



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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Bloc Québécois

Mathieu Desquilbet

Iranian Canadian Congress

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Ottawa, Ontario

--- L'audience débute le vendredi 20 septembre 2024 à 9 h 32

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

THE REGISTRAR: Order, please. À l'ordre,
s'il vous plaît.

This sitting of the Foreign Interference
Commission is now in session. Commissioner Hogue is
presiding. Cette séance de la Commission sur l'ingérence
étrangère est en cours. La Commissaire Hogue préside.

The time is 9:32 a.m. Il est 9 h 32.

COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Bonjour tout le monde.
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/Sous affirmation solennelle

THE REGISTRAR: Thank you very much.

1 Counsel, you may proceed.

2 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

3 --- EXAMINATION IN-CHIEF BY/INTERROGATOIRE EN-CHEF PAR

4 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:

5 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Good morning, Mr.
6 Crase.

7 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Good morning.

8 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: We're going to start
9 with just some housekeeping matters.

10 You recall being interviewed by Commission
11 counsel on September 4 this year?

12 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I do.

13 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And I would ask that
14 the Court Operator pull up WIT101.EN.

15 And is this the witness summary that was
16 generated from your interview?

17 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

18 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And I understand you
19 have a correction to make to this witness summary today. Is
20 that correct?

21 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

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

24 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Paragraph 36, where it
25 reads "Should the review process raise any questions, an
26 interview can be organized with the prospective nomination
27 candidate", we always interview every nomination candidate.

28 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Okay, understood.

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

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct.

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

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

8 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. WIT0000101.EN:**

9 Conservative Party of Canada (Michael
10 Crase) (Stage 2)

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

14 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. WIT0000101.FR:**

15 Résumé de l'entrevue: le Parti
16 conservateur du Canada (Michael
17 Crase)

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

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

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Great. And if we can
23 call up CPC13.EN.

24 If we scroll down a bit so we can see the
25 title.

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

27 This is the institutional report that was
28 prepared at the request of the Commission; correct?

1 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

2 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And you've had an
3 opportunity to review this institutional report?

4 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I have reviewed it, yes.

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

8 And go down. Yeah.

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

11 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

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

15 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

16 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you very much.

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

19 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. CPC0000013.EN:**

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

25 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. CPC0000013.FR:**

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

28 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. CPC0000012:**

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

6 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So I'll start a
7 little bit with your background, Mr. Crase.

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

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That's correct.

12 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And you are currently
13 the Executive Director of the Conservative Party, a position
14 that you held since November of 2022. Is that right?

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That's correct.

16 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Now, prior to
17 assuming this role, you were the Executive Director of the
18 Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario starting in 2018.
19 Is that right?

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That's correct.

21 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And between 2010 and
22 2015, you were a regional organizer for the Conservative
23 Party of Canada. Is that right?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

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

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, that's fine.

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So I want to
2 start with a very high-level question. Does the Party -- and
3 when I say "the Party", I might say "the Party", "the CPC",
4 "the Conservative Party". We all understand this to be the
5 Conservative Party of Canada.

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

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

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

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

21 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** What about the CPC
22 candidates? Does it view them as a target for foreign
23 interference?

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

25 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what about
26 members of parliament that are part of the Conservative
27 Party?

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

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

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** As I said, you know, we
5 are potentially concerned about it, you know, frankly, from
6 some of the -- some of what we've heard here so far, and
7 certainly some of the reports that have come out in the --
8 you know, over the past times it's become a more and more of
9 a discussed issue.

10 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And are you aware of
11 political party vulnerabilities that have been identified --
12 specific vulnerabilities identified by the security and
13 intelligence agencies in Canada?

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

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

20 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. CAN037690 0001:**

21 Site Threat Assessment of Foreign
22 Interference Threats to Canadian
23 Democratic Institutions - 2024

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

1 So I want to take you to the third bullet
2 point. You can go down. Sorry, the second bullet point.
3 Let me just make sure I'm looking at the right thing. Can we
4 go to the third page? Okay. Keep going down. Okay. Thank
5 you. It's actually paragraph 6 there.

6 So it says in paragraph 6:

7 "Exploiting loopholes in political
8 party nomination processes.

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

1 The nomination process can be
2 critical, as many ridings in Canada
3 are considered 'safe seats' that have
4 long been held by a particular
5 political party. In other words,
6 gaining a party's nomination in a
7 riding that has long supported that
8 party is akin to winning the
9 subsequent election. Therefore, Fl
10 activities during the nomination race
11 could achieve the desired outcome
12 without reliance upon Fl activities
13 during the election period. Fl
14 actors exploit this loophole to
15 engage in Fl that target specific
16 candidates and particular electoral
17 ridings."

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

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

28 So I wanted to ask you, in your view, what

1 are the most serious vulnerabilities that are facing your
2 party?

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

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

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We have a member of our
28 staff who is a long-standing -- a long-standing member of our

1 staff, our director of operations, who is tasked with being
2 our communication with the regulatory bodies and bodies along
3 these lines. He's been a SITE representative since 2021 as
4 well and has the clearance.

5 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: And this is Trevor
6 Bailey?

7 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: This would be Trevor
8 Bailey, yes.

9 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Right. And what did
10 you say his position within the Party was?

11 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Director of operations.

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

18 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: He would be the
19 individual speaking to any of those agencies, including SITE.

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

23 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Through Mr. Bailey.

24 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Okay. And you
25 mentioned that he has a security clearance. Do you know what
26 level of security clearance that is?

27 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I do not, no.

28 MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ: Okay. And we know

1 that the Party leader, Mr. Poillievre, is not top-secret
2 cleared. Do you -- are you aware of whether anybody within
3 the Party is top-secret cleared?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Within the Party I am not
5 aware of anybody that's top-secret cleared.

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

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

9 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And has Mr.
10 Bailey attended SITE meetings since the last general
11 election?

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

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

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

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

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So first I think I had
26 heard of them is when you raised them with us. I know that I
27 certainly was not invited and when we went back and took a
28 look, we couldn't find an invitation to Mr. Bailey either on

1 it. So I'm unclear as to who they reached out to regarding
2 those invitations.

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

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah, counsel -- our
6 general counsel asked him, yes.

7 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And generally,
8 do you know, since Mr. Bailey reports to you, whether the
9 Party views these briefings as useful, or helpful, or
10 desirable?

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

15 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And does the Party
16 think there should be a closer relationship between political
17 parties and security and intelligence agencies including
18 SITE?

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think the more
20 information that we are given, the more -- and are able to
21 use, the more that we can do.

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

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

28 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Now, you've mentioned

1 that Mr. Bailey gets information from SITE on foreign
2 interference and that informs the party's views on foreign
3 interference and the information that it has on it.

4 Is there any passing on of that information,
5 so to speak, to other members of the party? Do you take that
6 learning from SITE and then use that to educate other party
7 staff members, candidates, campaign staff? Does that
8 information make its way beyond Mr. Bailey?

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

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

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

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So as we are just
26 beginning the cycle of candidates, nominations of, and the
27 training that's resulted in that, I think we're still in the
28 process of developing the broad-based training that we would

1 use. And that's an evolving scenario that would cover a
2 number of things. I would imagine that anything relevant
3 that we could include as part of this, we would certainly
4 include in the training.

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

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

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

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** In the past, did you
9 provide any information in that respect? Any training in
10 that respect in the past?

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

17 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And same question for
19 party staff. Does the staff, party staff, receive any
20 training on foreign interference?

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

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

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, the staff that would

1 be hired for an MP and their constituency office, or their
2 Parliament Hill office, or House of Commons staff, the party
3 doesn't involve itself in that.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And in terms of any
5 guidance or resources regarding an MP's conduct with foreign
6 diplomats, foreign officials, does the party give any
7 guidance or resources to MPs on that topic?

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

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

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

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

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

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And what about
27 those -- that type of guidance or resources, but to
28 candidates. So does the party provide any guidance with

1 respect to hiring campaign staff to candidates?

2 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Mostly -- you know, I'm
3 not sure in the way that you're discussing. There's
4 certainly the -- when a candidate is nominated, they have
5 both the regional organizer and a desk officer that are their
6 primary points of contact. And as they build their campaign
7 teams out, they would work with them to assign those roles,
8 generally very volunteer roles, to a local campaign. That
9 would be more along the lines of people that they know. I
10 myself was a campaign manager a number of times for my local
11 riding. Those would be the conversations that would happen.
12 So I'd say it's more conversational than guidance when we're
13 talking about bringing in those roles, recognizing that these
14 are volunteers that are largely driven from our riding
15 associations.

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

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

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

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, on those things, you
2 know, candidates would bring questions about that through
3 their desk officer, generally, and we would address them on
4 the individual basis.

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

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

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

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

28 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And if it came

1 to the party's attention that there was a caucus member of
2 your party that may have -- may be involved in foreign
3 interference activities, what are the options available to
4 the party and what steps could it take in that case?

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

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

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

20 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** They would certainly take
21 the lead ---

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah.

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

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

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** --- there are obviously
28 things that we would -- there would be a part for us to play

1 subsequent to that in terms of their candidacy.

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

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

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

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

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

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, it would be myself
25 or my designate.

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So I wanted to
27 ask how, if at all, the Party's thinking on foreign
28 interference has evolved since the last General Election.

1 Have there been any lessons learned, any thought to what to
2 do in response to some of the allegations that have arisen in
3 light of GEs 43 and 44?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Are there specific
5 allegations that you're speaking about there regarding the
6 Conservative Party?

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

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

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

28 So I'm just wondering if the Party has

1 thought about that and has made any adjustments or changes to
2 its process as to how to respond if a candidate were to raise
3 that in the next General Election, for example.

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So I'd start by saying
5 I've been there during the last General Election. I'm not
6 entirely clear what or how those concerns were brought, what
7 time -- at what timeframe they were brought during the
8 campaign. What I can say is that any -- again, any issue
9 along these lines would initially come in through the desk
10 officers.

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

16 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. I want to
17 speak now to your electronic infrastructure and cyber
18 security.

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

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

26 But to the question that you've asked there,
27 our infrastructure includes -- our internal infrastructure
28 would include the items that you outlined as well as our

1 central database. We have a sizable and experienced IT team
2 at Party headquarters. Many of the longest-serving members
3 of staff come from that team and they have always been very
4 proficient at their jobs.

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

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

14 Within the infrastructure itself, though, we
15 use two-factor authentication for access to our emails,
16 things along those lines.

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

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

27 So the first would be support, and so the
28 Party to all levels, whether it's our internal requirements

1 or to our campaigns or volunteers, there is a support desk
2 and network to help them with this because they're part of
3 that team that I spoke about earlier.

4 The -- we also have our database, and that
5 has different levels of access. It is something that,
6 through our mobile app, individuals would use to canvass,
7 volunteers would use to canvass. That's very much a -- just
8 an input kind of scenario. Headquarters access would
9 obviously be substantially more -- substantially greater in
10 terms of our ability to access that system.

11 The third -- and within that I should
12 mention, by the way, that we do not provide emails to
13 candidates, email accounts or anything along those lines.
14 They get those.

15 Hardware would be the third item. We provide
16 hardware to Party staff, but not to local campaigns or local
17 riding associations.

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

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

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

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

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

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No.

28 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Can you

1 generally describe for us the Party's contact, familiarity
2 with, relationship with the Canadian Centre for Cyber
3 Security, CCCS?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So again, reaching back
5 to Mr. Bailey, my understanding is that he maintains contact
6 with that group. The specifics of that, I don't have
7 offhand.

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

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I'm not aware of that,
12 no.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And what about
14 the Party's contact with the House of Commons IT security?
15 Is there any contact between the House of Commons IT security
16 and the Party?

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

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

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We're getting into -- I'm
25 sure there are a number of things that I won't be able to say
26 off the top of my head because they are things that would
27 happen in the background in just the general ongoing
28 improvement of our systems. And by the way, the vendors that

1 we would access was, for example, payment processors who are
2 always improving these things internally. The implementation
3 of multi-factor authentication, that would be something that
4 would be new since the last election.

5 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And is there
6 any assistance offered to candidates to address any cyber
7 security concerns that they may have? Does the Party assist
8 in that?

9 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think that, as I said,
10 we're developing training. There will be IT components of
11 that training.

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

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

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The first kind of, I
26 would say, formal assistance that we would give in any ways
27 is post-nomination. A nomination candidate will have, to a
28 degree, a relationship with their regional organizer or with

1 the desk officer responsible to help them through the process
2 of becoming a candidate. But beyond any specific training or
3 any guidelines or anything along those lines, that occurs
4 post-nomination.

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

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

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

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

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

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I would start by saying
26 that we have no evidence to suggest that our IT
27 infrastructure is not secure; that we invest heavily in both
28 the individuals and the systems that -- and I mean, heavily

1 financially in the individuals and the systems that we have
2 in place to maintain the operation and security of those
3 systems. And, you know, generally speaking, our Party has
4 been on the record for years as saying that it is the job of
5 the Party to finance its own operations. So I believe we
6 have the resources, based on my understanding, to continue to
7 address this.

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

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

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Now, I want to
18 talk a little bit about membership and the requirements for
19 membership. I understand that membership is governed at a
20 federal level, is that right?

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

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

27 Okay, if you go down, "Membership
28 eligibility," great. So I just want to see all of those.

1 Perfect, right there.

2 Okay. So we'll kind of take these one by
3 one. So this is the requirements for membership; is that
4 correct?

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

6 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And so the first
7 bullet point -- well, first of all, the opening sentence
8 says:

9 "Membership in the Conservative Party
10 of Canada is open to every citizen or
11 permanent resident of Canada who..."

12 (As read)

13 And then it lists five bullets there. So
14 what are the -- so it's citizens and permanent residents are
15 the only individuals that are able to be members; is that
16 correct?

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

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

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

23 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** How are you able to
19 identify whether something is a prepaid credit card versus
20 just a regular credit card?

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

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

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Sure. I did have a third
6 point on ---

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

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

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right.

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

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

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

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

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

28 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And then has

1 attained the minimum age of 14. I think we understand why
2 political parties accept memberships as young as 14. How is
3 that verified?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** How is their age
5 verified?

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

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

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

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Exactly.

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

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

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And here we
18 have:

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

27 How do you verify that the membership has
28 been paid by the member personally?

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The way that we verify
2 that is, frankly, through the mechanisms by which you can
3 acquire your membership. As I mentioned, we are talking a
4 personal credit card from a Canadian financial institution;
5 we're talking personal cheque from a Canadian financial
6 institution; we're talking personal money order from a
7 Canadian financial institution. No avenue such as cash or,
8 you know, you mentioned prepaid credit cards, which do not
9 have that attached to them, are able to be used to acquire a
10 membership in the Party. And that, I think, is an important
11 verification.

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

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

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

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** There's still a paper
5 option. I would say at this point, you know, well into the
6 mid-90 percent of our memberships are purchased online.

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

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** The -- yes. The prepaid
12 is the automated rejection.

13 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right.

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

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

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

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

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** It is. It is possible,
28 for example, with a joint credit card. My wife and I have a

1 joint credit card. If we purchased a membership along those
2 lines.

3 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Okay. But apart from
4 that, you know, if I decide that I want to buy membership for
5 my three kids that are over 14 and my spouse, is it something
6 that I can do?

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

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

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That is the only
13 situation.

14 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** --- memberships at the
15 same time?

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

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

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

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

27 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** There it varies. But
28 you're talking generally within -- within a few weeks. This

1 frankly gives us time to do the payment processing side of
2 this when you click and send, send it through.

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

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

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

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

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

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** --- or they aren't
27 processed?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah. And so, the

1 process for that would be -- and I don't have the exact
2 wording in front of me. But when you submit your membership
3 application it says this is an application to that effect.
4 And occasionally they would receive, for whatever reason that
5 we discussed here, they would receive an email back saying,
6 listen, it's been reviewed and here's the refund of the
7 money, we have not processed the membership.

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

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

21 If it is for example, a conduct issue
22 subsequent to the membership, the party has a member's code
23 of conduct and a process in line with that that could lead to
24 membership revocation.

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

26 Now, in terms of party contributions and
27 payments made for contributions, are you looking for the same
28 type of irregularities when people are making donations?

1 What are you looking for there? Are there systems to kind of
2 flag irregularities?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** From the processing side
4 of contributions, the technical side of that would be very
5 similar. We do not accept -- or we flag donations that come
6 from an IP address that looks -- looks suspicious.
7 Certainly, that doesn't necessarily mean that it is, but the
8 system would flag that. As far as the other elements to it,
9 again, you know, the system automatically would reject
10 prepaid credit cards. The system would -- and those type of
11 elements, they would be very consistent.

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

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

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

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have no reason to
26 believe that, no.

27 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Now, who
28 organizes and coordinates the nomination contest? Is it the

1 federal party, or is it the EDAs, or is it a combination?

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

5 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Sure.

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

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

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

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

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

25 Subsequent to that initial conversation, an
26 access to their specific candidate portal would be granted.
27 And this is a tool that has a number of elements attached to
28 it. A very extensive questionnaire, a bunch of background

1 checks they need to -- they need to approve. A bunch of
2 authorizations for us to contact the CRA for example, or
3 anything along those lines. Access to their social media
4 accounts, and the archives. A whole variety of things. It
5 takes quite a bit of time for people to go through this.
6 It'd also have the good conduct bond of \$1,000 and the 25
7 signatures of members of the riding.

8 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So I can actually
9 take you to the requirements.

10 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Sure.

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

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah.

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

21 Application. Yeah, there it is.

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

1 check, credit check, confidentiality agreement, declaration.

2 Keep going down, please.

3 Completed forms authorizing the Canada
4 Revenue Agency, the Canada Border Service Agency, Citizenship
5 Canada.

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

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

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

12 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And how long does a
13 member have to be a member in order to apply to be a
14 nomination contestant?

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

16 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And are any of
17 these questions in the questionnaire or any of the documents
18 that the applicant provides looking specifically for flags or
19 irregularities relating to foreign interference?

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

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Are there any in
25 particular that you can think of that might assist in
26 determining whether there are any concerns along the -- along
27 those lines of foreign interference?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Specifically, you know,

1 we would take a look at, really, a lot of this, but you know,
2 the actual questionnaire itself, I think, is important. You
3 deal with work histories, you deal with organizations that
4 individuals might be involved with, you might have
5 volunteered with.

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

10 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So the
11 application is not necessarily looking to flag for those
12 specific issues.

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** It's looking to flag for
14 a number of things.

15 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right. And so you
16 mentioned that a closing notice is issued at some point, and
17 maybe just kind of take us through the process after that
18 closing notice is issued.

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So a closing notice
20 issued. From that moment on, any individual has 14 days to
21 finish and complete and submit their application.

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And how long do they
23 have to continue signing up new members?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Forty-eight (48) hours
25 post-closing notice.

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And you
27 mentioned at the beginning of your testimony this morning
28 that every applicant gets an interview.

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

2 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So maybe explain a
3 little bit the interview process, what are you looking for?
4 What's the purpose of the interview?

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

17 They would interview and ask questions, and
18 then provide a recommendation to the National Candidate
19 Selection Committee, which is a committee of National
20 Council.

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

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

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

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

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And speaking
19 now to the voting process, so the nomination meeting, now, I
20 understand that nomination contests are held in person. Is
21 that right?

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

1 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. But they've
2 never been held online.

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** They've never been held
4 online.

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

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

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

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

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

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** What kind of
23 identification, sorry, is required?

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

1 identification that verified name and address.

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

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

5 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** --- the person.
6 Okay.

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

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

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

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

25 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. And so if a
26 member signs up and provides a certain contact information
27 address and that address doesn't match the photo ID that
28 they're presenting, is that something that would get flagged

1 and how would that be dealt with?

2 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That would be something
3 that would get flagged by the individuals at the desk, the
4 volunteers at the desk, I imagine also by the scrutineers
5 that were looking over it. That individual would go to
6 credentials, and assuming the situation that you just
7 described where they -- the ID they have doesn't match the
8 address requirement or the address that is in our system, the
9 returning officer would make a ruling on whether they could
10 vote or not. But that would seem to be pretty clear-cut that
11 they could not.

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

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

27 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what are some
28 options? What would be done if there was a concern about the

1 fairness of the contest or any other issue that might bring
2 into question the -- whether or not it's -- the contest is
3 otherwise fair or is being done properly?

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

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

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And what are the
18 mechanisms to raise issues about a nomination contest after
19 the nomination contest has concluded?

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

28 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** If a nomination

1 contestant, prior to the nomination meeting taking place,
2 raises concerns that they're being targeted for foreign
3 interference, that there's foreign interference with respect
4 to their campaign, what are the -- does the Party have any
5 mechanisms in place to deal with that, to investigate it?
6 How would the Party deal with that situation?

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

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

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

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

22 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Right. And so what
23 would the Party -- would the Party take any steps in that
24 situation?

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Our nomination process is
26 determined on people coming -- you know, members coming to
27 exercise to vote. As I said, not having been faced with that
28 situation at this point, I don't have the specifics on how we

1 would proceed. But as I mentioned, the processes we have in
2 place are really designed to create fairness between the
3 candidates.

4 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Can you just tell me for
5 how long do you have to be a Party member before being
6 allowed to vote in a nomination contest?

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

11 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** And then typically,
12 how long after the closing notice is the nomination contest
13 held?

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

17 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. So I guess the
18 answer to the question would be, it would typically -- you
19 would be a member, at a minimum, for a few weeks to a month -
20 --

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

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

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

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Very briefly touching
27 on leadership contests, is the Party aware of allegations
28 that the CPC leadership races were targeted for FI attempts

1 in the last two leadership contests? And these are
2 allegations.

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I was not the Executive
4 Director or a Party employee for the time for either of the
5 leadership races that you've spoken about there, so I don't
6 have any specific information beyond the two, I think, very
7 brief paragraphs in the NSICOP report that touched on it.

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

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

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

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

19 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Are you aware
20 of any vulnerabilities within your Party system that could
21 make that possible?

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

23 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Well, I'm asking you.
24 Yeah.

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We have a number of
26 controls in place that are designed, again, for any of these
27 circumstances. They are retroactive in nature. We can -- a
28 Board can remove a member of their own Board for misconduct.

1 National Council has the ability to remove a Board as a whole
2 and hold a new meeting to elect a new Board.

3 We have the ability to deregister a riding if
4 it comes to that. We have the Members' Code of Conduct that
5 members can use and access or -- it can come from a number of
6 sources, but members can use and access for any of these kind
7 of concerns.

8 Those are the kind of controls we would have
9 in place.

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

11 Turning now to mis and disinformation and the
12 media ecosystem, do you agree that mis and disinformation can
13 be a vehicle for foreign interference?

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

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

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah.

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

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

25 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Has the Party seen
26 instances of this beyond the example I just gave in any of
27 its campaigns? And that was not in the context of a
28 campaign, my example, but has the Party seen instances of mis

1 or disinformation in its campaigns either during the General
2 Elections or nomination contests, or by-elections, for that
3 matter?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So again, I've not been -
5 - I was not Executive Director during the last General
6 Election. I cannot think of an example of one of our
7 candidates for nomination that is contesting a nomination or
8 a by-election where we've been flagged on specific online
9 foreign interference issues.

10 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Does the Party
11 maintain a TikTok account?

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

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

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

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

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

26 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** So you mentioned the
27 Party's Code of Conduct. Does the Code of Conduct or
28 anything else include any guidelines for candidates in terms

1 of spreading or amplifying suspected or confirmed
2 misinformation, disinformation, anything along those lines
3 for candidates?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think specifically on
5 the spreading, I can't think of that off the top of my head
6 that it would beyond the fact that that -- the general
7 harassment and elements in the code would be broad enough to
8 cover that, I believe.

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

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

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

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

24 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** On the topic of
25 recommendations, is the Party open to regulation by the
26 Elections Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Canada
27 Elections, of nomination contest and/or leadership contests?

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** This is a question that I

1 think you would see from my interview summary that is not
2 mine to answer. I think, first off, it's very vague in terms
3 of what exactly we're talking about here, and there are a
4 number of folks from our side -- I imagine all parties would
5 have to take a look to see what those recommendations were.
6 Generally speaking, we feel very confident in the systems
7 that we have in place, both for nominations and leaderships.

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

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

15 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Okay. Does the Party
16 have any other recommendations for the Commission as it
17 relates to foreign interference?

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

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

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

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

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, I've closed, and I

1 think I've said this, but that we take the integrity of the
2 processes that we are tasked with running very seriously.
3 We're constantly attempting to improve, and you've pointed
4 out, for example, the elimination of cash as a ability to
5 purchase a membership post 2015. Those are the kind of
6 things we're always looking to do to tighten up our
7 processes, but we're very confident in them and have no
8 reason to think otherwise.

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

10 Commissioner, those are my questions. Thank
11 you very much.

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

14 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please. À l'ordre,
15 s'il vous plaît. The sitting of the Commission is now in
16 recess until 11:10 a.m. Cette séance de la commission est
17 maintenant suspendue jusqu'à 11 h 10.

18 --- Upon recessing at 10:50 a.m./

19 --- La séance est suspendue à 10 h 50

20 --- Upon resuming at 11:13 a.m./

21 --- La séance est reprise à 11 h 13

22 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please. À l'ordre,
23 s'il vous plaît.

24 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
25 Commission is now back in session. Cette séance de la
26 Commission sur l'ingérence étrangère est de retour en
27 session. The time is 11:13 a.m. Il est 11 h 13.

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So first one is the

1 counsel for Concern Group.

2 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

3 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:**

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

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

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

8 In terms of electronic infrastructure, you
9 mentioned a sizeable and experienced IT team and consulting
10 with outside entities as being among some of the supports
11 that the Conservative Party has. What sources of funding
12 does the party rely on to implement and maintain this level
13 of infrastructure?

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

16 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** And so therefore any
17 additional procedures or preventative measures, such as, for
18 example, greater ID verification or systems for detecting
19 online disinformation would be funded entirely with
20 contributions and membership fees?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** They would be funded
6 through the party's budget, and the party's budget is funded
7 through donations.

8 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** Do you think that could
9 put smaller parties at a disadvantage in terms of cyber
10 security?

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

16 **MR. DAVID WHEATON:** Okay. Thank you. I have
17 no further questions. Thank you.

18 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.
19 Counsel for Jenny Kwan.

20 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

21 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:**

22 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Good morning. I'm Mani
23 Kakkar, counsel for Jenny Kwan.

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

25 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** Good morning. I have a few
26 questions, a few themes that I'd like to cover with my
27 questioning today. The first is with respect to TikTok. In
28 your testimony, you mentioned that the Conservative Party

1 does not have a TikTok account. Does it have policies for
2 its candidates or for those that are running in nomination
3 races?

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

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

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We have an onboarding
12 process, of which our communications director works with the
13 candidates. I think appropriate social media, kind of,
14 guidelines are part of that conversation. I haven't been
15 part of that direct conversation.

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

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

22 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** Thank you. I appreciate
23 that. Moving to a different question, you had talked in
24 detail about your verification processes with respect to
25 credit cards and payment methods, that you try to use payment
26 methods that allow you to essentially verify the identity of
27 the person that is applying to be a member of the party. And
28 while I appreciate that isn't necessarily something you've

1 done to target FI in particular, but I wanted to put to you
2 CAN.3769, 37690.

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

10 And I just wanted to confirm with you that
11 your current methods of payment and verification wouldn't
12 capture someone in this situation?

13 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** You are correct. We have
14 no evidence to suggest this has occurred.

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

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We have not seen any
18 evidence to suggest this has occurred.

19 **MR. MANI KAKKAR:** And would you agree with me
20 that as a political party, it may be difficult for you to
21 implement these tools, that you may need to work with
22 government agencies to effectively identify or take steps in
23 situations like this?

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

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

6 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think that, frankly,
7 the fact that we don't have bulk membership purchases beyond
8 the family membership form that we spoke about earlier makes
9 the situation that you're providing quite -- you know, quite
10 a challenge to operationalize. People need to pay
11 individually with these methods. These methods need to be
12 attached to those individuals. And, you know, we are a very
13 large party. We currently have hundreds of thousands of
14 members of our party. This is -- that's a -- that in and of
15 itself is, I think, a difficult thing for someone to
16 influence.

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

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

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

1 And down to paragraph 51. And actually, if
2 we could just scroll down to paragraph 52?

3 Here it says that you became aware of
4 allegations of potential FI affecting Mr. Shahrooz. I wanted
5 to ask if you took any proactive steps or if any of the
6 members of your team took any proactive steps either, one, to
7 reach out to Mr. Shahrooz?

8 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Mr. Shahrooz was not, at
9 this point, seeking a nomination for the party or a candidate
10 for the party.

11 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Are you saying that he
12 wasn't -- he had not made his intentions clear to seek a
13 nomination or that he hadn't completed and given you a
14 nomination package?

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** He never filed a
16 nomination package with the party.

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

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

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

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, I -- from reading
26 what he has posted, I don't follow the individual accounts of
27 everybody that's seeking a nomination for us. We have
28 hundreds and hundreds at this time that are seeking

1 nomination in our seats, and so I wouldn't have followed it,
2 certainly, on a day-to-day basis by any stretch.

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

9 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I was aware of his
10 statements after -- which I believe the statements were
11 connected with his decision not to seek the nomination after
12 the fact. That is the first I had heard of the particular
13 comments he made.

14 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Did you have any
15 discussions with Mr. Shahrooz about the alleged interference
16 he was suggesting occurred?

17 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I've never spoken with
18 Mr. Shahrooz.

19 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Did you have any
20 discussions within your team specifically, not just limited
21 to, but Mr. Bailey, who's your SITE Task Force
22 representative?

23 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No.

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

28 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Again, at that point in

1 time, he's no longer part of the process seeking a
2 nomination. We wouldn't engage at that point.

3 MS. MANI KAKKAR: Would it be possible that
4 interference could occur at the point of prior to the
5 nomination process, preventing people from running in a
6 nomination race for your party, and that is your position
7 that you should or should not have a role in determining if
8 that's happened or a role in taking proactive steps if it
9 has?

10 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Well, the systems that we
11 have in place from a proactive perspective is our ability to
12 oversee the process in terms of the other candidates running,
13 other members in play. I'm not sure how we would engage with
14 comments positively or negatively online about a particular
15 candidate. My understanding subsequently of this one is Mr.
16 Shahrooz is critical of the Iranian regime, and there was
17 some conversation that that would lead to a disallowance as a
18 candidate. I have no reason to believe Mr. Shahrooz would
19 have been disallowed as a candidate.

20 MS. MANI KAKKAR: I apologize. Could you
21 just repeat? You understand that Mr. Shahrooz was
22 complaining about the foreign interference and that that
23 would disallow him to be a candidate? Could you ---

24 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: That was my ---

25 MS. MANI KAKKAR: --- just clarify that ---

26 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: --- understanding, yes.
27 Post his withdrawal. And so I have no reason to believe had
28 Mr. Shahrooz not submitted a package he would have been

1 permitted to contest the nomination.

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

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

7 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** I appreciate that. So
8 perhaps taking a minute here, I just want to understand the
9 Conservative Party's position on if, whether it's Mr.
10 Shahrooz or someone else in the future, there is allegations
11 of foreign interference prior to someone filling out a
12 nomination package that may prevent them from actually
13 running in the race, what is your party's position on your
14 involvement, what it might be, or should be?

15 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We haven't faced that
16 yet. I think that had that -- those kinds of scenarios been
17 brought to our attention, we would have the conversation with
18 the departments, with political operations, with our general
19 counsel to see what those particular circumstance is. I --
20 beyond that, I can't really say.

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

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think, as I said, once
26 we have a series of controls, once a candidate is in the
27 process and has filed their papers, it's challenging when
28 we're talking about people who are, to various levels, just

1 speaking about being -- filing those papers or contesting a
2 nomination.

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

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** It would be the political
12 operations, although we'd likely engage different
13 departments, depending on what the circumstance was.

14 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** And does the Conservative
15 Party currently provide members of its political operations
16 team with any sort of training or information around foreign
17 interference?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No.

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

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Well, I think that's why
25 it would be a broader conversation that would include general
26 counsel.

27 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Okay. In this particular
28 case, even though I understand that he did not ultimately run

1 in the nomination contest, did, at any point, you or Mr.
2 Bailey raise potentially sharing this information with CSIS,
3 or any of your partners on the SITE Task Force, or anyone
4 else that you're -- that you speak to in the government that
5 is specifically assisting with foreign interference?

6 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No, the only information
7 that I have on this was Mr. Shahrooz's comments post his
8 withdrawal from the process.

9 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Okay.

10 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Ms. Kakkar, your time is
11 exhausted, so I will ask you to ask your ---

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

13 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** --- question.

14 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Which is well timed. Thank
15 you.

16 I think just in -- as a final point, what
17 steps, if any, do you anticipate taking as a party, so that
18 when it comes to the next general election or the next by-
19 election you're in a position to have candidates nomination
20 contestants, those running in nomination contests, approach
21 your organization about potential FI and what steps you would
22 then take?

23 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Our candidates for
24 whether they've completed and are part of the nomination
25 process, completed their package and are part of the formal
26 process, or our candidates that are nominated have a point of
27 contact with any concerns, not just specific to this. When
28 those concerns are brought forward, as I mentioned earlier,

1 they are triaged out. A lot of circumstances are unique and
2 different, and we handle them as they come.

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

5 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes.

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

7 So are you suggesting that you wouldn't have
8 a specific process in place for FI, that it would just be
9 housed within the general processes you already have
10 available?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I would say that the
12 processes we have available are designed to maintain the
13 integrity of our process that we oversee. I think foreign
14 interference is captured largely in that. But as new
15 situations arise, we're -- like, we're flexible in how we --
16 in how we're going to deal with things, and we have the
17 resources available to us to do that.

18 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Thank you for your
19 testimony.

20 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Mr. Singh, counsel for
21 the Sikh Coalition.

22 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

23 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:**

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

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

28 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** So in speaking with

1 Commission counsel, you mention that you began your role with
2 the Conservative Party in November of 2022, after the
3 leadership race had already been completed. Do you recall
4 when you first learned about concerns or allegations that the
5 Government of India engaged in some kind of foreign
6 interference activity targeting the Conservative leadership
7 race?

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

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

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

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

20 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. TSC0000013:**

21 Indian proxies funding Canadian
22 politicians "at all levels of
23 government": CSIS Report

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

28 And so I do note that this is an unverified

1 media report, so I'm not asking you to comment on the
2 veracity, but Mr. Cooper reports reviewing an October 2022
3 CSIS Intelligence Assessment that talks about an Indian proxy
4 securing party memberships, that the Indian Consulate in
5 Canada informed a different leadership candidate who was
6 running for leadership at the same time that he cannot attend
7 any Indian community events or events hosted by the
8 Consulate. And the assessment goes on saying that this
9 leadership candidate had previously taken a policy position
10 contrary to India's interests, which is why India tried to
11 hinder his campaign in the diaspora.

12 Do you recall any of these claims being made
13 publicly at any time?

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

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

21 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Just can you tell -- can
22 you say which document you ---

23 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Sure.

24 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** --- want to refer to?

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

28 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. CAN004985:**

1 Foreign Interference and Elections: A
2 National Security Assessment - CSIS
3 IA 2022-23/57

4 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** Has Mr. Crase been --
5 has he seen the document?

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

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Okay. Let's put up the
9 document.

10 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** And if we just scroll
11 down to page 6?

12 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** If he's not in a
13 position to comment ---

14 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Sure.

15 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** --- he will let you
16 know.

17 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Yeah, of course.

18 So, Mr. Crase, this is an intelligence
19 assessment from CSIS. And if we -- page -- if you scroll up.
20 Right there, right there.

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

27 Again, I'm not asking you to comment on the
28 veracity, but was this information ever conveyed to yourself

1 or to the Conservative Party with regards to the leadership
2 race?

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

6 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** At any point in time, had
7 you had a conversation with Trevor Bailey, who was appointed
8 as the Conservate SITE representative, about whether security
9 or intelligence agencies communicated concerns about the
10 leadership race?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I do not recall any
12 conversation that highlighted that, no.

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

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No.

18 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Would you agree that any
19 information that, you know, substantiates these concerns or
20 allegations should be made public in the interests of
21 transparency and security? Is that a recommendation that you
22 would make?

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

26 From our standpoint, the -- you know, broadly
27 speaking, whether it's this document, whether it's the NSICOP
28 report, whether it's the article that you highlighted all

1 speak very high level and vaguely about an allegation, but
2 there's no meat around that. There's no -- there's nothing
3 beyond the literal one sentence themselves, which is -- you
4 know, seems essentially the same in both documents.

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

7 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes.

8 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** So just given the gravity
9 of the threat and the fact that the leadership race of a
10 political Party in Canada may have been targeted for foreign
11 interference and we're talking about an individual who
12 becomes an eligible candidate to become the Prime Minister of
13 Canada, so given the nature of the allegations, the fact that
14 they were made very publicly, has the Conservative Party
15 carried out any internal investigation or informal
16 discussions about this threat activity?

17 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** About the threat -- like
18 specifically?

19 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** About the threat
20 activity, about the vulnerability, about actions that could
21 be taken by the Party.

22 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** We're confident in our
23 process and the hundreds of thousands of people that voted to
24 elect our leader.

25 **MR. PRABJOT SINGH:** Thank you. Those are all
26 my questions.

27 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

28 So I don't know if it's Me Lafrance or Nirman

1 for the OCCE?

2 Me Lafrance?

3 --- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY /CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR

4 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:

5 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: Good morning, Mr.
6 Crase.

7 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Good morning.

8 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: Sébastien Lafrance
9 for the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

10 Just a few clarification questions, if I may.

11 So you said earlier to the Commission's
12 counsel that the only allegation -- and I paraphrase here --
13 the only allegation in a leadership contest of foreign
14 interference that you have seen was in the NSICOP report;
15 correct?

16 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Correct.

17 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: And then do you
18 remember if there was any evidence supporting these
19 allegations?

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

22 MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE: I would like to --
23 if I can ask the court reporter to bring up the document
24 WIT101.EN.

25 Thank you very much.

26 And to go to paragraph 58.

27 Thank you very much.

28 So is it consistent with what you just said

1 here that if you look at the second sentence -- well, first
2 of all, you're aware of this paragraph. Do you remember this
3 paragraph 58?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Just give me a second
5 here.

6 Yes.

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

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

14 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Specific to those
15 allegations, correct.

16 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Excellent. So will
17 you agree with me that when allegations are not supported by
18 evidence -- that these allegations will be unsubstantiated
19 and they will not be supported by evidence, then the
20 allegations will simply not be followed up with; right?

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

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

24 So now, are you aware of a complaint that was
25 submitted to the Office of the Canada -- of the Office of the
26 Commission of Canada Elections -- my apologies -- with
27 respect to also -- to a leadership contest and foreign
28 interference? Are you aware about it?

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

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

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

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

7 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So I would say that it
8 would be important to highlight the word "potentially" there.
9 We have no evidence to say that that had anything to do with
10 foreign interference.

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

13 So these were potential allegations; right?
14 So allegations are not necessarily proven. They may be
15 uncertain. They may be proven later on. But they're still -
16 - at this point when they're allegations, they are not -- if
17 they are unsupported by evidence, they remain allegations.

18 Do you agree with that?

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes.

20 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** And being potential
21 added to allegation basically emphasizes the fact that it's
22 potential. It may not necessarily be supported by evidence.
23 Correct?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Absolutely.

25 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Have you seen any
26 evidence related to these allegations here in paragraph 59 or
27 are you aware of any evidence related to this complaint that
28 was submitted to the Office of the Commissioner of Canada

1 Elections here?

2 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** So my understanding is
3 the complaint was submitted before my time as Executive
4 Director.

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

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

11 So then would it be fair to say, sir, based -
12 - by analogy with paragraph 58 and based on what you said
13 about paragraph 59 here with respect to the allegations
14 potentially relating to FI, that the Office of the
15 Commissioner of Canada Elections assessed the case and
16 determined that there was no foreign interference in the
17 case? Would it be fair to assume or to say?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, I would say a couple
19 things.

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

28 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** And do you remember

1 how it was brought to the attention of our office in that
2 very context here?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I do not because I was
4 not there at the time. As I said, my understanding of it
5 really centres around the response from the Commissioner's
6 office.

7 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Okay. Thank you
8 very much.

9 So if I can bring your attention again to --
10 about to paragraph 60 here, if we can scroll down a little
11 bit.

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

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

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

18 "When the Party learned of the
19 irregularity and reported it to the
20 OCCE, Office of the Commissioner of
21 Canada Elections, through a complaint
22 on OCCE's web portal..."

23 Have you seen this complaint?

24 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have not seen the
25 complaint.

26 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Do you know if
27 foreign interference was mentioned clearly, directly or
28 indirectly, in this complaint since you just said you have

1 not seen it?

2 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I have not seen -- I have
3 not seen it, so I do not know if foreign interference was
4 mentioned.

5 My understanding is it's not.

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

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

12 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That was my
13 understanding, is it came through the web portal, but again,
14 that is just information that was conveyed to me. I did not
15 submit the complaint or was part of the process to submit the
16 complaint.

17 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Okay. Are you aware
18 that when there is a web complaint filed with our office,
19 that there is an email that is sent to the sender
20 acknowledging the fact that a complaint was submitted to our
21 office?

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

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

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yes, in all fairness,

1 yeah.

2 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Thank you. These
3 are my questions. Thank you very much.

4 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.
5 Counsel for the Human Rights Coalition?

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

7 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** No questions.
8 Counsel for the RCDA?

9 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

10 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:**

11 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Good morning.
12 Guillaume Sirois for the Russian Canadian Democratic
13 Alliance.

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

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

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

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

25 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think Parliament should
26 take a look at that.

27 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. And I suggest
28 to you that greater restrictions on social media content and

1 companies could in some instances, such as foreign
2 interference, could help foster free speech rather than
3 undermine it. Would you agree with that?

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

6 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** All right. Thank you.
7 Those are all my questions.

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

9 So AG?

10 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** I understand
11 Commissioner that the AG has been granted the extra five
12 minutes?

13 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes.

14 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

15 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:**

16 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Thank you very
17 much.

18 I'd just like to clarify first of all, Mr.
19 Crase, I wasn't 100 percent sure I understood your evidence
20 about being invited to the SITE task force briefings from
21 time to time. Were you saying that you did not attend and
22 don't know, or were you saying that the Conservative Party of
23 Canada was not invited at all to the briefings in 2023 and
24 2024?

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

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

1 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Or who that invitation
2 went to.

3 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** In fairness to
4 you, I anticipate that there will later be evidence in these
5 hearings that -- and I'm not sure if this goes to you, but
6 that that the executive director email account of the
7 Conservative Party was invited to the briefings in May of
8 2023. Do you have any reason to dispute that?

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

12 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. And in
13 February of 2024, shortly ahead of the Durham by-election, I
14 anticipate that there will be evidence, in fairness to you I
15 should tell you that, that Steven Barber, Matthew Conway, and
16 Christina Maheux are the contacts invited by email. Do you
17 have any reason to dispute that?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** No.

19 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. And
20 lastly, in May of 2024, following the Durham by-election, the
21 SITE task force, I anticipate the evidence to come will say
22 that Ian Todd, Steven Barber, Matthew Conway, and Christina
23 Maheux on behalf of the Conservative Party were invited,
24 provided they are secret cleared to review the after action
25 report, so to speak, from the site task force. Again, any
26 basis to dispute that?

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

28 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. All

1 right. If we could go back to -- I don't know if we need to
2 go back to your witness statement. You were just looking at
3 it. But the comments that you had made about the allegations
4 in the public NSICOP report concerning the party leadership
5 campaigns. Do you recall that?

6 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

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

11 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: That is correct.

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

15 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. COM0000363:

16 NSICOP special-report-foreign-
17 interference

18 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: All right. And
19 what you're referring to there is the three sentences were
20 removed -- were deleted to remove injurious or privileged
21 information. The sentences describe two specific instances
22 where PRC officials allegedly interfered in the leadership
23 races of the Conservative Party. Right?

24 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

25 MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS: And then if you
26 look at paragraph 73, it refers to this paragraph described
27 India's alleged interference in a Conservative Party of
28 Canada leadership race. Yes?

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

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

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

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

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

10 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Now, do you
11 doubt that this characterization of the information removed
12 is accurate?

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

16 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. Now, do
17 you know whether the Conservative Party's designated
18 recipient of classified information has been briefed on this
19 redacted information?

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

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

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

26 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** And do you agree
27 it's a useful thing for your party, for any political party,
28 to have access to the relevant classified information

1 pertaining to its candidates, members of Parliament, members
2 of that party, and its leader?

3 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think the more
4 information we have, absolutely.

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

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

10 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. Any
11 reason to dispute that?

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

13 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Okay. You're
14 aware as well that the Government of Canada has offered to
15 the leader of your party, Mr. Poilievre, access to classified
16 information in this regard, provided he obtains a security
17 clearance, right?

18 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I've seen reports of
19 that, yes.

20 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** You know that as
21 a matter of public record, that the leader of your party has
22 declined or refused to go through the security clearance
23 process, right?

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

26 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** And you
27 understand that by contrast, the leader of at least some of
28 the other opposition parties, the NDP and the Greens, have

1 agreed to go through that process?

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

3 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** You're not,
4 okay.

5 Do you agree with me that the leader of your
6 party would be better informed on national security issues,
7 including these specific allegations concerning the
8 Conservative leadership races and other foreign interference
9 matters if he took the necessary steps to receive classified
10 information?

11 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I believe the leader of
12 the party is a privy councillor and that he has had
13 clearance. And I believe that his reasons, as he has stated
14 for being able to speak on this issue, and his concerns
15 around that are well known.

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

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I believe that there
22 should be ways to get that information where he is not --
23 where he is able to speak.

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

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I'm not part of those

1 conversations.

2 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** You don't
3 dispute that?

4 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I'm not part of those
5 conversations.

6 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Can you give any
7 explanation at all for why your party's leader has refused to
8 take the steps that would be necessary, at least *de facto*
9 necessary, to see the intelligence relating to these
10 paragraphs and perhaps other matters affecting your party for
11 himself.

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

15 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Would you not
16 want to know, as executive director of the party, if, for
17 example, one or more of your party's MPs or participants in
18 its leadership contests are among, let's say, the examples of
19 wittingly engaged individuals referred to in the NSICOP
20 report?

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

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

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

28 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** So if you can't

1 use them, you'd rather just not know?

2 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I think it is important
3 for us to be able to use the information that we're given.
4 We -- you know, in a process around a candidate, if we were
5 given, you know, information that did not have, you know, to
6 the points that we've talked about here, any substance to it,
7 that would be challenging to act on. We have a process.
8 There are appeals.

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

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

14 **MR. BRENDAN van NIEJENHUIS:** Thank you, sir.
15 Those are my questions.

16 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

17 Conservative Party. Me De Luca?

18 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

19 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:**

20 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Good morning, Mr. Crase.

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

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

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I mean, this appears to

1 be very ongoing. Yes.

2 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: Okay. Ms. Kakkar had
3 some questions for you about the Richmond Hill nomination
4 contest and Mr. Shahrooz's participation in that, and I think
5 you confirmed that Mr. Shahrooz never actually submitted an
6 application -- a candidate nomination application. Is that
7 correct?

8 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Correct.

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

12 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: No.

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

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

17 And you were taken to paragraphs 72 and 73.
18 And you were read -- or you were referred to, at least, the
19 allegations of foreign interference by the PRC and India. Do
20 you recall that?

21 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I do.

22 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: Okay. And do you have
23 those paragraphs in front of you?

24 Can we get to ---

25 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Not ---

26 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: --- paragraph 72 and ---

27 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Can you just wait for
28 the document ---

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

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

3 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** It's up. Paragraph 72
4 and 73.

5 You have those? Okay. And so you were taken
6 to those paragraphs, and those paragraphs suggest that --
7 paragraph 72 suggests that the PRC was involved in two
8 leadership races; correct? Or more than one leadership race;
9 correct?

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

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

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

14 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. And there's
15 citations for those allegations. And it's Footnotes 220,
16 221, and 222; correct?

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

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

21 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** That's my understanding,
22 yes.

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

26 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Correct.

27 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. And you've been
28 asked to attend at this public hearing as a representative of

1 the Conservative Party; correct?

2 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: That is correct.

3 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: And you're being asked to
4 respond to allegations that are made with respect to
5 leadership races for the Conservative Party of Canada;
6 correct?

7 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: That is correct.

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

10 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Correct.

11 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: Okay. Could I ask you to
12 -- you were asked by my friend, Mr. Lafrance, about the
13 complaint that was submitted by the CPC regarding their
14 membership irregularities in the 2022 CPC leadership contest.
15 Do you recall that?

16 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

17 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: Okay. And you made
18 reference to, and this is referred to in your interview
19 summary, to a response that was received from the OCCE. Do
20 you recall that?

21 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: I do.

22 MR. NANDO DE LUCA: Okay. And can I have
23 CPC9.01 pulled up?

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

25 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. CPC0000009.001:

26 Letter from the OCCE to the CPC,
27 dated February 16, 2024

28 MR. MICHAEL CRASE: Yes.

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

5 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Are you talking the one
6 "Upon..."

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

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

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

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

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

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** Yeah.

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

19 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:**

20 "In the course of our review, we
21 noted proactive steps taken by the
22 CPC to ensure that controls were in
23 place to govern the sale of CPC
24 memberships. This was evidenced by
25 the restrictions in place on
26 acceptable forms of payment and the
27 systematic review of transactions
28 prior to accepting a membership

1 purchase."

2 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Okay. One more for you.

3 Can I ask to scroll down to page 3?

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

7 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** In the meantime,
8 Madam Commissioner, just Sébastien Lafrance from the OCCE
9 office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

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

15 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you, but are you
16 making an objection to ---

17 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** I am.

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

20 **MR. SÉBASTIEN LAFRANCE:** Yes. Fair enough.
21 Thank you.

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

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

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

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

28 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:**

1 "The potential for anonymous and
2 unacceptable purchases was reduced
3 through the restriction of *Vanilla*
4 credit cards at source through
5 Moneris, the credit card processing
6 company. Through the application of
7 the CPC's rules and regulations
8 during the review of the membership
9 sales, the CPC appears to have
10 mitigated potential over-
11 contributions and reduced the
12 possibility of ineligible
13 contributions."

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

16 **MR. MICHAEL CRASE:** I believe that is a
17 reference, sir, a term used for pre-paid credit cards.

18 **MR. NANDO DE LUCA:** Thank you. And the
19 concerns regarding membership irregularities in respect of
20 which the complaint was filed and this letter was responded
21 to were in respect to the 2022 leadership contest. Am I
22 correct that they were not in relation to the leadership
23 campaign for the current leader, sir?

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

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

26 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

27 Any questions in re-examination?

28 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** No thank you,

1 Commissioner.

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

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

4 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you for your time
5 and for coming.

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

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

8 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please. À l'ordre,
9 s'il vous plait.

10 The sitting of the Commission is now in
11 recess until 1:25 p.m. C'est séance de la Commission est
12 maintenant suspendue jusqu'à 13 h 25.

13 --- Upon recessing at 12:04 a.m./

14 --- La séance est suspendue à 12 h 04

15 --- Upon resuming at 1:27 p.m./

16 --- La séance est reprise à 13 h 27

17 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please. À l'ordre,
18 s'il vous plait.

19 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
20 Commission is now back in session. Cette séance de la
21 Commission sur l'ingérence étrangère est de retour en
22 session. The time is 1:28 p.m. Il est 10 h 28.

23 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Good afternoon.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** So before we get
25 started with Mr. Ishmael, the Commission has one housekeeping
26 matter to deal with, Madam Commissioner.

27 During Mr. Crase's evidence, there were a
28 number of questions asked related to Mr. Kaveh Shahrooz, and

1 in order to complete the record, the Commission would like to
 2 enter into evidence Mr. Shahrooz's interview summary with the
 3 Commission. These documents do not need to be pulled up, but
 4 they are WIT81.EN, WIT81.FR, and WIT81.1, and they are all to
 5 be marked as exhibits.

6 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. WIT0000081.EN:**

7 Interview Summary - Kaveh Shahrooz
 8 (Stage 2)

9 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. WIT0000081.FR:**

10 Résumé de l'entrevue - Kaveh Shahrooz
 11 (étape 2)

12 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. WIT0000081.001:**

13 Affidavit of Kaveh Shahrooz

14 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** The Commission's next
 16 witness is Mr. Ishmael. If Mr. Ishmael could please be
 17 sworn?

18 **THE REGISTRAR:** All right. Mr. Ishmael,
 19 could you please state your full name and then spell your
 20 last name for the record?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Azam Ishmael. Ishmael is
 22 spelt I-S-H-M-A-E-L.

23 **THE REGISTRAR:** Thank you very much. Now for
 24 the swearing in.

25 **--- MR. AZAM ISHMAEL, Affirmed/Sous affirmation solennelle:**

26 **THE REGISTRAR:** Thank you.

27 Counsel, you may proceed.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Thank you very much.

1 --- EXAMINATION IN-CHIEF/EXAMINATION EN-CHEF PAR

2 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:

3 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Good afternoon, Mr.
4 Ismael. Do you recall being interviewed by Commission
5 counsel on August 20th of this year?

6 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

7 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. If we could call
8 up WIT99.EN?

9 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. WIT0000099.EN:

10 Interview Summary: Liberal Party of
11 Canada (Azam Ishmael)

12 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: This was the summary
13 that was generated from your interview with Commission
14 counsel.

15 I'll just wait for it to come up on the
16 screen. Great.

17 Have you had a chance to review this document
18 for accuracy, Mr. Ishmael?

19 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

20 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Do you have any
21 corrections, additions, or deletions that you would like to
22 make to it?

23 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No.

24 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Will you adopt it as
25 part of your evidence before the Commission?

26 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

27 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: For the record, the
28 French translation is WIT99.FR.

1 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. WIT0000099.FR:

2 Résumé de l'entrevue FINALE - Parti
3 Libéral du Canada (Azam Ishmael)
4 (étape 2)

5 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Mr. Ishmael, the
6 Liberal Party also prepared an institutional report at the
7 request of Commission counsel. Is that correct?

8 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

9 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: If we could call up
10 LIB.2? LIB.2?

11 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. LIB0000002:

12 Institutional Report Liberal Party of
13 Canada

14 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: While that's coming up,
15 Mr. Ishmael, I'll ask you, did you have an opportunity to
16 review the institutional report?

17 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

18 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And is it accurate?

19 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

20 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And will you also adopt
21 that institutional report as part of your evidence today?

22 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

23 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. So we have that
24 document in front of us now. For the record, the English
25 appendix to the institutional report is LIB.3 and the French
26 versions of the institutional report and the appendix are
27 respectively LIB.4 and LIB.5. They don't need to be called
28 up, but they should all be made exhibits.

1 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. LIB0000003:

2 Appendix A - Institutional Report -
3 Liberal Party of Canada

4 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. LIB0000004:

5 Rapport Institutionnel De Lenquête
6 Publique Sur Lingérence Étrangère
7 Parti Libéral Du Canada.pdf

8 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. LIB0000005:

9 Anne A Rapport institutionnel - Parti
10 libéral du Canada.pdf

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** So Mr. Ishmael, it's
12 your second time before the Commission so we won't spend too
13 much time on your background. Suffice it to say, you have
14 been the national director of the Liberal Party of Canada
15 since 2017?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to ask
18 you about the Liberal Party's views about the foreign
19 interference threat in general. What can you tell us about
20 the party's views, broadly speaking?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I think like all
22 major political parties in Canada, we recognize that it is a
23 threat and a threat actor within our political system and we
24 try to be aware of it and defend against it where we can.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** What is the party
26 considered to be the most important vulnerabilities it faces
27 on the FI front?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well I think I'll speak

1 for myself, there is -- ultimately, the ultimate decision-
2 making body of the Liberal Party of Canada is the Convention
3 floor, but, you know, I think, by and large, we would see
4 misinformation, disinformation as the largest threat to
5 foreign interference.

6 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Any other areas?

7 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Cyber security, obviously,
8 is one that's been raised with us, so I would say those
9 probably are the major sources of area of foreign
10 interference in, yeah.

11 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: I want to turn briefly
12 to nomination contests because those have been identified by
13 the intelligence community as a potential area of
14 vulnerability. And I'll take you to some documents on that a
15 bit later, but just to start out, I just want to cover what
16 is required to make a person eligible to vote in a Liberal
17 Party nomination contest.

18 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Okay.

19 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: I understand the
20 criteria for joining as a registered Liberal, and I've been
21 told that registered Liberal is the correct terminology, not
22 member; is that right?

23 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

24 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. The criteria
25 include being 14 years old; correct?

26 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

27 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And being -- and
28 ordinarily living in Canada.

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think it's ordinarily
2 residing.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Ordinarily residing,
4 yeah. That sounded a little awkward to me too when I said
5 it. Maybe I copied it down wrong. All right. And in terms
6 of that latter requirement, I understand that in practice it
7 sort of takes its meaning from what you need to do to prove
8 that you are ordinarily residing in Canada at a nomination
9 contest. Does that ---

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah. So the ways that
12 a person can prove that they are ordinarily resident in
13 Canada is with first government-issued ID with a Canadian
14 address on it?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Alternatively, with a
17 letter with an address on it from an institution like a bank,
18 or a credit card company, or a school, or university?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** In that case, I believe
20 you require -- it's required two pieces of ID.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I'm sorry, yes, quite
22 correct. So you're required to present one piece of
23 identification that proves who you are, right, what your name
24 is ---

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** M'hm.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** --- and the other piece
27 of identification -- or, I'm sorry, the letter would be what
28 establishes your residency?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And then there's
3 also a vouching practice. It's described in the IR. We
4 don't need to get into it, but that's a third way to prove
5 your identity and residency; is that correct?

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's correct.

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I understand as
8 well that to be eligible to vote in a nomination contest
9 there's a time issue, there's a cutoff time issue. Can you
10 explain how that works?

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, so once the meeting
12 is set, the cutoff is set two to seven days prior to the call
13 of the meeting.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Two to seven days prior
15 to the call of the meeting?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And who decides
18 when the cutoff will be?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Depends on the context,
20 but it's the national chair, the national campaign chair.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And when the
22 cutoff occurs, what happens to the membership list for that
23 riding?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So the membership list at
25 that moment, those will be the people who are eligible to be
26 -- vote. They're then sent to the various contestants to
27 verify and scrutinize the list.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And the list as

1 it exists at the time of the cutoff, does that reflect the
2 list of people who are eligible to vote at the nomination
3 contest?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So folks who
6 sign up after the cutoff would not be on the list?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to turn
9 briefly to the residency requirement we just spoke about. I
10 understand the Liberal Party does not require a person to be
11 either a citizen or a permanent resident to join the party
12 and vote in a nomination contest; is that right?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to ask
15 you a little bit about the rationale for that. So I think we
16 can all understand why citizens would be able to vote in a
17 nomination contest. That makes sense. And I suppose some
18 might say that permanent residents are folks who are living
19 in Canada, and they've also taken steps to demonstrate their
20 intention to maintain a long-term connection to Canada.
21 Conversely, those who are neither citizens nor permanent
22 residents, they may hope to remain in Canada, or they may be
23 passing through; right? Why does the Liberal Party permit
24 foreign nationals who are not citizens or permanent residents
25 to vote in nomination contests?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So kind of as I said at
27 the top, you know, the ultimate decision-making body of the
28 Party is the Convention floor, and this rule has existed in

1 the Party for many decades. As a matter of fact, when I
2 looked into it to find the origin, nobody could point to the,
3 oh, this happened at this moment. So, you know, my response
4 I guess would be largely more philosophical and what I think
5 generally people agree with when it comes to this
6 requirement, and, you know, political parties are designed to
7 engage people and engage their communities. And the idea
8 behind this requirement is, you know, you may need service
9 from your member of parliament. You may be able to go
10 volunteer, and put up signs, and participate in all of the
11 kinds of various activities, political activities. So
12 extending that right to vote to individuals not only
13 encourages them to, you know, put them on the path to be, you
14 know, members of the Party, contribute to our democratic
15 processes, but also, you know, engages them in the overall
16 engagement of the Party.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I'm going to
18 return to this in a moment, and maybe explore that a little
19 bit, but I want to ask you just at the outset, do you view
20 the requirements as they are, so the lack of requirement that
21 a person be a citizen or permanent resident, as a potential
22 vulnerability to foreign interference in Liberal Party
23 processes?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Do you want to explain
26 that?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I just think when it comes
28 to it, when you break down the requirements for permanent

1 residency or citizenship, if you were to extract that rule to
2 its extreme, you would need people to show up with either
3 their birth certificate or a passport to vote in nomination
4 meetings. So, frankly, it's not practical, and it also
5 creates a friction between, you know, public engagement, and
6 I think, you know, in a lot of cases, puts an undue burden on
7 people just looking to get active in their democratic spaces
8 in the overall process. And, you know, when you speak of,
9 you know, political parties, and when you think of the
10 engagement they do, we're engaging, you know, thousands, tens
11 of thousands of people every election when we go. So when
12 you break it down, as I said in my original testimony when I
13 first appeared before the Commission, you know, the ability
14 to orchestrate thousands of people, or hundreds of people to
15 influence the outcome of a single nomination meeting, without
16 it being detected by authorities or breaking some other
17 Elections Canada law or legislation, you know, to me, strikes
18 me as very, very, very minimal.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Well, let me ask
20 you about that a little bit. I mean, nomination contests are
21 -- I mean, by definition, it's a small subset of the people
22 who reside in a constituency who are able to vote in it;
23 right?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** It's limited to
26 registered Liberals?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes, correct.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** It's limited to

1 registered Liberals who are signed up before the cutoff?

2 Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm just going to ---

3 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, correct.

4 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- ask you to ---

5 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, okay.

6 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And it's limited to
7 folks, typically, and we'll come to a slight exception, but
8 it's typically limited to folks who actually show up at the
9 nomination meeting ---

10 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

11 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- right? So there
12 can be -- how many people typically show up in a nomination
13 meeting?

14 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: It really can vary from
15 contest to contest. The largest contests I've ever heard of
16 were 20, 25,000 in the lead up to the 2015 campaign. You
17 know, thinking back to my time as national director, I think
18 the largest meeting we oversaw had 7,000 potential
19 participants. So, you know, on average, it's probably a few
20 hundred people, but it can expand quite rapidly.

21 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. And I understand
22 that a lot of these contests are acclamations?

23 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

24 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And some of them are
25 going to be landslides, I imagine, in the nature of things?

26 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah.

27 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Some of them are also
28 going to be very close though; right?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct. Well, the nature
2 of our ballot, the balloting within the Liberal Party of
3 Canada is a preferential ballot, so with runoffs. So you do
4 get a scenario in which sometimes the voting is closer only
5 because multiple rounds generally tends to lead to closer ---

6 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right. And however it
7 pans out, if there's two candidates, or three, or four,
8 ultimately, there are situations where a few dozen votes
9 might make the difference between one candidate and another?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I understand that there
12 is no fee involved to become a registered Liberal?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you want to
15 explain why that is?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So the 2,000 -- I believe
17 it was the 2016 Convention, it was put forward to the Party
18 membership of, you know, should we remove this barrier to
19 entry within politics to engage more people. And the Party
20 had just gone through a leadership process that included a
21 supporter category that allowed people to vote for whoever
22 they wanted for a leader without paying a fee. So this was
23 kind of the natural evolution of that thought process. So
24 bring -- you know, the idea was to bring in more people into
25 the Party, engage more people by removing the economic
26 barrier to participate.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Again, I'm going
28 to return to this in a little more depth later, but it has

1 been suggested that having a fee can provide a little more
2 friction in the process that might make foreign interference
3 a little more difficult, and that depending on how payment is
4 accepted, it might make it a little easier to detect or trace
5 suspicious activity.

6 Do you have any views on that?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, I think that's false
8 just with the reality of either you could go to cash payments
9 for memberships and then Elections Canada allows you to
10 accept up to \$20 cash for a Party membership in which cash is
11 untraceable, largely, or if you move to credit cards or if
12 you move to those kind of forms of payment, you know, they're
13 pretty ubiquitous, those pre-paid credit cards that you could
14 use to enter in the system. You know, you could go to Petro
15 Canada and get a Visa or a MasterCard prepaid, so I don't
16 think it's as meaningful a test as people think it is.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So we've heard
18 some evidence that it is easy to set up payment systems to
19 detect and disallow prepaid credit cards.

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'm not familiar with
21 that.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Have you made
23 any inquiries about that?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Our Party membership being
27 free, I didn't need to look into it.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to ask

1 you, is it possible to have bulk signups of -- I almost said
2 members. Is it possible to have bulk signups of registered
3 Liberals in the Liberal Party?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah. So if you're part
5 of a nomination contest, you can bring the information
6 together, if you're an accredited nominated candidate, and
7 provide to the Party in its prescribed form an Excel sheet
8 that we could help upload to the system.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So the situation
10 is someone from a campaign submits to the Party an Excel
11 sheet with the information required, name, date of birth,
12 address. Anything else I'm missing?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, I don't believe date
14 of birth is a requirement, but ---

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Oh, I see.

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- you know, the standard
17 biographical information that you need, so address and name
18 is probably ---

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So a single
20 campaign worker can show up with a spreadsheet with dozens of
21 names on it ---

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** --- submit them, and as
24 long as -- as long as the fields are filled out correctly,
25 the Party will process them and make them, not members,
26 registered Liberals.

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah, sorry.

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The Party secretary does
2 have the ability if I really felt that something was amiss to
3 impose other requirements, but practically speaking, we
4 accept it.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Just to speak
6 briefly about the actual voting process, I think we already
7 covered what we need to for in-person nomination contests.

8 I understand as well that the Liberal Party
9 does permit virtual nomination meetings in some cases.

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Are they ---

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Particularly coming out of
13 COVID. That was the genesis of it.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** So that's what I was
15 going to ask. Going forward, are -- do you expect them to be
16 common?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't expect them to be
18 common, no.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And just to put
20 it out there, in terms of -- are there steps taken to verify
21 identity and residence in virtual nomination meetings?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely. The same
23 requirements remain.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And how are those
25 enforced in a virtual meeting?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So the Party invested in
27 technology that used facial recognition to compare the
28 person's face versus the ID they were presenting, so using a

1 third-party company, we use that. And if -- should the
2 person opt not to use that software, they were allowed to go
3 into a Zoom breakout room and hold up their piece of ID
4 against their actual face to do the confirmation.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I understand
6 that the Liberal Party has a greenlighting process or maybe
7 I'll call it generically a vetting process for potential
8 nomination candidates. Is that right?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Does the Party
11 do anything specifically to scrutinize candidates for
12 vulnerability to foreign interference?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The Party when it comes to
14 greenlighting of candidates is particularly vetting for
15 anything that would bring the Party's reputation into
16 disrepute, so it really covers the gamut. And you know,
17 while there's no specific question to foreign interference,
18 you're left -- it's a very rigorous process that would leave
19 you with a well-established kind of history and, you know,
20 establishment of who the candidate is.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Did the vetters
22 receive any sort of training or instruction to attune them
23 specifically to foreign interference as a concern to address
24 in the vetting process?

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Has the Party been
27 provided -- I'm sorry. Does the Party provide vetters any
28 training resources specifically related to foreign

1 interference?

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The Government of Canada
3 has just recently come out with some how to detect foreign
4 interference material -- I believe it was in May of this year
5 -- that ---

6 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- we'll be including in
8 training material going forward.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Are there other
10 sort of resources from government that would be helpful to
11 the Party going forward in terms of specifically training
12 vetters how to better identify foreign interference?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's an interesting
14 question. I guess it would depend on the material and, you
15 know, how dense it was.

16 We've always advocated for more kind of
17 common language training material, so if the government had
18 stuff to provide, then I'm sure we would review it.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Up to what point can
20 the Party -- I'm sorry. If someone gets greenlit, up to what
21 point can a -- can the Party withdraw its approval for such a
22 person?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Up until the Elections
24 Canada deadline for candidates, which is effectively
25 established by the time they print the ballot.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So throughout
27 the nomination process and up until, effectively, you're
28 saying, when the ballot is printed.

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And are there
3 any mechanisms that can be used after the ballot's printed?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely. As we saw in
5 the last election campaign the Prime Minister or the leader
6 of the Party can say they won't sit as a member of our
7 caucus, so by that time it'd be too late to remove them from
8 the ballot, but they wouldn't be a member or they wouldn't be
9 associated with the Liberal Party of Canada.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I want to ask you about
11 -- well, our focus here is forward looking, but I know that
12 when the intelligence community raised concerns about a
13 particular nomination contest in 2019, you were looped in on
14 those concerns as the SITE rep at the time.

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** As I'm allowed to confirm,
16 yes.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah. That was part of
18 the evidence at Stage 1 of these hearings, so fair enough.

19 Has the Party changed any of its nomination
20 rules that we've discussed so far in response to the concerns
21 that were raised by the intelligence community that ---

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No. We reviewed the
23 processes and, again, we found our system to be quite robust,
24 so there hasn't been any material change.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

26 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Did you also review the
27 requirements for becoming a member?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The Party hasn't reviewed

1 that ---

2 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** No?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- requirement, no.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. The intelligence
5 community has continued to express concerns about what they
6 describe as loopholes in the political Party nomination
7 process.

8 I'm going to ask if we can turn up a
9 document. It's CAN37690. There's an underscore 0001.

10 So if we can page down to the next page,
11 we'll see -- yeah. It's a SITE TF -- if we can just go up a
12 tiny bit, we'll see it's from February of 2024, and it's a
13 SITE Threat Assessment of Foreign Interference Threats to
14 Canadian Democratic Institutions 2024.

15 And you were provided with this document in
16 advance of your testimony today?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I was provided with
18 hundreds of pages of documents yesterday, so I'd have to rely
19 on counsel that we received this.

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right.

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** But I would say this is
22 the first time I'm looking.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Fair enough.

24 Well, I'll take you to the part that may have
25 caught your attention. It's on the third page of the PDF, so
26 I think it's one more page down, and it's points 5 and 6.

27 Yeah. So this is it.

28 So you'll see at paragraph 5 -- and I'm not

1 going to read the entire paragraph, but just a few parts. It
2 says:

3 "Foreign states use foreign
4 interference and seek to influence
5 Canadian politics by clandestinely
6 supporting candidates or elected
7 officials who are perceived to be
8 receptive to the foreign state
9 policies, narratives and geopolitical
10 strategies. At the same time, these
11 foreign states actively oppose
12 individuals who are perceived to be
13 against their interests." (As read)

14 It talks about how it happens at all levels
15 of government.

16 At paragraph 6, it says:

17 "Nomination processes for political
18 parties in Canada are not regulated
19 by federal or provincial government
20 legislation or enforcement bodies..."

21 (As read)

22 It gives examples, EC and OCCE, talks about
23 how the rules are set by the Parties. And about halfway
24 down, it says:

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 the
4 party is akin to winning the
5 subsequent election. Therefore, FI
6 activities during the nomination race
7 could achieve the desired outcome
8 without reliance upon FI activities
9 during the election period. FI
10 actors exploit this loophole to
11 engage in FI the target specific
12 candidates and particular electoral
13 ridings." (As read)

14 And you'll see that paragraph is actually
15 titled "Exploiting Loopholes in Political Party Nomination
16 Processes".

17 So I want to suggest that there are two
18 points that we can take from this document. One is that SITE
19 assesses that foreign states have the intent to engage in
20 election interference, specifically around nomination
21 processes. Do you agree with that?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Do I agree that's ---

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Sorry, do you agree
24 that that's one thing we can take out of this document?

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That seems to be their
26 stated concern, yeah.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Although there is, from my

1 very, very quick read of this, there does seem to be some
2 erroneous statement of facts here. Nomination races are
3 regulated by Elections Canada. Any nomination contestant
4 that spends over \$1,000 must file a return with Elections
5 Canada and become subject to that regime.

6 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Fair point. The second
7 point is that the intelligence community's view is that there
8 are potential vulnerabilities. They seem to describe them as
9 loopholes, in political party nomination processes that
10 foreign interference actors are exploiting. I'm going to ask
11 you first, do you disagree with SITE's assessment that
12 foreign interference actors have the intent to interfere in
13 the nomination process?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, that is SITE's
15 assessment, and I have a lot of confidence in SITE. So I
16 don't -- you know, if that is their opinion they have more
17 information than me. So you know, I'll accept the premise of
18 their conversation. But as, you know, I kind of said in
19 Phase 1, I think in terms of all the ways in which you could
20 interfere with elections in Canada, you know, mobilizing
21 hundreds, if not thousands of people to vote in a nomination
22 meeting is probably the most difficult.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I'm going to
24 suggest the one thing that SITE is suggesting here is that
25 it's easier to affect a nomination contest because you -- it
26 involves far fewer people than a general election or a by-
27 election.

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Oh, it definitely does,

1 but it still requires -- you know, having participated in
2 many a nomination meeting and winning some and losing others,
3 you still need to mobilize people and it's not the easiest of
4 activities.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you dispute
6 the assessment of SITE that there are loopholes or
7 vulnerabilities in political parties' nomination processes?

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'd have to kind of review
9 each one and have an opinion on each one. But again, I have
10 a lot of confidence in SITE. So if there's -- if they are
11 stating this concern, then it's worth, you know, considering.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And in fairness,
13 this document doesn't identify any party. Do you think that
14 there are vulnerabilities in the nomination process of the
15 Liberal Party that may make it vulnerable to foreign
16 interference?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think it depends on the
18 actor and the reality. You know, every system that you
19 create, and again it goes back a bit to the practicality
20 around, you know, what standard of -- what standard will you
21 keep when allowing people to participate. So every system
22 has some level of vulnerability. But I think by in large,
23 when you look at the Liberal Party of Canada's processes, and
24 as entered into the evidence, then you know, just how layered
25 the process is and how robust the system is in terms of
26 participating.

27 You know, we've already talked about you need
28 to prove just in the short period I've been on the witness

1 stand, we've talked about the fact that the candidates need
2 to be vetted by a committee, then then -- and accepted. They
3 need to then sign up by certain dates. Then they also need
4 to be, you know, participate in the race itself, and then
5 they need to show up and prove their identity.

6 So I think at any stage of that there would
7 be some vulnerability. But I think in the layered matrix of
8 the security of the overall process, I think you know, I feel
9 quite confident in it.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I'm going to
11 press you a little bit on that and a couple particular areas
12 of the Liberal Party's nomination processes. And I want to
13 do that maybe by way of a hypothetical. Okay. So first
14 let's imagine that a foreign actor wanted to interfere in a
15 Liberal nomination contest. That's a reasonable thing to
16 hypothesize based on the assessments of SITE. Do you agree?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Sure.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah, okay.

19 Second, let's hypothetically imagine that a
20 foreign state accomplishes that end or attempts to accomplish
21 that end by clandestinely pressuring a bunch of foreign
22 nationals who legitimately live in that riding potentially to
23 support a particular candidate in a Liberal nomination
24 contest. Right? So the state directs them, you know, go
25 sign up to become a registered Liberal and tells them, you
26 know, show up at this contest at such and such a time and
27 case a vote for so and so. And all of this is done
28 clandestinely.

1 Let me ask you first about that. Do you
2 agree that. Do you agree that authoritarian governments are
3 likely to have the ability to apply considerable pressure to
4 foreign nationals living in Canada?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, that's a -- I
6 would assume that they have some ability, as that's how
7 they're motivating anybody they're activating. But at the
8 same time, you know, when you bring it back to the party, I
9 think the key word you said there was clandestinely. They
10 are clandestinely doing this. The Liberal Party of Canada is
11 not a police -- doesn't have investigative powers afforded to
12 the Courts or police officers. It doesn't have the same
13 security protections.

14 So when we talk about what is in the scale
15 and scope of the ability of the Liberal Party of Canada, I
16 feel pretty confident about it. But you know, if an
17 authoritarian regime has the ability to exercise influence
18 outside their borders, of course.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And do you
20 dispute that -- and particularly with respect to foreign
21 nationals who are not permanent residents, right, they don't
22 have any right to remain in Canada long term. They don't
23 have a demonstrated intention to remain in Canada long term
24 even. Do you dispute that an authoritarian foreign power is
25 likely to have the ability to apply considerable pressure to
26 such persons to do something like register for a party and go
27 and vote in a nomination contest?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So I'm not an expert on

1 how much pressure they could apply.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah.

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume somebody
4 who is returning to a country is probably more vulnerable
5 that somebody who is not staying within the country. But
6 from my understanding, Canadian citizens and permanent
7 residents here in Canada are also pressured. So I don't
8 think it is unique to foreign nationals.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Do you think that
10 foreign nationals are more vulnerable than citizens who have
11 a right to remain in Canada -- who are obviously can remain
12 in Canada, and permanent residents who presumably are going
13 to be able to as well?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume so, yes.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. In that scenario
16 where we have a foreign power who's applying pressure to its
17 foreign nationals, I want to ask you to comment a little bit
18 on whether a requirement that only permits citizens or
19 citizens and PRs to vote might provide some protection.

20 And so I'm going to ask you to first consider
21 the perspective of a foreign national, right? Do you think
22 that -- and I think you were alluding to earlier that
23 typically a requirement to be a PR or a citizen, it's sort of
24 an honour system, right? It's an attestation.

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** So it's not typically
27 verified by documents, right? But from the perspective of a
28 person whose being told, we'd like you to go join this party

1 and vote for so and so, do you think that the first step
2 being you have to lie and say you're a PR or citizen even
3 though you're clearly not, might dissuade some people from
4 engaging in that activity?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think if an
6 authoritarian regime is threatening you from a place that's
7 not here in Canada, you're probably more worried about what
8 the authoritarian regime could do than anything that would be
9 done here in Canada.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So you imagine
11 that that if this was told to, you know, a group of people,
12 that they're all going to be prepared to lie about their PR
13 or citizenship status because of the pressure of the foreign
14 power?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I can appreciate that they
16 would be pressured to do so, but to do so undetected, I think
17 that's where it becomes more challenging.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Can you explain
19 that?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, again, you know in
21 my experience of mobilizing people and mobilizing large
22 numbers of people that you would need to influence nomination
23 meetings, and often times, you know, they talk -- the SITE
24 Task Force talks about safe seats, although I would argue,
25 you know, every election is contested very thoughtfully here
26 in Canada, but in those cases where there are quote unquote
27 safe seats, often times those bring the biggest nomination
28 meetings. Those brings meetings, and requirements, and, you

1 know, the hundreds or thousands. So the ability to, you
2 know, clandestinely organize that I think is more difficult,
3 and I think if ever detected, either by officials or by the
4 party, you know, it'd be referred to the, you know, the
5 Commissioner of Elections Canada.

6 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Well let me ask you
7 about that detection angle, because I'm going to suggest that
8 if we look at the same requirement, but we look at it from
9 the perspective of the foreign actor, right, instead of the
10 foreign nationals, the foreign actor here, that if there were
11 a requirement that individuals be permanent residents or
12 citizens, it might make this tactic a bit riskier; right? If
13 we imagine the foreign state is trying to act clandestinely,
14 they don't want to get caught, and if they were to ask a
15 large group of foreign nationals to sign up for a party, if
16 that ever came to light, it would be clear that you had what
17 appears to be maybe coordinated activity by a large group of
18 foreign nationals who are breaking the rules in order to vote
19 in a nomination contest.

20 So I'm wondering if you agree that a foreign
21 nation that doesn't want to get caught doing this kind of
22 thing, again, they might be dissuaded by the fact that it is
23 against the rules and it could come to light?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think if you're
25 motivated to go to the extent of orchestrating foreign
26 interference, I don't think a self-attestation is the biggest
27 barrier to your action.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. But the

1 potential, I guess, is if that -- if it comes to light that a
2 bunch of people have self-attested falsely from a particular
3 foreign state and that breaks the rules, that potentially
4 raises all kinds of red flags, concerns, people start
5 worrying why are all these folks lying about this factor,
6 when if there's no such requirement, then it's all within the
7 rules?

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I guess so. I think the
9 bigger story would be more that a foreign actor is creating
10 the influence; not so much that the rule has been broken.

11 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you think it
12 would be easier to detect if it required a foreign actor to
13 break the rules?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't know. I guess
15 it'd depend on what rule is being applied.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right. Well, I'm
17 suggesting if you had a situation where only PRs and citizens
18 could vote.

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't think that that
20 would make it anymore difficult, no.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** You don't think it
22 would make it more difficult to detect?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I want to ask you
25 similar questions with respect to charging a fee.

26 So one thing we've heard some evidence about
27 is that there are ways to potentially detect or trace
28 activity, depending on the method of payment obviously and

1 the systems that are in place. Right. So we've heard that
2 it can be possible to detect bulk payments; right? So we had
3 a bunch of payment made on a single credit card. We've heard
4 that it is possible to determine whether the credit card used
5 to pay for a membership matches the name and at least postal
6 code that the member is giving; right? That there might be
7 some potential to detect irregularities around IP addresses.
8 So I guess if a bunch of payments are all coming from the
9 same spot at the same time, that might raise some flags.

10 So I wanted to ask you, again, with respect
11 to charging a fee, if a -- imagine a scenario where, again,
12 you have a foreign state trying to clandestinely induce a
13 bunch of foreign nationals to vote in a nomination contest.
14 Do you think that requiring each individual person to go and
15 pay a fee out of their own pocket, maybe with a Canadian
16 credit card, presumably it would be traceable to them, might
17 at least put a little bit of friction in the process?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Honestly, I don't think
19 so. Membership fees tend to be pretty nominal in Canada. I
20 think Elections Canada only allows them to be up to \$20. So
21 if you're already willing to engage in this activity, using
22 your personal credit card, which would circumvent some of the
23 security measures you talked about, I don't believe that that
24 would be a great source of friction in terms of keeping
25 foreign interference out of the system.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And let me ask you the
27 same sort of question, but from the perspective of a foreign
28 state. Again, let's suppose that this foreign state is

1 trying to keep things secret. Do you think that requiring
2 payment that would potentially create an easily traceable
3 record of this coordinated activity might dissuade or deter
4 the foreign state from engaging in foreign interference?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** If each individual is
6 paying through their own personal credit card, I don't know
7 that it would be easily traceable. It's only if the funds
8 originated from the foreign state, in which case that would
9 be a violation of the, you know, the *Canada Elections Act*.
10 So I'm not sure that it does.

11 And I would also think that if you're a
12 foreign state and you're compelling people to do this
13 anyways, I don't think, again, paying some nominal fee would
14 be the greatest barrier. No.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I guess I was
16 suggesting that the payment would be ultimately traceable if
17 any questions were raised later.

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** It's traceable to see who
19 shows up to vote at the actual meeting itself. So I don't
20 know that the additional friction of payment process would
21 create more friction.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Would you advocate for
23 any changes to the current legal regime around nomination
24 contests?

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think more specifically,
26 like, ---

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Just general.

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Just any change? Well I

1 guess there's lots of changes that can be brought to
2 nomination races that would ease the administrative burden on
3 candidates that would, you know, I don't know, I think it
4 would matter, really, on what is being considered.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Sorry, I should have
6 specified. With respect to any changes to the current legal
7 regime around nomination contests in respect of foreign
8 interference.

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not that I can think of,
10 but should there be proposals come forward, happy to consider
11 them.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to turn
13 briefly to leadership contests. If I understand correctly,
14 there are no -- there's no standing set of rules for
15 leadership contests. They get drafted by -- is it the
16 Leadership Vote Committee?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct. There's a
18 subcommittee of the party that gets put together at the time
19 of leadership contest.

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So we can't
21 really get into details because we don't know what the rules
22 would be the next time around.

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** But I take it that to
25 vote in a leadership contest, the person must be a registered
26 Liberal?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And I think I saw, is

1 it 40 -- the cut off is 41 days before the leadership vote?

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'd have to go back ---

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- and refer to the ---

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** But we can check in
6 your IR.

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That does sound right
8 though.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And the same
10 ordinarily reside in Canada requirement?

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And so the same
13 rules with respect to voting by non-citizens, non-PRs?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Just to put
16 things in a little bit of context, I know you don't know what
17 the rules will be next time. In the past, have leadership
18 votes taken place in person, remotely, by mail, some other
19 mechanism I'm not thinking of?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think in the history of
21 the party, we've probably done it all.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Recent history.

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** In more recent history,
24 you know, the 06 Convention was done in person. It was a
25 Leadership Convention so it's decided on the Convention
26 floor.

27 More recently, from -- as I recall, and this
28 was before my time, it was done -- you were sent a ballot by

1 the mail, you registered, and then you voted online. And I
2 think you could also vote in person.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Has the party
4 given any thought to how concerns about foreign interference
5 might impact how voting and other processes in future
6 leadership contests might be organized?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I think like
8 anybody following the news, there's been some conversations
9 of these things. But I think, you know, quite honestly,
10 people are looking towards this Commission for
11 recommendations, and from the community as to how best to
12 proceed on this matter.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Has the party
14 historically done vetting of leadership candidates.

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you know if
17 that's something that might be considered next time around?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think, you know, when
19 they're drafting the rules, they will consider everything.
20 So I would imagine there would be some consideration of it.
21 But in the Liberal Party history, that hasn't been a
22 criteria. It's left to the Registered Liberals to kind of
23 vet the candidates.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Are there any
25 resources, and it could be advice or anything else, that
26 would assist the party, when the time comes, to ensure that
27 its leadership processes are secure?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, you know, in terms

1 of resources, I look to this Commission ---

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right.

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- and any guidance they
4 can provide. You know, I have read allegations that some of
5 the other major parties have maybe had issues around their
6 leadership process. So I haven't seen any detailed analysis
7 of that, but, you know, I would be fascinated to read that.

8 Beyond that, I think -- you know, the over --
9 again, our leadership process is a very layered process in
10 which, you know, each riding association only is allocated
11 100 points, so the ability to influence the overall
12 leadership is - remains quite difficult, you know, to
13 influence the final outcome of the leadership because you
14 would quite literally need a pan-Canadian network, which is
15 how you win those nominations, or how you win leadership.
16 But, you know, I think on all of these things, I think these
17 are known/unknowns, where we know that there is a threat out
18 there, but we don't know exactly what shape the threat takes
19 when it comes to leadership contest.

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I'm going to turn to a
21 different topic, cyber security, IT security. I first just
22 want to talk about the Party's internal IT infrastructure.
23 So I understand that the Party has updated its approach to
24 cyber security after I think it was 2016. Has that been an
25 ongoing process?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And what kinds
28 of things -- and I don't need granular detail, obviously, but

1 what kinds of things has the Party done to protect its IT
2 security?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I think by and
4 large, the most sophisticated is consulting external experts
5 and having them bring their expertise to the Party and
6 assessing us for vulnerabilities and kind of providing a
7 roadmap as to how best to secure the Party infrastructure.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** And another big piece is
10 that largely, the Party has moved all of our IT systems to
11 credible third-party actors, people like Microsoft Sales
12 Force, so on and so forth.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Has the Party
14 had contact with the Cyber Centre?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And specifically
17 with respect to its IT infrastructure, has the Cyber Centre
18 been helpful?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** From my understanding --
20 I'm not a technical person, so I would say yes. Yeah, I'd
21 have to ask my IT person.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Any ways it
23 could have been more helpful?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'd have to ask her, but I
25 -- you know, I think when it comes to cyber security, you
26 know, the number one resource the Party would ask for would
27 be a list of approved vendors, you know, and if they wanted
28 to help financially, negotiated -- negotiated rates on behalf

1 of all parties. But ideally, what we would like to be able
2 to do, or like to have, is a list of approved vendors and
3 experts that we can turn to because a lot of our time
4 internally is spent assessing vendors and trying to assess
5 where exactly do they fall within the security matrix. Is
6 this the best company to use for email? Is this the best
7 security to use for cyber securities, and so on and so forth,
8 and then you balance that against, of course, the costs that
9 are allocated to that. But it's an ever-changing landscape,
10 so, you know, whoever was best six months ago is not
11 necessarily best moving forward; right? So that would be the
12 number one resource we ask for.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Let me ask this
14 because you mentioned funding. Are there ways that the Party
15 could strengthen its electronic infrastructure that it, like,
16 lacks the financial resources to implement?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, I think all major
18 parties in Canada probably have the financial wherewithal to
19 engage with these companies and have the financial resources
20 to it. I don't see how a blanket, for example, per vote
21 subsidy would help us be more secure. If the government
22 wanted to kind of encourage us to spend in areas of security
23 that they felt were vulnerable and provide rebates in that
24 area, I think, you know, it would be interesting to hear
25 their proposal. But by and large, I would think that most
26 major parties -- you know, each Party raises millions of
27 dollars a year. I would think that they would have the
28 resources to invest in basic cyber security, and I hope they

1 do, frankly.

2 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: All right. I'm going
3 to turn to a slightly different subset of this topic. In an
4 election period, does the Party provide candidates and
5 campaign staff with IT devices, right, phones ---

6 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No.

7 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- and computers?
8 Okay. Does the Party offer candidates and campaign staff
9 access to the Party's own internal infrastructure to
10 safeguard their devices?

11 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: For their devices, no.

12 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay.

13 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: We provide them best
14 practices to follow.

15 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. So you provide
16 them -- what does that entail?

17 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: You know, use two-factor
18 authentication. Oftentimes it's information that we've
19 either digested from government sources or just industry best
20 practices.

21 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Does the Party
22 offer technical support?

23 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Not directly, but if
24 somebody were to call us and say, hey, I'm having trouble
25 navigating something, or I have an issue, we would engage
26 with them, of course.

27 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay.

28 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: The -- you know, the Party

1 exists to support local candidates win their local election.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I -- tell me if
3 this is correct, but what I'm imagining is you have a
4 candidate and a campaign staff. They are working off of the
5 same kind of phones that any of us might go into Best Buy and
6 purchase, or go to Bell, or Telus, or whoever else.

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** M'hm.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Computers bought off
9 the internet, or from some local store, and, basically, folks
10 are -- they're the first line of defence to protect their own
11 cyber security, hopefully by engaging the best practices you
12 suggest, but, ultimately, they're sort of on their own; is
13 that fair?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah, okay. We've
16 heard some evidence that some MPs maintain a personal device
17 for their non-House of Commons work. So personal, personal,
18 but also campaign work and fundraising. Is it the same
19 answer with respect to who is administering, helping, paying
20 for, protecting those devices, it's sort of the MPs own
21 responsibility to deal with?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do -- if we
24 imagine a scenario where a foreign actor, and, frankly, it
25 doesn't have to be a foreign actor, any sort of hostile actor
26 got access to a candidate's or a campaign's, you know,
27 campaign communications, fundraising communications,
28 extremely personal, private information, do you think that

1 would create a potential vulnerability?

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely, yes.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Do you have any
4 thoughts about how candidates and campaigns can be provided
5 with better cyber security, whether it's through government
6 of parties, or what?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I think that the
8 challenge there is a logistical challenge; right? You've got
9 -- every party in the next election will have 343 candidates,
10 some of them who are stood up at the very last minute, some
11 of them who have been campaigning or cabinet ministers and
12 MPs. So the challenge always remains moving people to new
13 devices. You know, even in our personal lives, if my phone
14 were to break today and tomorrow morning I had to go get a
15 new phone, it's a real pain to move your information over to
16 a device. So it truly is a logistical challenge to get
17 around. I think the best case to secure it in, and this
18 comes even within our -- the Party walls and the staff that
19 work at the Party candidate is training and education as to
20 what to avoid; right? You know, we spend a lot of time
21 educating our employees of, you know, suspicious links and
22 suspicious activity, and what does this look like, and that's
23 probably your best mechanism, because every system is
24 fallible. This is why they keep attacking the system. So,
25 you know, it -- any direct recommendation, you know, somebody
26 would have to explain to me how we solve the logistics first.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's the biggest

1 challenge.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** In terms of that sort
3 of training, is there mandatory training for candidates and
4 campaign workers on cyber security?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** It's not mandatory. It's
6 provided in the packages.

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And why is it
8 not mandatory?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think like everything
10 that comes down to a campaign, it's, you know, a question of
11 time and logistics and recognizing you have candidates who
12 will be signed up long before an election starts and others
13 that will start on, you know, day 10. So when you make
14 something mandatory, you know, I always have the view that,
15 you know, there needs to be a consequence to it. You know,
16 if an employee doesn't do their training, well, we can
17 threaten to terminate the candidate, but, obviously, over
18 time, you know, you've got space there. You have abilities
19 to escalate it, versus in a campaign, you're talking about an
20 extremely short period of time, you know, as little as 36
21 days, and the candidate can be nominated up to I think it's
22 10 or 14 days into the writ. So you're talking about 20 days
23 on top of everything else that this person needs to do. So
24 when you say "mandatory", I think we always need to be
25 careful about what does mandatory look like.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I understand that
27 that's sort of the shortest timeline. Is that typical?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't know. Typical is

1 hard to say in a minority government. You know, when you
2 have longer set election days, you probably have a little bit
3 more time. When you're looking at a minority government, you
4 know, sometimes -- I would say it's generally a bit tighter.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Just returning to this
6 idea about how, for example, government might provide better
7 security -- and, again, I realize there are unanswered
8 questions about exactly how that would work, but as a matter
9 of -- I don't know if it's principle or practical, but does
10 the Party have a view -- does the Party have concerns about
11 government offering this sort of infrastructure to candidates
12 in terms of the security of the information that would be on
13 it?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, the government
15 can offer any service, you know, and I'm sure some people
16 would consider it. I think it really depends on what is
17 being considered, right?

18 And ultimately at the end of the day, again,
19 and I think this is the consensus among political parties,
20 but I could be wrong, it's we're not asking the government to
21 do, we're asking the government to guide. Which is tell us
22 which providers are the safest ones and how to set it up so
23 that it is safe, and then we will engage them. We will
24 engage them directly and we will tell people to engage with
25 them directly.

26 You know, it's done in lots of other areas,
27 you know, if you want to have Facebook advertising during a
28 campaign for example, you need to provide validated proof of

1 who you are and, you know, we guide campaigns to do things
2 like that. Versus doing it, I always -- I always worry
3 about, you know, logistically what is possible.

4 Because what ends up happening in election
5 campaigns, as you can appreciate, it's a very difficult and,
6 you know, stressed period. People tend to flow to what is
7 the easiest thing that they can do. So if you say, well, you
8 now need to sign a 25 page form, and so through some
9 mandatory trainings on it and so forth, to access these kinds
10 of resources, your uptake on those resources wouldn't be, you
11 know, 100 percent. And I don't think that there's anything
12 that the party or any other parties would offer their
13 candidates that is 100 percent take up of an offering of a
14 party. I really can't think of one, other than maybe the use
15 of our logo. And even that some people try to change that.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And I understand this
17 is a little hypothetical, but in general, can the party not
18 just mandate, you know, you need to use X and Y service, you
19 need to use X and Y degree of protection, you need to use --
20 if there were a government option -- the government option in
21 terms of IT?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would tell you the
23 things that are mandated are very, very difficult to
24 implement and they have to carry a very heavy disincentive.
25 So the only thing I can think of which is mandatory for
26 Canada to do is go through the vetting process for example.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right.

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** And should you choose not

1 to go through the vetting process, well, you will not be a
2 candidate. It is, you know, those are the kinds of things
3 that I can think of when it comes to actual practices.
4 Because don't forget, you now, politics in Canada by in large
5 is a voluntary exercise, you know?

6 The candidates that are running are not being
7 paid. Often times the key campaign managers are not being
8 paid. Official agents who take on, you know months and
9 months of responsibilities and duties are not being paid.
10 They are all doing this just to be part of the democratic
11 process and you know, ultimately, to have their views
12 reflected in the House of Commons.

13 So when it comes to mandating things, you
14 know, that is a friction point. You are going to keep --
15 you're going to push people out of the system. And in a
16 country as large as ours, and the operations you need to
17 operate, it can become quite tricky.

18 And I think, you know, if you're thinking for
19 an email account for example, a candidates email account.
20 Well, it's not only on the side of the candidate you would
21 need to secure, but it's also whoever they are sending
22 information to as well, right? Because if the breach, as
23 with any email, the breach can happen on the sender or the
24 receiver, or it could happen further down the line. So when
25 you're looking at making things mandatory, it becomes quite
26 tricky as to how do you ensure compliance.

27 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right. But I guess, is
28 it fair to say though, the vetting process for example, is

1 mandatory because it's so important to the party ---

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** --- that the party
4 could likewise say, cyber security of our campaigns and
5 candidates is so important that we are going to mandate it?
6 That is an option, isn't it?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct. However,
8 submitting yourself to a vetting process, that might take a
9 few hours, a few days, depending on how complicated your
10 process is. Totally changing your IT personal infrastructure
11 could be a large undertaking, you know? Like, and again,
12 you're dealing with a wide array of people's capacities.

13 So everybody can sit and answer questions and
14 talk about their selves, and their past, and their political
15 beliefs. Not everybody would fully understand how to set up
16 sophisticated IT systems to protect themselves from a cyber
17 attack.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Has the party
19 investigated what that would require?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I just know from the
21 logistics of it. Oftentimes it is suggested for example,
22 that we use one unified email address and just operating that
23 we offer other systems that require usernames and passwords.
24 And we know from that experience that's hundreds if not
25 thousands of people hours. And you know, when you take that
26 experience and you apply it to something like email, where
27 you could have -- you could literally be administering 10s of
28 thousands of emails because if you wanted every volunteer to

1 have one, the burden would be so huge on the political
2 parties that it would be unmanageable.

3 And then there would be a cost associated
4 with it, and per Elections Canada, any cost incurred either
5 by the local candidate or the national party then becomes
6 subject to campaign expense limits. So when you're
7 allocating your budget, you need to think about what is the
8 best -- what is the best use of your allocated dollars.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Does the party
10 offer email addresses to any candidates, or is it only MPs,
11 or how does that work?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** As by rule, we don't offer
13 it to anyone.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** We explain to people how
16 to set up their own accounts, and how to -- should they need
17 it, and how to make it secure. On occasion there have been a
18 few MPs that have requested accounts, but they tend to be
19 people who hold party positions, campaign co-chairs, stuff
20 like that.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And when you say you
22 help people set up their own accounts, does that mean like
23 Gmail accounts, or Outlook?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** If that's what they're
25 using, yeah. Like, they can call in and we can, you know,
26 we're -- we recognize that these are volunteers who are
27 looking to get engaged. So any point of friction that they
28 encounter, be it from, you know, setting up a Gmail account

1 to finding an internet provider for their office, or campaign
2 insurance, you know? We try to be full service to them
3 because we're so grateful to our volunteers across the
4 country and the people who are engaging in the process, that
5 we want to make this both as pleasant a process, but also as
6 seamless a process.

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to turn
8 to mis- and dis-information. It's a topic that's come up in
9 these proceedings, and I'm wondering if you think there is a
10 risk of foreign interference occurring through disinformation
11 campaigns?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And what is that risk?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, mobilizing just
15 as much as when we were looking at the party and, you know, I
16 say it's very hard to mobilize hundreds of people to show up
17 to a nomination meeting, do it clandestinely, and get them to
18 execute all the similar action. I think that's very
19 difficult.

20 But I think when it comes to misinformation,
21 disinformation -- and I don't think this is true just of
22 foreign actors, I think this is true of domestic actors as
23 well, you know, an ill placed tweet, deepfakes, those kind of
24 things could sway large -- large opinions very quickly.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Are there any formal
26 structures, or people, groups, within the party who identify,
27 track, respond to mis- and dis-information affecting the
28 party or candidates?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** There is no formal -- no
2 formal mechanism.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Is there like an
4 informal mechanism?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, you see it come up
6 on the campaign, you know, very famously, I think there's
7 like articles from the *Buffalo Chronicle* ---

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Sure.

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- that will appear, and
10 then the party will be forced to respond to it. But I think
11 when you talk about misinformation, disinformation, you know,
12 some of it's spread by other political actors, sometimes
13 you'll challenge it if you see it, and it's ubiquitous
14 enough. In other cases, you know, it will be just people
15 flagging it for the party, saying, hey, somebody is saying
16 this about X or Y policy. And then you have -- you have to
17 gauge you know, does it make sense to respond, does it make
18 sense to engage with it?

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And I imagine things
20 have changed throughout time. But in more recently, has the
21 party tried to take recourse through social media companies?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, sometimes when
23 we see fake or false posts we'll report them. If we see
24 accounts that are purporting to be official accounts we'll
25 report them to the social media platforms, yeah.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** And how responsive are
27 they?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not very. If at all.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Can you give any detail
2 about that, which companies, which --?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, it would be the
4 large social media platforms.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Yeah.

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** As you know, everybody
7 would use, like that's largely where the political parties
8 reside. And in terms of, you know, things from accounts
9 impersonating members of parliament, to accounts
10 impersonating candidates, or spreading just, you know, that
11 have large followings, and they are just spreading general
12 disinformation about party policies.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Has the party sought
14 help from government, from SITE, or any other organization?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not explicitly, no.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Does the party
17 have any guidelines for its own members about spreading or
18 amplifying potential mis- or dis-information?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, the Liberal Party of
20 Canada does not spread misinformation or disinformation, and
21 if somebody were to bring it to our ---

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** (Laughter/Rires)

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** --- if somebody would
24 bring that to our attention, we would tell them not to. You
25 know, again, politics in Canada is largely an exercise in
26 reputation. So anything that would bring your reputation
27 into disrepute would be, you know, frowned upon and
28 discouraged in a meaningful way. So if somebody said, "Oh,

1 hey, there's this article that says," you know, I don't know,
2 create any hypothetical you want, we would say, you know,
3 "That's not true. Don't reshare that. Don't say that," you
4 know.

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Particularly when it would
7 -- you know, if it were to come from a candidate's account or
8 an MP's account, it would be, you know, largely frowned upon.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Are there any, like,
10 specific directions provided to candidates? Or it's sort of
11 taken for granted? Or?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Generally it's "don't
13 lie."

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Right. I'm wondering
15 about your views about the role of government in countering
16 dis and misinformation. So we've heard a couple proposals
17 floated in various ways, for example, a proposal for an
18 independent social media watchdog, or legislation requiring
19 greater transparency from social media companies in terms of
20 their algorithms and whatever it is that makes them work.
21 I'm wondering if you any thoughts about government's role,
22 and in particular, in relation to those two suggestions?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I don't spend a
24 lot of time thinking about how the government can combat
25 these things, and I don't count myself as an expert on it.
26 You know, I'm sure government is filled with lots of people.
27 My hope is just that they consider it and they're actively
28 thinking about ways to discourage it and dissuade it, by

1 large.

2 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Is it something that
3 the parties, and I guess particularly the Liberal Party, has
4 the ability to address on its own?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think the amount of
6 disinformation, misinformation that is out there on the
7 internet, it would be hard for us to counter ever single
8 false claim that goes against us.

9 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I want to turn to
10 financial contributions. Donations made to the party. Are
11 there any mechanisms that exist to detect unusual
12 contributions or irregularities?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well there's the Office of
14 the Commissioner of Elections, and then of course Elections
15 Canada, who review our donation history. But internally, you
16 know, the finance department is always reviewing donations
17 and contributions.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And what kinds
19 of things are they reviewing donations for?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** By and large they're
21 looking for donations that go over the limit, because we have
22 a requirement under the *Elections Canada Act* to return any
23 surplus funds over the limit. They are looking, you know, if
24 something were to appear strange, they would probably flag
25 that. But a lot of the systems are built up to have
26 automatic triggers. But by and large, I think when it comes
27 to financial contributions, and we see this from Elections
28 Canada, it's often them who find it first, and they'll say,

1 "Hey, have you thought about, you know, what is the history
2 on these contributions and these contributors, and so and so
3 forth," and they'll engage us in a conversation.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Does the party tend to
5 flag when they're -- is there any mechanism for the party to
6 identify if there were, for example, suddenly an unusual
7 number of maximum donations in a particular neighbourhood?
8 Is there a mechanism to flag that formally within the party?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't think there's any
10 formal mechanisms. You know, it's largely based on -- it's
11 largely based on staff reviewing it and the, you know,
12 incorporated IT security systems; right? So a lot of online
13 transactions from a single IP address, like as you mentioned
14 earlier, that would get flagged and probably stopped.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Those kinds of things.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** What if there was, you
18 know, a sudden boom in households with multiple contributors
19 making maximum donations? Is that something the party would
20 note?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Often times that's
22 inquired by Elections Canada.

23 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** And in our case, you know,
25 we may look into it if it looks strange, but often times, you
26 know, there's lots of families that support the Liberal Party
27 of Canada, thankfully.

28 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Does the party accept

1 donations from prepaid credit cards?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I guess through our system
3 you may be able to produce that, but I'd have to ask
4 specifically. I've never contemplated that.

5 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Does the system -- your
6 -- well, it doesn't have to be the system. Does -- if there
7 are payments made online, is there a way to determine or does
8 the system identify if they're -- the name and address sort
9 of correspond between the member who is making the payment,
10 supposedly, and the name on the credit card?

11 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I think that would be
12 reliant on the credit card processor more than the party. So
13 I can't speak to that explicitly. I'd have to ask -- I'd
14 have to confer with the finance department as to what checks
15 the payment processors make against that.

16 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay.

17 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: But ultimately there would
18 be a check in that we issue the receipts for donations, so if
19 somebody were to all of a sudden receive a receipt for a
20 donation that they didn't make, that would raise questions
21 and they would likely call us.

22 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: And do you know if your
23 system would catch multiple payments on a single card, say?
24 At separate times, presumably.

25 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well we rely on recurring
26 donors in the party. You know, people make contributions,
27 particularly at election periods. They'll feel motivated to
28 make multiple donations. So.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Sorry, I should have
2 said multiple payments for different persons on a single
3 card.

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** There would be the ability
5 to detect if multiple people have made donation off of a
6 single credit card. So the most obvious example would be a
7 husband and wife. But there is an attestation to say that,
8 you know, the funds are your own and you're donating, you
9 know, at your own volition.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And do you know
11 if your system would catch that and flag it?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'd have to confer with
13 the finance team.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to ask
15 you about the -- and we've talked about this a little bit,
16 but ask you about the resources that the party provides to
17 address foreign interference threats. And I wanted to start
18 with candidates. Does the party provide any resources to
19 candidates to address foreign interference?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think when it comes to
21 foreign interference, you know, there's the newly created
22 guide from government that we'll provide to candidates.
23 We'll pass through to candidates. But I think with any of
24 these things, the party is there to be, like, the one-stop
25 shop for any concern a candidate would have. You know, be it
26 policy, communications. If they thought they were the target
27 of foreign interference, you know, they'd reach out to us,
28 and in that case, you know, we'd relay it as appropriate.

1 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And in terms of
2 training to help them, for example, determine if they might
3 be a target of foreign interference, does the party provide
4 that?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** We will be providing it
6 with the resource that the government has given us recently.

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay.

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** We haven't issued our new
9 candidate manual yet for the next election.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. Is the
11 intention that that information would be in the candidate
12 manual?

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Will it be
15 mandatory to review that and engage in any sort of training?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** It will be provided to
17 them.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So up to them to
19 exercise their discretion to review it and how they review
20 it?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah.

22 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. What about any
23 guidance in terms of resources relating to foreign
24 interference in, say, the hiring of senior campaign staff?
25 So not every volunteer, presumably, but the folks who are
26 really at the top of the food chain in a nomination campaign?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, each political
28 campaign is its own independent unit of the party; right?

1 They often operate as, best way to describe it is maybe as an
2 independent franchise. So HR decisions are left with local
3 campaigns, but if anybody had a concern about this, you know,
4 we'd be happy to engage with them and say, you know, "Well,
5 what makes you think that?" And if that were to come
6 forward, I think it would be incumbent on the party to engage
7 the appropriate authorities on it.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. But in terms of
9 sensitizing people to things that they should look out for,
10 is there anything provided to ---

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not yet.

12 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Are -- is any
13 guidance offered to Liberals about interactions with foreign
14 officials or accepting foreign travel? That sort of thing?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No. There's no guidance.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. I promise I
17 won't spend too long on this, but I do want to ask you very
18 briefly about SITE. I know you testified about this once
19 already. So I just wanted to ask you for a bit of an update.

20 We expect to hear evidence that SITE offered
21 unclassified briefings to the political parties in advance of
22 each of the by-elections since June of 2023.

23 Did the Liberal Party attend any of those
24 briefings?

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't think we did, no.

26 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And why not?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well I received the
28 information and I passed it on to the campaign team, but

1 ultimately the way I read the email and, you know, just the
2 simple fact that it was unclassified, I assumed that this was
3 kind of a baseline setting. You know, and unlike -- I do
4 have the -- I guess the good fortune that I've been the
5 national director for a long time, so I've attended lots of
6 SITE briefings, and I tend to think that if they really
7 wanted us there, if there was information that was really
8 important for us to be shared with, either they'd make it
9 classified or, as they did this summer when they were
10 providing training on deep fakes, you know, they were quite -
11 - aggressive is not the right word, but they were quite
12 relentless in their pursuit of getting the attention of the
13 Party.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. And were they
15 successful on that occasion?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. So I appreciate
18 you've been in this role for a while and you've been SITE rep
19 and you have a lot of background information here. And what
20 I hear you saying, essentially, is I'm probably not going to
21 learn a lot new from an unclassified SITE briefing.

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That was my assumption,
23 yeah.

24 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** What about other folks
25 who maybe haven't been around quite as long, other people on
26 the campaign team or elsewhere in the Party who might not
27 have the history that you have?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** From my understanding, it

1 was only open to two individuals, so I would have been one.
2 And currently we haven't designated the second person yet.
3 Waiting closer to a campaign to decide who that would be.

4 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. You touched
5 on this earlier, but I want to ask you specifically about the
6 range of sort of tools or options available to the Party
7 about how to respond if a foreign interference threat arose,
8 so for example, if you were to receive information that a
9 candidate may be impacted by foreign interference activities.

10 And again, I know it's a broad question.
11 Impacted could mean persons believed to be a witting or
12 unwitting proxy. It could mean that they're the victim of
13 it. But what sorts of processes or tools or resources do --
14 exist in the Party for dealing with that circumstance?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think, by and large, it
16 would probably escalate very quickly to my office and then we
17 would engage the SITE Task Force and the people at PCO who
18 manage it and coordinate it.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I want to ask
20 you a question about one of the things you said in your
21 interview summary, if we could turn it up. I believe it's
22 WIT99 -- I knew that at one point -- page 4.

23 Yeah. WIT99.EN, please.

24 So you indicate -- and sorry, it's paragraph
25 14. That's perfect.

26 So there's a question there about there's no
27 formalized processes, as you said. But you indicate campaign
28 organizers -- this is about three lines down:

1 "Campaign organizers might
2 investigate the validity of the claim
3 to assess if it is serious enough to
4 meet the bar of involving senior
5 organizers to deal with it, perhaps
6 by having a conversation with persons
7 involved."

8 I take it from your earlier answers campaign
9 organizers are not expected to receive training on foreign
10 interference specifically whenever the next election occurs.
11 Is that right?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. I'm just
14 wondering, how are they going to decide whether to
15 investigate, how to investigate, whether to speak to the
16 person who may be involved?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, political
18 parties are -- particularly when it comes to campaign
19 contests, are largely hierarchical organizations.
20 Oftentimes, our campaign organizers are -- they tend to be
21 the youngest staff and they're, I would say, by and large
22 trained to seek out senior guidance, you know.

23 And again, this goes back -- this is not
24 unique to foreign interference. This is anything that would
25 bring the Party's reputation into disrepute in which -- and
26 this is where, I guess, you know, things get political. You
27 know, if they were to see or hear something that they would
28 think would be odd or required, you know, further

1 conversation or investigation, you know, we would expect them
2 to escalate it.

3 But you know, the range of things that could
4 happen would be so far -- is so wide it would be hard to say
5 like exactly do X or Y in a certain situation because like
6 even when it comes to -- for example, we were talking earlier
7 about leadership contests. You know, what does that threat
8 look like? What does, you know, engagement look like in
9 those periods? It's very nebulous.

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** I guess my question is
11 -- like I hear what you're saying, that you hope that the
12 campaign organizer might escalate a more serious concern, but
13 you've indicated here that they might also investigate the
14 validity of the claim, including having conversations with
15 the person that's involved.

16 I'm wondering if you think there's a
17 potential sort of risk in delegating so much of this
18 decision-making potentially to campaign organizers who are on
19 the front lines and might not have the expertise to
20 investigate a complaint like this.

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, I think this is
22 where what the claim is, right, where that -- I think that
23 matters a lot. You know, if you think if the claim is, oh,
24 hey, this person overseas gave a donation they may not be
25 eligible for, then I would trust that a campaign organizer
26 who oversees collecting donations on a regular basis to be
27 able to have a conversation and say, "Hey, you know, what
28 happened? Okay. I'm going to alert the Party to return,

1 refund that donation because it's not eligible -- it's not an
2 eligible contribution" or if it was something more serious, I
3 think that's when it would escalate very quickly, you know.

4 And in my experience, people are very quick
5 to involve more senior parts of the Party almost on any
6 issue, not just foreign interference.

7 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. Is it fair to
8 say, though, that there's no specific protocol to guide ---

9 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

10 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- the way someone
11 would exercise their discretion? You hope they'd use good
12 judgment, but ---

13 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

14 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: --- there's no protocol
15 in place.

16 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

17 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Okay. I'll ask you
18 briefly about EDAs.

19 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Can I call them riding
20 associations? Is that ---

21 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Sure.

22 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Okay.

23 MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: So there have been
24 allegations that there might be vulnerabilities around riding
25 associations and that foreign entities might attempt to
26 influence or gain control of an EDA's Board.

27 First, I think it might be helpful if you
28 could tell us what role riding associations play in the

1 Liberal Party.

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, riding
3 associations in the Liberal Party are kind of the heart and
4 soul of the grassroots engagement of the Party. So these are
5 separate legal entities set up per Elections Canada whose --
6 really, their number one task is engaging volunteers and
7 raising the funds for the next campaign.

8 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Are they involved in
9 candidate selection in any way?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The candidate selection is
11 overseen by the National Campaign Team. They can be involved
12 through candidate search and helping us locate people.
13 Oftentimes, you know, some of our best candidates come from
14 recommendations from local associations. But local people
15 generally know what's going on on the ground, so.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Do they typically
17 endorse candidates?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's not typical, no.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right. What are
20 the mechanisms the Party has if it felt it needed to remove
21 an individual from an EDA Board potentially because it had
22 concerns about foreign interference, for example?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah. As per the evidence
24 provided in the EDA by-law, there is -- you know, there's a
25 very formal process that somebody could follow. Either you
26 can take the riding over, you can remove the Board, you can
27 not recognize the EDA. If it's particular to an individual,
28 you could ultimately remove them from the Party, which would

1 have them cease control over whatever office they held with
2 the Party.

3 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. The last thing,
4 I just wanted to open the floor to you if there's anything
5 else that you wanted to provide by way of information or
6 suggestions or recommendations that falls within the
7 Commission's current mandate.

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, the only thing I
9 would say just by and large around these things is, you know,
10 political Parties exist to engage and mobilize people to
11 provide the public good of participating in democracy. You
12 know, oftentimes it's lamented falling participation rates in
13 elections, and I think political Parties and -- this is not
14 my word. There's academic assessments on it. They mobilize
15 people to participate in the election, they increase turnout
16 in elections.

17 So oftentimes, that's lost in the
18 conversation, is, while looking for and looking to kind of
19 address challenges or vulnerabilities within the system, you
20 may overlook the reality that we are creating a barrier to
21 engagement. And ultimately, that is what political Parties
22 are set up for.

23 We're not police agencies, we're not
24 investigative agencies. We have quite burdensome regulation
25 that we follow, probably some of the strictest regulation in
26 the world. But ultimately, you know, what does a political
27 Party exist for, especially in Canada? It seeks to build
28 consensus, it seeks to engage volunteers, it seeks to raise

1 money to fight the campaigns and win the campaigns. But
2 ultimately, you know, we're trying to provide a public good
3 of candidates that all Canadians can be proud of across all
4 Parties, but also, you know, ultimately make excellent
5 Members of Parliament.

6 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Thank you very much,
7 Mr. Ishmael.

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

9 So we'll break for 20 minutes, so we'll come
10 back at 3:10, 3:12. It means probably 3:15.

11 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please. À l'ordre,
12 s'il vous plaît.

13 The sitting and the Commission is now in
14 recess until 3:15. Cette séance de la Commission est
15 maintenant suspendue jusqu'à 15 h 15.

16 --- Upon recessing at 2:52 p.m./

17 --- La séance est suspendue à 14 h 52

18 --- Upon resuming at 3:17 p.m./

19 --- La séance est reprise à 15 h 17

20 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please. À l'ordre, s'il
21 vous plaît.

22 The sitting of the Foreign Interference
23 Commission is now back in session. Cette séance de la
24 Commission sur l'ingérence étrangère est de retour en
25 session.

26 The time is 3:17 p.m. Il est 15 h 17.

27 **--- MR. AZAM ISMAEL, Resumed/Sous la même affirmation:**

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Alors, le premier

1 contre-interrogatoire c'est ça le -- Me Sirois, je pense.

2 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Commissioner, just before Mr.
3 Sirois begins, I just wanted to take an opportunity to remind
4 everyone, witnesses and counsel, to try to speak slowly for
5 the benefit of our interpreters. We have both French and
6 English interpretation and sign language interpretation.
7 Thank you.

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you for the
9 reminder on their behalf.

10 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

11 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:**

12 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Good afternoon. I'm
13 Guillaume Sirois, counsel for the Russian Canadian Democratic
14 Alliance. I would like to start by going back to a specific
15 point you mentioned during testimony. Did I understand
16 correctly that the Liberal Party was not reporting online
17 disinformation and potential online foreign interference to
18 the government all the time?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't fully understand
20 the question. I ---

21 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** When did the Liberal
22 Party see something that can look like foreign interference
23 online, or a disinformation campaign, for instance?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Oh, we see disinformation.
25 We don't know that it's necessarily foreign interference, so
26 we don't report it to the government, no.

27 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. I would like to
28 pull WIT 87, please. This is the witness summary of Lucy

1 Watson, National Director of the NDP. She also discussed
2 about whether or not to report to the government
3 disinformation campaign. And I want to direct you to
4 paragraph 86, please.

5 Yes, thank you. I'm going to read it to you,
6 just for the record.

7 "The NDP finds it worrisome that
8 [the] government does not seem to
9 have tools or a desire to deal with
10 this type of social media
11 manipulation. The party has reported
12 mis/disinformation activity to its
13 SITE [Task Force] contact at PCO but
14 rarely receives status updates. At
15 best, the NDP might get a brief email
16 with no information about what to do.
17 Thus, the NDP questions whether
18 reporting out is of value."

19 Do you agree with that statement?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, I think if you're --
21 if you have concrete information to provide the Government of
22 Canada, I think they would be interested in having it. So
23 even if the response is maybe lacking, you know, you should
24 report it.

25 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** But the Liberal Party
26 of Canada is not necessarily reporting it to the government.

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, there's lots of
28 misinformation, disinformation out in the world. You know,

1 oftentimes you report it to the platforms. We don't -- you
2 know, I haven't seen anything to date that would warrant
3 reporting it directly to the government to say, oh. My
4 understanding of the NDP's position, and you'd have to
5 confirm with them, is that their leader is a target of
6 significant misinformation, disinformation from foreign state
7 actors. So I'm sure that that's what they're -- or I assume
8 that that's what they're reporting, not just every piece of
9 misinformation, disinformation that exists on the internet.

10 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Now we can pull the
11 document down now, please.

12 Are you saying that the leader of the NDP is
13 more targeted by disinformation than the leader of the
14 Liberal Party of Canada?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't know that he is,
16 but I know that from testimony that Ms. McGrath gave last
17 time, that their leader seems to be a particular target of a
18 particular foreign state.

19 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I would like to go now
20 to RCD.31. You've been the national director of the Liberal
21 Party of Canada since 2017; right?

22 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. RCD0000031:**

23 Canadian Lawmakers Say Pro-Russia

24 Group Tried to Derail Sanctions Law

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

26 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I'd like to bring you
27 to some evidence of foreign interference and disinformation
28 campaigns since 2017. And perhaps I'd like to have your

1 opinion as well on the evolution of these disinformation
2 campaigns over the years.

3 So first, this is an article from the New
4 York Times dated October 4th, 2017. This article was in
5 relation to the context of the *Magnitsky Act*, which aimed to
6 impose some sanctions on foreign officials that committed
7 human rights abuses.

8 I would like to ask you to read the first
9 three paragraphs for the record, please.

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You want me to read it out
11 loud?

12 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Yes, if possible.

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Sure.

14 "As Canadian lawmakers took up
15 legislation on Wednesday that would
16 bar businesses from dealing with
17 foreigners who have committed human
18 rights abuses, a nonprofit group
19 called the Russian Congress of Canada
20 pushed hard against the measure."

21 **MS. ERIN DANN:** I'm so sorry to interrupt,
22 Mr. Ishmael. Just, when we read, I think we have a tendency
23 to speak ---

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Oh.

25 **MS. ERIN DANN:** --- very quickly. So just if
26 you could try to slow, slightly? Appreciate it.

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Fair enough.

28 "The lawmakers say the effort was

1 part of a broader lobbying campaign
2 orchestrated by Russia against such
3 laws, including one in the United
4 States. Canadian human rights
5 advocates say they were also singled
6 out.

7 The pro-Russia group denies any
8 connection to the Kremlin, but
9 lawmakers say the push fits a pattern
10 of Moscow-backed interference in the
11 West. And they say that the lobbying
12 campaign, which began in 2014 and
13 grew with attacks last spring on
14 Canada's foreign affairs minister,
15 Chrysti Freeland, highlights the
16 dangers of Russian meddling in
17 Canada."

18 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Thank you. We can
19 pull the document down now. I'm wondering if, was foreign
20 interference a concern in 2017 when you became national
21 director in the Liberal Party?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** When I started as national
23 director, a large part of the foreign interference concern
24 was around cyber security.

25 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** But was it a concern
26 at the time?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

28 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** How would you qualify

1 this concern?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: It was something that we
3 were very alive to as an issue.

4 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Okay. I would like to
5 pull you to CAN88.

6 I'll ask the Court Report to pull CAN88,
7 please. CAN88.

8 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. CAN000088:

9 Assessing the Canadian Information
10 Environment During the 2019 Federal
11 Election: A DFRLab Report

12 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: As we'll see, this is
13 a report from the Digital Forensic Research Lab of the
14 Atlantic Council. We don't know the exact date of the
15 publication of that report, but it was provided to us by the
16 Federal Government. It's called *Assessing the Canadian*
17 *Information Environment During the 2019 Federal Election*.

18 As we can see from page 3 of that document --
19 if we can go down, please, the third paragraph, this is a
20 forensic -- yes -- this is a forensic analysis of some of the
21 Canadian information ecosystem in the months -- the month
22 before and three months following the 2019 federal election.

23 The last paragraph of page 3, the page we're
24 at right now, says that:

25 "...the DFRLAB observed a
26 disproportionate volume of [...]
27 negative content [...] directed at
28 Trudeau and the incumbent Liberal

1 government."

2 And that:

3 "...anti-Trudeau hashtags such as
4 #TrudeauMustGo greatly exceeded the
5 volume and intensity of hashtags
6 targeting any political figure[s]
7 associated with the Conservative,
8 Bloc Québécois, New Democratic, or
9 Green Parties."

10 Were you aware of this during the 2019
11 General Election?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That there was a hashtag
13 that said TrudeauMustGo?

14 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Well that it had such
15 a magnitude, I guess.

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, when it comes to
17 political campaigns, you know, the volume of things is never
18 really surprising, to be honest. Like, there's just lots of
19 -- there's lots of very strong opinions. So, you know, if
20 that -- if the volume was high, I could believe it.

21 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay. I want to go
22 down to -- further down in the document, please, at page 15,
23 under the heading -- yes, the heading "Opportunism by Russian
24 state broadcasters"

25 The report says that the reporting from
26 Russia state broadcasters about the blackface situation:

27 "...appeared to be the latest move in a
28 concerted anti-Trudeau editorial

1 campaign that had gained steam since
2 RT had named Trudeau [...] earlier to
3 its list of 'Top 10 Russophobes of
4 2018.'

5 Did you notice at the time of the 2019
6 election, or prior to this election, that there was a
7 concerted anti-Trudeau editorial campaign from Russian media?

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I was not aware, no.

9 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** But do you challenge
10 the conclusions from that report?

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'm not familiar with this
12 organization or this report, but I'm sure they believe what
13 they wrote.

14 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I want to take you now
15 to 2021. As you see, we're going across the years.

16 I'd like to ask the Court Reporter to pull
17 RCD.19, please.

18 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. RCD0000019:**

19 U.S. Indictment Kalashnikov and
20 Afanasyeva

21 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Have you heard about
22 the recently unsealed indictment from the United States
23 Department of Justice alleging that Canadian influencers
24 received \$10 million U.S. from Russian operatives to set up a
25 news outlet aimed at influencing the U.S. elections?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I've read news articles on
27 it, yes.

28 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I'd like to go to page

1 5 of this indictment, please, at paragraph 10(a).

2 As we can see here, the indictment alleges --
3 it's not a focus of the indictment, but among other things,
4 the indictment contains the following allegations. That:

5 "From in or about March 2021 to in or
6 about February 2022, Founder-1
7 created videos, posted social media
8 content, and wrote articles pursuant
9 to a written contract between
10 Founder-1's Canadian company [...], and
11 RT's parent organization, ANO TV-
12 Novosti. This content generally
13 consistent of English-language social
14 commentary."

15 I don't think there's a need to bring you to
16 the screenshots of those social media posts, but would it
17 surprise you to learn that this -- these social media posts
18 discredited the Liberal Party of Canada, among other things,
19 and promoted other parties?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

21 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Why not?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well I just think we are
23 the Government of Canada and disinformation looks to
24 destabilize governments. Therefore, given that we are the
25 government, that, you know, people trying to influence it
26 from the inside is not surprising.

27 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And the fact that
28 these posts were made during an election campaign, during the

1 2021 election campaign, do you think that -- does that
2 surprise you as well, or?

3 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No, I would imagine if
4 you're trying to interfere in an election, probably the best
5 time is during an election.

6 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Does that mean that
7 this interference campaign's goal was to criticize the
8 government of the day, which was the Liberal Government at
9 the time, but it could have criticized another party if it
10 wanted the Liberal Party to stay in government, for instance?

11 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, I don't know what
12 their goal was, but I would assume that they're targeting the
13 government in power, yeah.

14 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Okay. I would like to
15 take you to 2022 now.

16 It's RCD.12. If we can please pull the
17 document?

18 You're probably familiar with the Freedom
19 Convoy?

20 **--- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. RCD0000012:**

21 Calls for Trudeau to step down during
22 Freedom Convoy traced back to Russian
23 proxy sites

24 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I am familiar, yes.

25 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Yeah. So this is an
26 analysis published on February 16, 2023 by Caroline Orr, a
27 scholar, who is also an analyst for the National Observer and
28 who led the Election Integrity Reporting Project.

1 Her conclusion is that, as you can see from
2 the title, is that:

3 "Calls for Trudeau to step down
4 during [the] 'Freedom Convoy' traced
5 back to Russian proxy sites".

6 I'd like to go down please just to see the
7 first paragraph that I would like you to read for the record
8 as well.

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:**

10 "Russian propaganda sites attacked
11 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, making
12 false accusations about his
13 government 'ordering' the use of
14 violence against demonstrators, and
15 tore into Canada's mainstream media
16 during last year's 'Freedom Convoy.'
17 The protest occupied downtown Ottawa
18 for three weeks and cost the Canadian
19 economy nearly [illegible] billion
20 [dollars]."

21 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Perfect. Thank you.
22 Are you surprised by those conclusions? Have you heard about
23 this conclusion prior to today?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** To be honest, I might have
25 been familiar with it at the time, but I'm not overly
26 familiar with it.

27 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And do you have any
28 reasons to disagree with these conclusions?

1 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No.

2 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Okay. I would now
3 like to take you to -- closer again still to the present.

4 We can pull the document down again.

5 We can -- I'll go back to the U.S. indictment
6 that was unsealed two weeks ago that also contained the
7 allegations that we just saw, but it also contains allegation
8 that a news outlet called -- that was identified as Tenet
9 Media was set up by Canadian influencers with the help of
10 Russian nationals, ex-employees of RT.

11 Can we pull RCD20, please?

12 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. RCD0000020:

13 Tenet YouTube videos

14 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Those are screenshots
15 of Tenet Media's videos that relate to Canada. It's been
16 reported and -- yeah.

17 We can see the -- can we zoom out a little
18 bit, please, just to see more videos at the time? It would
19 be easier, I think, for the witness.

20 Perfect. Thank you.

21 We can scroll down. I want to give you the
22 time to look at the -- mainly at the images and the titles of
23 the different videos.

24 One's called "Canada's Immigration to Spiral
25 Out of Control". There's a picture of Trudeau, the Liberals.
26 Again, pictures of Trudeau, videos of Trudeau.

27 "Make Canada Great Again". "Economic Revolts
28 Imminent". "Canada Is Doomed". "Houses for Everyone".

1 Again, pictures of Trudeau.

2 "Trudeau's Grocery Wars". "Is A Muslim
3 Majority in Canada's Future?". "Canada's Mass Graves". "Is
4 Trudeau in Trouble?".

5 I think we get the point. We can pull the
6 document down.

7 Do you notice anything about these -- this
8 content, these sort of video, this sort of messaging that's
9 being promoted by Tenet Media here?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah. Well, it's clearly
11 directed at the -- it's clearly directed at the Prime
12 Minister and it's clearly directed to raise, you know, social
13 chaos as a potential outcome of it.

14 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** It was reported by the
15 media that the videos from Tenet Media that relate to Canada,
16 including those that we just saw on YouTube and others on
17 Rumble, were seen half a million times. You mentioned
18 earlier in your testimony that disinformation campaign as
19 opposed to, for instance, voter coercion could have a mass
20 impact on elections or on policy decisions and so on.

21 Do you think that this kind of influence
22 campaign specifically from Tenet Media could have mass
23 impact?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, I don't know all the
25 facts around the Tenet Media, so I don't want to -- I don't
26 want to, you know, opine on something that I don't have all
27 the details on, but a misinformation campaign targeting the
28 Prime Minister absolutely could have an impact, yes.

1 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And is it significant,
2 in your opinion, that this disinformation campaign that we
3 just saw happened, if not in an election year, shortly before
4 an election, a general election in Canada?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, I think we're the
6 target of foreign interference all the time, so you know, of
7 course.

8 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I'd like to step --
9 take a step back and look at the broader picture.

10 So we've talked since 2017, since the time
11 you became National Director, and I want to have your input
12 about the cumulative impact of those different campaigns that
13 we saw, Russian campaigns, disinformation campaigns. And now
14 we're only talking about Russia, but I'm sure Chinese are
15 doing disinformation as well, India.

16 What can you tell us about the cumulative
17 impact over the years of those different disinformation
18 campaigns?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** It would be hard for me to
20 say specifically this is -- you know, it results in X or Y
21 issue, but clearly, as presented, you know, the thesis of
22 their argument is to destabilize Canada in any form or
23 another. And if you look at the ongoing polarization that's
24 going on in Canadian politics, and this is just my opinion,
25 it's being fed by extreme views of which, you know, clearly
26 what was presented in those -- like the titles of the videos
27 is doing.

28 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** So there's some degree

1 of success to those.

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Absolutely.

3 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: And do you think it
4 could explain the growing opposition against the Liberal
5 Party of Canada?

6 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I think it feeds the
7 polarization of politics. Does it -- is there a direct line
8 back to the Liberal Party of Canada? I would hope not, but I
9 could believe it, yeah.

10 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: And that will be my
11 last question.

12 Do you believe that Russia is satisfied with
13 Prime Minister Trudeau's or the Liberal Party of Canada's
14 foreign policy?

15 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: I would imagine that our
16 strong stance on Ukraine and support for the Ukrainian
17 country and their freedom is probably not very pleasing to
18 Russia.

19 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Perfect. Those are
20 all my questions. Thank you.

21 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Thank you.

22 Counsel for the Concern Group.

23 --- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR

24 MR. NEIL CHANTLER:

25 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Good afternoon. My name
26 is Neil Chantler. I'm counsel for the Chinese Canadian
27 Concern Group.

28 Sir, I'm going to take you back through some

1 of your evidence earlier today, and I'm going to start with
2 your general assertion that the Liberal Party of Canada
3 sitting here today stands by its existing Party rules and
4 systems regarding membership, candidate selection and riding
5 nomination contests. It does not believe there's any
6 significant need for reform in order to better protect
7 against foreign interference. Is that correct?

8 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

9 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: With respect to
10 nomination contests specifically, your view is that the
11 layers and systems in place are what make the process secure
12 from foreign interference.

13 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

14 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: And that includes the
15 Party's rules regarding membership as well as candidate
16 selection.

17 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

18 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: And I also heard you say
19 that enhancing cyber security protections would be an
20 enormous burden on the Party -- I think you meant a financial
21 burden -- in order to get systems in place that perhaps
22 adequately and better protected your members, devices,
23 electronic communications and so on.

24 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: That's not exactly what I
25 said.

26 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Okay. Would you like to
27 clarify?

28 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Sure. When it comes to

1 deploying -- if we're relating back to, you know, the idea of
2 providing every individual their own device or their own
3 email account, it's not that it is burdensome. It's just
4 largely impractical to get that out, to support that
5 organizationally, so. And then, you know, at what point --
6 you know, what is the cutoff? Is it every volunteer that
7 we're providing devices to? Is it every campaign manager?
8 Is it every candidate? And I think that's where we'd
9 actually look to the Commission and we look to some of the
10 findings of the Parliamentary committees to provide guidance
11 on, you know, what is the best practice here.

12 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** I do hear you to be
13 saying that there's some degree of budgetary consideration in
14 that assessment, that it would be too costly to enhance the
15 security of everyone's devices. Is that right?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, everything is a
17 budgetary consideration, but also there would be campaign
18 implications as to local and national campaign limits. But I
19 don't think we would -- you know, if there was something we
20 could tangibly do that would markably (sic) improve the
21 security, we would likely do that. What I guess we would
22 need to be convinced of is that me setting up an email system
23 is more secure than using commercially available systems that
24 are currently available.

25 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** You were taken to a
26 document earlier today suggested that our spy agency, at
27 least, believes that foreign states are motivated to
28 interfere with our democracy by manipulating our nomination

1 contests. You remember that document?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yes.

3 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: I don't need to pull it
4 up, I don't suppose.

5 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

6 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: And in this regard, you'd
7 agree with me that the Parties and your rules surrounding
8 these nomination contests are at the front lines of defending
9 our democracy against foreign interference.

10 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, I would like to
11 think the security establishment is at the front lines of
12 securing our democracy, but we definitely have a role to
13 play. Absolutely.

14 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: You have a role to play
15 and you are participating in or overseeing a very fragile and
16 vulnerable part of our democracy, the appointment of
17 individuals who will, in theory, potentially sit in the House
18 of Commons.

19 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

20 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: And yet -- and the
21 Liberal Party's not alone here. The political Parties rely
22 almost entirely on donations and volunteers to vet
23 candidates, to protect candidates from cyber security
24 threats, and oversee nomination contests; would you agree
25 with that?

26 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct, yeah.

27 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Do you think that we
28 should be relying on volunteers and donations to protect the

1 front lines of our democracy?

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** You know, I'm never
3 surprised at how extraordinary the volunteers are across the
4 country. Oftentimes, when you look at studies of volunteers
5 participating in activities, they oftentimes do better jobs
6 than paid employees because they believe in it, they're
7 committed to it. And I would, you know, take the commitment
8 of a dedicated Liberal local returning officer who's
9 experienced, who has seen this, to be, you know, quite high
10 in value. I would defend their engagement and their
11 processes. Just because somebody's a volunteer doesn't mean
12 that their contribution to our system is less than somebody
13 who's paid. As a matter of fact, I'd say the Party president
14 of the Liberal Party of Canada who's a volunteer, his
15 contribution is even greater than my own as the National
16 Director.

17 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And would you defend to
18 the same degree the notion that parties are relying on
19 donations as opposed to some more secure source of funding or
20 a return to the per vote subsidy?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The donations that come in
22 to a political party in Canada are some of the most heavily
23 regulated in the world. And to date, I haven't seen anything
24 to suggest that a securely received donation compromises the
25 system. Should somebody be doing something clandestinely or
26 illegal, that would be, you know, clandestine or illegal. I
27 don't think by changing the source of the funding
28 automatically increases the security or the foreign

1 interference posture of any party.

2 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** What I was really
3 referring to was the notion that there's a limited budget for
4 every party, and some parties are bigger than others and some
5 have more money than others.

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

7 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And some are actually
8 weighing these budgetary concerns and they're unable to
9 perhaps implement the kinds of protections against foreign
10 interference that they might otherwise if they had the
11 funding. Do you not see that as a problem? Do you think
12 that the current system of parties relying solely on
13 donations is sufficient to protect them from foreign
14 interference?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, I think when you
16 look at the major parties, the major parties are operating,
17 you know, budgets that are in the millions of dollars. But
18 at the same time, you know, as I testified earlier, you know,
19 one thing we would appreciate is the sourcing of vendors and,
20 you know, perhaps the combined purchasing power to reduce the
21 financial burden. But I don't think when you're up against a
22 state actor any organization would be subject -- you know,
23 like, any organization would be subject to foreign
24 interference. You know, banks have hugely, you know,
25 multiples of security budgets than political parties have,
26 and yet, they're still targets. You know, a foreign state
27 just has more resources than any political party, regardless
28 of how they're funded will ever have.

1 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Thank you. I want to
2 focus in on one of the requirements for membership in the
3 Liberal Party and that is that someone be ordinarily be
4 resident in Canada. I'm not sure that any precision has been
5 put on that term in this inquiry yet. What is meant by
6 ordinarily required -- or resident of Canada?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So, you know, the
8 generally accepted definition of it is that you're able to
9 prove that you live in Canada, that you reside within your
10 association.

11 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** What percentage of the
12 year? There has to be more precision than that.

13 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** The ability to provide
14 documents that show that you live in the area.

15 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Does that mean if
16 somebody spends 1 month a year in Canada and 11 months
17 somewhere else, they live in Canada?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think that would be up
19 to the local returning officer to decide, but it would seem
20 that that would meet the requirement of ordinarily a
21 resident. If they're there at the meeting as well and
22 they're able to produce that level of ID and, you know,
23 documents.

24 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** So your view is
25 ordinarily resident doesn't mean more than half the time. It
26 could mean as little as a month a year?

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** To be honest, I've never
28 considered what is the threshold for ordinarily reside. I'd

1 probably confer with the Party's legal counsel and, you know,
2 the constitutional affairs advisors of the Party to come up
3 with a standard.

4 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Clearly, you and I can't
5 determine what the term ordinarily means here today. It's
6 probably a term that could be clarified.

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

8 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Do you agree that people
9 ordinarily resident in Canada are likely to have an account
10 with a Canadian financial institution?

11 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume so, yes.

12 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** But I heard you say
13 earlier today you do not believe that requiring individuals
14 to pay a membership would add any layer of protection against
15 foreign interference. That's your evidence; correct?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, my personal opinion
17 would be that, yeah.

18 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And you said something
19 along the lines of it's not as meaningful a test as some
20 people say or suggest.

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

22 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** I mean, at the very
23 least, would you agree with me that requiring somebody to
24 make a payment of a nominal sum, it could be completely
25 nominal, \$1, by a credit card from a Canadian institution,
26 would add some level of protection and would provide the
27 Party with an address, the billing address for the credit
28 card that could be cross-referenced with the stated address

1 of residency?

2 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Well, we would have the
3 address that they gave us, but I think when it comes back to
4 it and, you know, it was interesting to hear counsel earlier
5 this morning saying there are tools to defect -- or to detect
6 the use of multiple pre-paid credit cards, which I've never
7 had to look into, so I'm not an expert in the space, but, you
8 know, my knowledge of IT systems and payment processing would
9 lead me to believe that it's not a meaningful test. And I
10 also -- you know, I would also go back to the earlier
11 testimony that if you're engaging in foreign interference,
12 and you're a person that has a bank account, I don't know the
13 creation of some nominal sum raises the bar in terms of
14 engaging in foreign interference.

15 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** I heard you say earlier
16 today that requiring members to be permanent residents or
17 citizens doesn't necessarily add any layer of protection
18 either, that people who are temporarily resident in Canada
19 might be manipulated by a foreign state but so might
20 Canadians. People here permanently might be manipulated in
21 some way to vote a certain way. That's the first I've heard
22 that suggestion. And I ask you, do you have any examples?
23 Have you heard of that happening where large swaths of the
24 Canadian public were improperly encouraged, threatened, under
25 threat to vote in a certain way?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not to vote in a certain
27 way, but, you know, it's very easy to see a scenario in
28 which, you know, somebody is a citizen of Canada and yet the

1 rest of their family resides in a foreign country. Like,
2 that happens all the time.

3 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** You spoke briefly today -
4 - earlier today about this notion of greenlighting a
5 candidate. And some degree of vetting goes into
6 greenlighting a candidate. I presume reviewing their
7 background, some degree of reference checks and so on.

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

9 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** But you I think stopped
10 short of saying that greenlighting was an attempt to combat
11 foreign interference, that it couldn't be left to the Party
12 to somehow determine in that process whether someone was at
13 risk of foreign interference; is that correct?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, I said that it's not
15 particularly only looking for foreign interference. It's
16 looking for anything that would bring the Party's reputation
17 into disrepute. So if -- you know, it would be hard to
18 detect, of course, but if ever you had the thought that it
19 could be foreign interference, that would bring the Party's
20 reputation into disrepute; therefore, the vetting process
21 would catch it in that filter.

22 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** So you'd agree with me
23 that it's very important that we vet candidates carefully and
24 look at their backgrounds to try and detect whether there's
25 any risk of foreign interference?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

27 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Because a Party's name --
28 an individual's name on a ballot is a tacit approval in the

1 eyes of the public that the Party endorses that individual?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

3 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Just briefly, if I may,
4 Madam Commissioner. With regards to donations, you said that
5 there were no policies in place with respect to accepting
6 donations from individuals. There was no review of a
7 donation to determine what source of -- where it came from
8 and whether that was somebody that you wanted to be donating
9 to the Party.

10 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Well, there is a self
11 attestation on the website saying that you are who you are
12 and that you're making that donation. It's clearly on the
13 Liberal Party of Canada's website. In terms of the system,
14 you know, I don't imagine what that next layer would be. You
15 know, similar to going online and purchasing something, you
16 know, once you've purchased it, you've purchased it.

17 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Would it be possible for
18 ---

19 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: It's going to be the
20 last question because you're already over time.

21 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Okay. It's not the
22 Party's role -- if I may ask a two-part question. It's not
23 the Party's role to enforce the *Canada Elections Act*; you'd
24 agree?

25 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct, but we would
26 comply with it, and if we were to find irregularities, we
27 would report it.

28 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Do you see it as the

1 party's role to assist in ensuring the *Canada Elections Act*
2 is not easily violated by foreign actors?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Our job is to assist
4 Elections Canada to ensure that we have elections that we can
5 have a lot of confidence in, and we're happy to assist them
6 any way they see fit.

7 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Thank you.

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

9 So the Human Rights Coalition?

10 **MR. DAVID MATAS:** No questions.

11 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** No questions.

12 Counsel for Jenny Kwan?

13 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

14 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:**

15 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Mr. Ishmael, good
16 afternoon. My name is Sujit Choudhry. I'm counsel to Jenny
17 Kwan.

18 Mr. Ishmael, I'd like to ask you some more
19 questions about nomination races. I'm sure you're aware that
20 nomination races have emerged as a central theme in this
21 Inquiry in light of some of the evidence that was tendered in
22 the spring and in light of the Commissioner's interim report.
23 And I want to pick up where Mr. Krongold left off.

24 So let me first ask that your witness
25 statement be put up. That's WIT.99. And in particular, I
26 was hoping we could go to paragraph 32. Yes, that page.
27 Great. Okay. That's perfect. Thank you so much.

28 So this section here is entitled "FI

1 Vulnerabilities in the Nomination Process". And your
2 evidence here is that -- and if I could take you to the last
3 sentence in particular:

4 "Though he considers the LPC to be a
5 target of FI, Mr. Ishmael does not
6 think it has been a victim of foreign
7 interference." (As read)

8 And that's your evidence; is it not?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

10 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So thank you.

11 Could we please call up Commission363?

12 So Mr. Ishmael, we're pulling up here the
13 NSICOP report on -- and this is a -- if we could scroll down,
14 please, just so we could see the title? Thank you so much.

15 This is the *Special Report on Foreign*
16 *Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and*
17 *Institutions*. Do you -- have you read this report?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not in its -- not the 92
19 pages, no.

20 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. But, well, I'm
21 going to take you to some passages and we'll see if you've
22 read them or not. And I'd like to ask you some questions.

23 So and just for the record, this was
24 submitted to the Prime Minister on March 22nd, 2024, and was
25 tabled in Parliament on June 3rd, 2024.

26 So let's first go to paragraph 4. And Madam
27 Registrar, that's page 10 of the PDF, page 2 of the report.
28 If you could scroll down? Thank you so much.

1 And so I'd like to take you to the bottom
2 half of that paragraph, which begins with the word "Second".
3 And I'm just going to read it for the record. It says:

4 "Second, the Committee wanted to
5 focus its efforts where it has
6 greatest value: access to highly
7 classified information that cannot be
8 discussed in public. The Committee
9 relied in large part on classified
10 materials, briefings and appearance
11 to inform its understanding of the
12 state of foreign interference in
13 Canada's democratic processes and
14 institutions and the government's
15 response."

16 And so I want to ask you some questions about
17 that -- those sentences, Mr. Ishmael.

18 Are you aware that NSICOP had access to
19 classified intelligence about the Liberal nomination in Don
20 Valley North in 2019?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't know that they had
22 that specific level of information. I just know that they
23 had access to classified information.

24 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. And just to be
25 clear, do you have a security clearance?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, I have the secret
27 level.

28 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Secret level. And so --

1 and you have -- through that, you've been given access to
2 some classified intelligence?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I've been given access to
4 it through the SITE Committee.

5 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Through the SITE
6 Committee. Okay.

7 So let's move on now to page 39 of the PDF,
8 which is page 31 of the report.

9 This is "Case Study #4: PRC interference in
10 the Liberal nomination contest in Don Valley North".

11 Now, have you read this page, Mr. Ishmael?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

13 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. Well then I'll
14 take you through it. So let's go through it paragraph by
15 paragraph. So the first paragraph says:

16 "According to CSIS, the PRC had a
17 significant impact in getting Han
18 Dong nominated as the Liberal Party
19 of Canada's 2019 federal candidate in
20 Don Valley North."

21 And so were you previously aware that this
22 was CSIS' conclusion?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

24 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So this is the first
25 time you've learned that CSIS concluded this fact?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

27 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. And would you
28 agree that if this is true, this would count as, to use your

1 words, an irregularity?

2 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Yeah, for sure.

3 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Thank you. So let's
4 move on to the next paragraph. And so we'll begin with the
5 second sentence. It says:

6 "Many of Mr. Dong's supporters
7 arrived in buses supported by the
8 PRC: between 175 and 200
9 international Chinese students
10 arrived in several buses."

11 Were you aware of this fact?

12 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: We had known that busses
13 were used in the nomination, yeah, which is not atypical.

14 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: And did you know that
15 those busses were supported by the PRC?

16 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: No.

17 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: No. And so this is the
18 first time you're learning this?

19 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

20 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: And you'd agree that
21 that's an irregularity?

22 MR. AZAM ISHMAEL: Correct.

23 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Okay. So let's move on
24 to the -- so just to stay with that paragraph, the report
25 states:

26 "The Consulate reportedly told the
27 students that they must vote for Mr.
28 Dong if they want to maintain their

1 student visas."

2 Were you previously aware of that fact?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

4 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And you'd agree that
5 that's an irregularity?

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct. Yeah.

7 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. So let's move on.

8 "The Consulate..." -- maybe we could scroll up
9 a bit, Madam Registrar? That's good. Thank you.

10 "The Consulate knowingly broke the
11 Liberal Party of Canada's rule that
12 voters in a nomination process must
13 live in the riding."

14 And then it explains that:

15 "...the students reportedly: lived
16 outside of the riding..."

17 Were you aware of this fact previously, Mr.
18 Ishmael?

19 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

20 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And that would be an
21 irregularity?

22 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, if they created fake
23 material to vote in a nomination, absolutely.

24 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Right. And you'd agree
25 that that -- it would be -- it would break Liberal Party of
26 Canada rules if those students who lived outside the riding
27 nonetheless voted in the nomination?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely. Yeah.

1 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. And so similarly,
2 you weren't aware that the students had been provided with
3 fraudulent residency paperwork; were you?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Of course not.

5 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** No. And that would be
6 an irregularity?

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

8 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** That would violate
9 Liberal Party of Canada rule?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

11 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And then it says here
12 the students:

13 "...sought to physically intimidate
14 voters and distribute pro-Dong
15 materials, contrary to Party rules."

16 Were you previously aware of that fact?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No. All reports from the
18 meeting that it was a very successful local nomination
19 meeting with, you know, the processes that rolled out kind of
20 typically.

21 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So and you'd agree that
22 that would break a Liberal Party of Canada rule as well?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Intimidating voters?
24 Absolutely. Yeah.

25 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So Mr. Ishmael, I put to
26 you that this is all, as you put it, clandestine activity,
27 because it occurred, but you were not aware of it. Is that
28 fair?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, I guess so. Yeah.

2 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And your testimony today
3 though is that you doubted the risk that there could be
4 foreign interference in nominations because it would be hard
5 for such clandestine activity to occur unobserved, but in
6 fact, it does seem that CSIS concluded it did occur; did it
7 not?

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, my testimony was that
9 to be unobserved, but clearly CSIS has observed it. And I
10 would expect the Commissioner of Elections Canada, if there
11 was a violation affected of the Elections Canada rules, that
12 they would act accordingly.

13 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Oh, so you don't doubt
14 that clandestine activity can occur in relation to
15 nominations?

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Clandestine activity, by
17 its very nature, would be clandestine. It would have to be
18 apparent to the Liberal Party of Canada. Our only ability is
19 to enforce the rules as they exist. I don't understand.

20 **MS. ERIN DANN:** I'm sorry to interrupt. It's
21 just a plea from our interpreters to try to slow the pace.

22 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Of course. Thank you,
23 Ms. Dann. I'm very sorry.

24 And so, well, Mr. Ishmael, I must have
25 misunderstood you, because I had thought your evidence, and
26 please forgive me if I'm mischaracterizing it, but I had
27 thought your evidence was the following, that interference
28 couldn't really occur because it would have to be observed,

1 given the large number of people who participate in
2 nomination races, that clandestine, it could not --
3 interference could not occur clandestinely. But we've just -
4 - I've just shown you the conclusion of the security services
5 that in fact there was foreign interference that did occur
6 clandestinely.

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No, my testimony was -- is
8 that it was -- that is the most difficult way in which to
9 interfere with a local nomination race.

10 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Sorry; that is the
11 most...?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Difficult way to interfere
13 with a local nomination race, and the way we protect against
14 that is through a tapestry of security measures.

15 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Right.

16 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** And if, in this case, you
17 know, CSIS or the Office of the Commissioner of Elections has
18 detected something illegal, you know, again as a political
19 Party we would hope that the responsible authorities would
20 take action.

21 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So you don't doubt that
22 clandestine interference can occur in relation to nomination
23 races.

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I think things can happen
25 clandestinely. Like, you know, we wouldn't know about it by
26 the very nature of it being clandestine.

27 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay.

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't understand.

1 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** That's fine. Thank you,
2 Mr. Ismael.

3 Could we please have the bottom paragraph
4 scrolled up to the top, please? The "CSIS assessed that"
5 paragraph. Thank you so much.

6 So this paragraph states:

7 "CSIS Assessed that the PRC's foreign
8 interference activities played a
9 significant role in Mr. Dong's
10 nomination, which he won by a small
11 margin." (As read)

12 Would you agree that Mr. Dong won by a small
13 margin?

14 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I don't recall the results
15 of the election.

16 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So you don't know how
17 much his margin of victory was?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

19 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Could you estimate it?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

21 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So you have no
22 information about that?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** All I know is that he won.

24 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay. I'll take your
25 word for it.

26 Let's go to the next ---

27 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** This is a nomination
28 meeting that has happened over five years ago, and there's

1 been hundreds of them since.

2 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Sure. And this
3 nomination meeting has been a central topic in a public
4 inquiry on foreign interference, Mr. Ismael. But I'll leave
5 it at that.

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's right. The Liberal
7 Party of Canada doesn't maintain records of who, or the
8 results of nomination meetings.

9 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Well, let's go on to the
10 next paragraph, then. It says:

11 "On September 28th, 2019, CSIS briefed
12 the Liberal Party of Canada's secret
13 cleared representatives on its
14 assessment, who in turn briefed the
15 PM alone the following day." (As
16 read)

17 So Mr. Ismael, were you one of the Liberal
18 Party of Canada's secret cleared representatives who received
19 this briefing?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I received a briefing,
21 yes.

22 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** You did. And so you
23 were aware, then, that CSIS had concerns about foreign
24 interference in Mr. Dong's nomination.

25 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So I'm not exactly sure
26 what I can reveal about the briefing itself.

27 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And to be clear, I don't
28 -- I'm not asking you -- and forgive me if I've asked --

1 inadvertently asked you. Please don't reveal any classified
2 intelligence, but were you -- well, were you briefed about
3 CSIS's concerns?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I was briefed about a
5 concern CSIS had. I don't know, I feel comfortable at that
6 point.

7 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** All right. And that was
8 in September 2019.

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

10 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And you have respect for
11 CSIS's expertise on questions of intelligence.

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

13 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And so I'd like to just
14 put -- I would like to seek leave from the Commissioner, if I
15 may, to put up Mr. Ismael's witness statement from Stage 1 of
16 the Inquiry. This is WIT32.

17 --- EXHIBIT No./PIÈCE No. WIT0000032 EN:

18 Stage 1 Interview Summary: Azam
19 Ishmael

20 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Okay, but you're already
21 over your time by two minutes, so you'll have to do it very
22 quickly.

23 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Well, I'll do it very
24 quickly.

25 And so if we could go, first of all, to
26 paragraph 14. And so maybe we could just reduce the size of
27 the text a bit, so we could see the rest of the section.
28 Thank you very much. Just a little bit more. Thank you.

1 So Mr. Ismael, this is your evidence from
2 Stage 1 of the Inquiry, which was regarding -- in relation to
3 Don Valley North. I just want to note -- I don't read here
4 that you disclosed that you had actually been one of the
5 security-cleared representatives of the Liberal Party to have
6 received a briefing from CSIS about Don Valley North. I ---

7 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Commissioner, I just have a
8 -- just a point of order here that at the time that this
9 witness summary was prepared, the information about a
10 classified briefing had not been made public.

11 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Fair, fair. So I
12 withdraw the question, Mr. Ishmael.

13 So then if we could just scroll up to
14 paragraph 16? And this will be my final questions.

15 So Mr. Ismael, at the time you gave this
16 evidence you stated:

17 "From the Party's perspective, there were no issues or
18 irregularities in the Don Valley North nomination process.
19 It was a hotly contested but very organized nomination that
20 complied with Party rules."

21 I'd like to now ask you to revisit that
22 statement, in light of the NSICOP report and what is now in
23 the public record. So is it still the Party's perspective
24 that there were no issues or irregularities in the Don Valley
25 North nomination process?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** So from the Party's
27 perspective and the information that's available to us after
28 reviewing with the local people, there were no issues or

1 irregularities. Should -- CSIS seems to have come to a
2 different conclusion given their level of knowledge, and I
3 accept CSIS's -- I accept CSIS's premise. But without
4 knowing that knowledge, it's hard for the Party to change
5 its ---

6 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And in light of the
7 NSICOP report's conclusion, is it still your position that
8 the Liberal Party of Canada has not been the victim of
9 foreign interference?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** That's an interesting
11 question. I don't have all the information that is available
12 to CSIS, so I don't know -- I don't know if they impacted the
13 result of the election.

14 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Thank you.
15 Thank you, Madam.

16 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you.
17 Attorney General?

18 (SHORT PAUSE/COURTE PAUSE)

19 --- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR

20 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:**

21 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Good afternoon. Ryann
22 Atkins for the Attorney General of Canada.

23 You were just taken to a passage of the
24 NSICOP report regarding the nomination contest in Don Valley
25 North in 2019. I take it you're not familiar with the
26 intelligence reporting underlying those sections of the
27 report?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

1 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And I take it, therefore,
2 that you're not familiar with any caveats or limitations
3 attached to that intelligence?

4 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

5 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** You've told us that for
6 election-related FI threats, you could engage with the SITE
7 Task Force and the PCO; is that correct?

8 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

9 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** I take it the Liberal
10 Party's been told how to get in touch with SITE and the PCO
11 for that purpose?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely.

13 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** For FI threats outside of
14 the election context, you say at paragraph 9 of your witness
15 statement that the Liberal Party would consult government
16 experts. That includes the Communication Security
17 Establishment, CSE?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah.

19 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** I believe you included --
20 you referenced a 1-800 number in your summary?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

22 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** That's a ---

23 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** I'm sorry, counsel,
24 just another request to slow down.

25 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** I'll do my best; I only
26 have five minutes.

27 That number that you reference, that's a
28 public number available online, right?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** From my understanding,
2 yeah.

3 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** It's not an exclusive line
4 for the Liberal Party?

5 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

6 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** In terms of other
7 government experts the Party could contact with FI concerns,
8 that would include CSIS as well?

9 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, we would always
10 operate through the SITE Task Force, but...

11 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And aside from contacting
12 them through the SITE Task Force, if it's a non-election-
13 related FI concern, CSIS maintains a non-emergency line for
14 reporting national security issues, including FI; correct?

15 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I'll take your word for
16 it.

17 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Okay. Would you know how
18 to contact the RCMP or police of local jurisdiction if you
19 had law enforcement-related FI concerns?

20 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely, yeah.

21 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And the Minister of Public
22 Safety, Minister LeBlanc, he's also been in contact with the
23 parties in respect of FI; correct?

24 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

25 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** We heard yesterday that
26 Minister LeBlanc provided political parties with an FI
27 toolkit recently?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Correct.

1 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** The Liberal Party received
2 that as well?

3 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

4 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Apart from what the Party
5 can do, if there are concerns about FI, MPs themselves can
6 contact the House of Commons administration, for example.

7 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes, I assume so.

8 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Okay. Including the
9 Sergeant at Arms parliamentary security?

10 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Sure, yeah.

11 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And I anticipate we'll
12 hear evidence from the House of Commons, based on what's in
13 their institutional report, that the House administration
14 maintains strong partnerships with the Security and
15 Intelligence Establishment and government agencies, including
16 the RCMP, CSIS, Public Safety, CSE; is that your
17 understanding?

18 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would hope so, yes.

19 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** It doesn't come as a
20 surprise to you if that's the case?

21 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** No.

22 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** If an MP did not know how
23 to contact one of these government agencies, they could reach
24 out to their contacts in the House to facilitate a
25 connection; correct?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume so, yes.

27 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** You were asked by
28 Commission counsel about candidates setting up their own IT

1 systems and maintaining responsibility for the security over
2 their systems and devices. I want to ask you a similar
3 question with respect to MPs who maintain their own systems
4 and devices. Does the Party have an expectation that MPs
5 take prudent steps to protect their IT and devices?

6 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** When it comes to Members
7 of Parliament that's largely left to the House of Commons, so
8 I would hope that Members of Parliament are being prudent.

9 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Do you think it's a
10 reasonable expectation for the Canadian public to have of
11 their MPs?

12 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Absolutely, yes.

13 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And you note in your
14 witness statement that if an MP suspects their systems have
15 been comprised, they can report the issue to the Party for
16 assistance?

17 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yeah, if they're a
18 candidate. But, you know, just generally speaking, if ever
19 there's an issue they're happy to report it to us and we're
20 happy to connect them through to the right authority.

21 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And they can also contact
22 the cyber security number at CSE?

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Of course.

24 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** And this isn't in your
25 witness statement, but I suggest there's a third option, they
26 could also privately engage a cyber security firm to analyze
27 their device if they have any concerns about compromise?

28 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** I would assume so. I

1 don't know what the limitations to their member operating
2 budget is, but I would assume so, yeah.

3 **MS. RYANN ATKINS:** Fair enough. Those are my
4 questions. Thank you.

5 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

6 Counsel for the Liberal Party.

7 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY/CONTRE-INTERROGATOIRE PAR**

8 **MS. JENNA GREEN:**

9 **MS. JENNA GREEN:** Good afternoon. It's Jenna
10 Green.

11 I just have one clarification, and if we
12 could pull up COM363, the NISICOP report that my friend, Mr.
13 Choudhry, was taking you to. It's page 39 of the PDF and
14 page 31 of the report.

15 Mr. Ishmael, if you look through these first
16 few paragraphs that my friend took you to, I just want to
17 note the footnotes, 211, 212, 213, 14. And if we scroll down
18 to the bottom, you'll see references there to CSIS and
19 redacted information.

20 I just want to confirm that you have no
21 information relating to these CSIS findings in 2021. I'm
22 sorry, 2021 and 2022.

23 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not that I know of, no.

24 **MS. JENNA GREEN:** Nothing that went into this
25 report?

26 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Not that I know of, no.

27 **MS. JENNA GREEN:** And is it correct you were
28 briefed in 2019?

1 **MR. AZAM ISHMAEL:** Yes.

2 **MS. JENNA GREEN:** Thank you.

3 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

4 Any re-examination?

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** No, thank you.

6 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So thank you for your
7 time, and let me wish you a good weekend. And don't forget,
8 we do not sit on Monday, so we'll see each other again on
9 Tuesday, 9:30.

10 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please. À l'ordre,
11 s'il vous plaît.

12 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
13 Commission is adjourned until Tuesday, the 24th of September
14 2024 at 9:30 a.m.

15 Cette séance de la Commission sur l'ingérence
16 étrangère est suspendue jusqu'à mardi, le 24 septembre 2024,
17 à 9 h 30.

18 --- Upon adjourning at 4:14 p.m.

19 --- L'audience est ajournée à 16 h 14

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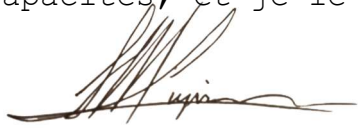
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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, Sandrine Marineau-Lupien, a certified court reporter,
hereby certify the foregoing pages to be an accurate
transcription of my notes/records to the best of my skill and
ability, and I so swear.

Je, Sandrine Marineau-Lupien, une sténographe officielle,
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conforme de mes notes/enregistrements au meilleur de mes
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Sandrine Marineau-Lupien