



**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**

VOLUME 33

ENGLISH INTERPRETATION

Held at :

Library and Archives Canada
Bambrick Room
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Friday, October 11, 2024

Tenue à:

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada
Salle Bambrick
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Le vendredi 11 octobre 2024

INTERNATIONAL REPORTING INC.

<https://www.transcription.tc/>

(800)899-0006

II

Appearances / Comparutions

Commission Lead Counsel	Shantona Chaudhury
Commission Counsel	Gordon Cameron Erin Dann Matthew Ferguson Hubert Forget Leila Ghahhary Benjamin Herrera Howard Krongold Hannah Lazare Jean-Philippe Mackay Kate McGrann Emily McBain-Ashfield Hamza Mohamadhossen Lynda Morgan Siobhan Morris Annie-Claude Poirier Gabriel Poliquin Natalia Rodriguez Guillaume Rondeau Nicolas Saint-Amour Daniel Sheppard Maia Tsurumi
Commission Research Council	Geneviève Cartier Nomi Claire Lazar Lori Turnbull Leah West
Commission Senior Policy Advisors	Paul Cavalluzzo Danielle Côté

III Appearances / Comparutions

Commission Staff	Annie Desgagné Casper Donovan Hélène Laurendeau Michael Tansey
Ukrainian Canadian Congress	Donald Bayne Jon Doody
Government of Canada	Gregory Tzemenakis Barney Brucker
Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections	Christina Maheux Luc Boucher Sébastien Lafrance Nancy Miles Sujit Nirman
Human Rights Coalition	David Matas Sarah Teich
Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance	Mark Power Guillaume Sirois
Michael Chan	John Chapman Andy Chan
Han Dong	Mark Polley Emily Young Jeffrey Wang
Michael Chong	Gib van Ert Fraser Harland

IV Appearances / Comparutions

Jenny Kwan

Sujit Choudhry

Mani Kakkar

Churchill Society

Malliha Wilson

The Pillar Society

Daniel Stanton

Democracy Watch

Wade Poziomka

Nick Papageorge

Canada's NDP

Lucy Watson

Conservative Party of Canada

Nando De Luca

Chinese Canadian Concern Group on
The Chinese Communist Party's
Human Rights Violations

Neil Chantler

David Wheaton

Erin O'Toole

Thomas W. Jarmyn

Preston Lim

Senator Yuen Pau Woo

Yuen Pau Woo

Sikh Coalition

Balpreet Singh

Prabjot Singh

Bloc Québécois

Mathieu Desquilbet

Iranian Canadian Congress

Dimitri Lascaris

V
Table of Content / Table des matières

	PAGE
HON. WILLIAM BLAIR, Sworn/Assermenté	2
Examination in-Chief by/Interrogatoire en-chef par Ms. Erin Dann	2
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Mr. Gib van Ert	44
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Mr. Sujit Choudhry	56
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Mr. Thomas Jarmyn	68
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Mr. Noah Lew	78
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Mr. Guillaume Sirois	81
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Ms. Sarah Teich	89
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Mr. Barney Brucker	93
 L'HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE, Affirmed/Sous affirmation solennelle	 98
Examination in-Chief by/Interrogatoire en-chef par Mr. Jean-Philippe MacKay	98
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Ms. Mani Kakkar	137
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Mr. Guillaume Sirois	147
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Mr. Neil Chantler	156
Cross-Examination by/Contre-interrogatoire par Ms. Maria Barret-Morris	169

VI

Exhibit List / Liste des pièces

No.	DESCRIPTION	PAGE
WIT0000155	Addendum to Interview Summary: Minister Bill Blair Interview Summary	2
WIT0000156	Addendum to In Camera Examination Summary: The Honorable Bill Blair	2
WIT0000102.EN	Interview Summary: The Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of National Defence	2
WIT0000102.FR	Résumé d'entrevue : L'honorable Bill Blair, ministre de la Défense nationale	3
WIT0000159	In Camera Examination Summary: Bill Blair	3
CAN018796	Defensive briefings to two Members of Parliament regarding PRC foreign interference activity	13
CAN005811	PRC Foreign Interference in Canada: A Critical National Security Threat	17
WIT0000158	In Camera Examination Summary: Zita Astravas	57
WIT0000121	Addendum to In Camera Examination Summary: Mr. David Vigneault, Ms. Michelle Tessier and Ms. Cherie Henderson	66
EOT0000017	NSIRA 2022 Annual Report	73
RCD0000088	Cognitive Combat: China, Russia and Iran's Information War Against Americans	86
WIT0000097.FR	Résumé d'entrevue: l'honorable Pascale St-Onge	98
WIT0000097.EN	Interview Summary: The Honourable Pascale St-Onge	98
RCD0000098	Projet de loi C-63 - Loi édictant la Loi sur les préjudices en ligne, modifiant le Code criminel, la Loi canadienne sur les droits de la personne et la Loi concernant la déclaration obligatoire de la pornographie juvénile sur Internet par les personnes	149
RCD0000042	CRTC Decision RT	153

VII
Exhibit List / Liste des pièces

No.	DESCRIPTION	PAGE
CCC0000034	A Threat to Canadian Sovereignty: National Security Dimensions of the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship	156
CAN001080	PRC Foreign Interference in Canada: A Critical National Security Threat - CSIS IA 2021-22/31A	159
CAN044734_0001	DIGITAL CITIZEN CONTRIBUTION PROGRAM CALL #5 PRIORITIES	172

Ottawa, Ontario

--- The hearing begins Friday, October 11, 2024 at 9:31 a.m.

THE REGISTRAR: Order, please.

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

The time is 9:31 a.m.

COMMISSIAIRE HOGUE: Just to inform everyone, we have again this morning a tight schedule, so I'll be a bit more strict on the time given to everyone for examination in-chief, as well as cross-examination. So -- because the Minister Blair has a hard stop at 12:15. As you can imagine, he has other things to attend to.

So just want you to know to make sure you ask all the questions that you feel are the most important one within the time that have been allocated to you.

Thank you. You can go ahead.

MS. ERIN DANN: Thank you.

Commissioner, it's Erin Dann for Commission counsel. Our next witness, as you've said, is Minister Blair.

Could Minister Blair please be sworn?

THE REGISTRAR: All right. So Minister Blair, could you please state your full name, and then spell your last name for the record.

HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Sure. My name is William Sterling Blair. The spelling of my surname is B-l-a-i-r.

THE REGISTRAR: Great, thank you. Now for the swearing-in.

--- HON. WILLIAM STERLING BLAIR, Sworn:

THE REGISTRAR: Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Good morning, Minister Blair.

HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Good morning.

THE REGISTRAR: Counsel, you may proceed.

MS. ERIN DANN: Thank you.

--- EXAMINATION IN-CHIEF BY MS. ERIN DANN:

MS. ERIN DANN: Minister, we'll just start with some housekeeping matters. You have been interviewed and testified before this Commission on several times. There is, today, we may refer to an addendum to your Stage 1 interview; that is WIT155.

--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000155:

Addendum to Interview Summary:

Minister Bill Blair Interview Summary

MS. ERIN DANN: There is also an addendum to your Stage 1 in camera examination; that is WIT156.

--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000156:

Addendum to In Camera Examination

Summary: The Honorable Bill Blair

MS. ERIN DANN: There is a summary that has been prepared of your Stage 2 interview; that is WIT102.EN, and the translation is WIT102.FR.

--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000102.EN:

Interview Summary: The Honourable

1 Bill Blair, Minister of National
2 Defence

3 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000102.FR:**

4 Résumé d'entrevue : L'honorable Bill
5 Blair, ministre de la Défense
6 nationale

7 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And finally there is a
8 summary of your Stage 2 in camera examination and that is
9 WIT159.

10 **--- EXHIBIT NO. WIT0000159:**

11 In Camera Examination Summary: Bill
12 Blair

13 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Minister, have you had an
14 opportunity to review those summaries?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Ms. Dann, I have.

16 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Do you have any corrections,
17 additions, or deletions you wish to make?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, ma'am.

19 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And are you prepared to adopt
20 those as part of your evidence today?

21 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, I am.

22 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Thank you.

23 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Ms. Dann, I suspend for
24 one minute. I just realized I forget my glasses, and I may
25 have to read, I imagine, this morning.

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

27 This sitting of the Commission is now in
28 recess until 9:35 a.m.

1 --- Upon recessing at 9:34 a.m.

2 --- Upon resuming at 9:35 a.m.

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

4 The sitting of the Foreign Interference
5 Commission is now back in session.

6 The time is 9:35 a.m.

7 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** You can go ahead.

8 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Thank you, Commissioner.

9 --- HON. WILLIAM BLAIR, Resumed:

10 --- EXAMINATION IN-CHIEF BY MS. ERIN DANN, (Cont'd):

11 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And now that all of us can
12 see and hear, Minister Blair, my questions today will focus
13 on your time as Minister of Public Safety and Emergency
14 Preparedness, and I understand that you held that position
15 from November of 2019 until October of 2021, is that right?

16 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, that's correct.

17 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And during that time period,
18 your Chief of Staff was Zita Astravas?

19 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** That's correct.

20 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And were you aware at the
21 time of Ms. Astravas's work history, including her history of
22 working at Queen's Park?

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, I was.

24 **MS. ERIN DANN:** The first topic I want to
25 discuss with you today is the flow of classified information
26 within Public Safety and to your office during that time
27 period. Let me begin at the early part of your tenure, pre-
28 COVID. What was the volume of intelligence you were

1 receiving, and how did you receive it?

2 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Pre-COVID there was
3 information received. Generally information of a Top Secret
4 nature was delivered to me in a secure location, what we
5 refer to as a "SCIF"; there was one located at 269 Laurier,
6 which was on the Public Safety side of the building, not the
7 ministry side. I did not have one available to me as the
8 Minister. There's also a SCIF that I would periodically
9 attend at the Toronto Regional Headquarters of CSIS, which is
10 located, obviously, in that city. That was the place where
11 Top Secret information was shared with me. But there was,
12 pre-COVID, a fairly consistent flow of other classified
13 material, not TS but classified, that was being made
14 available through my office and -- but more directly from the
15 Director of CSIS and his team.

16 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. And the
17 Commission heard evidence from your then-Chief of Staff that
18 prior to COVID, the Minister's office received physical
19 copies of reading binders that were provided to you. Is that
20 consistent with your memory?

21 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes. I recall receiving
22 some classified documents; again, not TS documents but
23 classified documents that were provided to me, again in a --
24 not a TS-secure location but in a secure location within the
25 government.

26 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And did you have access to a
27 CTSN account?

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No.

1 **MS. ERIN DANN:** An account on the Top Secret
2 Network?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, I did not.

4 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Did anyone in your Minister's
5 office, as far as you know, have access to CTSN?

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No. There's no CTSN
7 terminal in the Minister's office, and no-one in my office
8 had direct access to CTSN, including myself.

9 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. Once COVID
10 begins, am I right that you generally were -- or that you
11 spent the majority of your time in Toronto?

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yeah. Unfortunately,
13 with the advent of COVID, all of our sittings in the House of
14 Commons were virtual, and my schedule which was quite busy,
15 was filled with Zoom meetings and phone calls that took place
16 from Toronto. There were occasions when I would have to
17 engage in activities that were of a more confidential nature,
18 and so I would then, if appropriate, go to the Ministry
19 Resource Office, also located in Toronto. And if it was to
20 deal with TS material to go to the CSIS headquarters in
21 Toronto.

22 **MS. ERIN DANN:** We've heard evidence about
23 the regional office -- that's ---

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Excuse me, I'm from
25 Toronto, so we always thought of it as CSIS HQ, and it's not
26 of course, that's in Ottawa. But the Toronto Regional Office
27 is the one I'm referring to.

28 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. And -- excuse me

1 -- were members of the senior officials at Public Safety, I
2 understood, would have been in the office in Ottawa during
3 COVID. Do you have any awareness of that?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** When you say senior
5 officials ---

6 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Your Deputy Minister for
7 example.

8 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I believe the Deputy
9 Minister occasionally attended at the office at 369. I'm
10 also aware that most of the personnel that were in the public
11 service, on Public Safety side, were also working from home
12 during that period of time.

13 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. And what happened
14 to the volume of intelligence that you received and the way
15 in which you received it once the pandemic began?

16 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** The information that was
17 being sent over stopped during the pandemic. Those binders
18 no longer were being delivered to our office. That
19 information was not coming to me. I understand that there
20 may have occasionally been some documents shared with my
21 office, but the binders of information that we were routinely
22 provided prior to the pandemic, just ceased. And therefore,
23 my only access to secret documents, and in particular top-
24 secret documents, was exclusively limited to them being
25 shared with me by CSIS at their regional office in SCIF.

26 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. And was -- were
27 those documents shared on a regular basis at the Toronto
28 Regional Office? Was there a sort of set schedule by which

1 you would go in and review?

2 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am. In every
3 case CSIS would notify my office that they had something that
4 they wanted to share with me, and it was usually in
5 particular to a particular administrative process that they
6 required my authority to exercise. And there were in the
7 Spring of 2021 time period I think that we are talking about,
8 there were three occasions when I was requested to go to CSIS
9 headquarters specifically to engage in that administrative
10 process.

11 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. Do you recall
12 whether there were times -- aside from that administrative
13 process -- were there times that you were asked to attend the
14 regional office for briefings on particular intelligence?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** There was one occasion
16 that comes to mind where I was there for an administrative
17 process, but in addition to that we were also dealing with
18 information with respect to the intelligence priorities that
19 were being developed in Public Safety, under my authority,
20 and I was briefed on that. And on one of the occasions where
21 I was at CSIS Regional Office for the administrative purposes
22 to which I referred, but this was done in addition to that.

23 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Understood.

24 You told the Commission that you relied
25 exclusively on verbal briefings from Director Vigneault or
26 others at CSIS. Does that mean that outside of those
27 specific briefings and the administrative processes that
28 you've just referred to, that you did not receive or review

1 any written intelligence products during the period from
2 March of 2020 until October of ---

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, there was no secure
4 way to transmit those products to me, and even -- I had for
5 example, conversations with the Deputy Minister, with the
6 Director, and my Chief of Staff, during that period of time.
7 But we were all very conscious of the need for operational
8 security with respect to classified information. And that
9 was not discussed on -- over the phone or on Zoom.

10 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. Did you tell
11 anyone at CSIS, the Director or anyone else, that you were
12 not receiving written intelligence products?

13 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, the -- CSIS
14 would notify me if they had information they needed me to
15 know. There are operational matters that CSIS undertakes, as
16 all of the agencies and departments that reported me, the
17 RCMP, the Border Agency, the Corrections Services, and the
18 Parole Board, all engage in operational activities, and they
19 did not routinely brief me on those matters.

20 It was only when any one of those agencies,
21 including CSIS had information that they felt I -- they
22 needed to bring to my attention, that they would notify me
23 that they had something that they needed me to see. That was
24 the process that was in place at that time.

25 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right.

26 You've mentioned that the binders ceased.
27 Earlier this week we heard from Mr. Stewart, who was then
28 Deputy Minister, that Public Safety continued to produce

1 physical reading binders containing intelligence and provided
2 them to your Minister's office. How do you respond to that?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** It's not correct.

4 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Is it possible that the
5 binders could have been provided in hard copy to your office
6 in Ottawa without your knowledge?

7 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I think I would have
8 been aware that that information was flowing, and the
9 information that I received is that it ceased during the
10 pandemic and was not being provided.

11 **MS. ERIN DANN:** We also heard evidence that
12 there was a separate stream for the delivery of particular
13 intelligence to you, by hand, to your home, for specific
14 classified materials directed to your attention. Did that
15 process occur either before the pandemic, or during the
16 pandemic?

17 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am, it did not.
18 Actually, before the pandemic, there's a program and it's not
19 administered by Public Safety, but rather by the
20 Communications Security Establishment. It refers to
21 individuals that we refer to as CROs. It's an acronym and I
22 apologize.

23 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Client Relations Officers, I
24 think we've heard.

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Exactly, so thank you
26 very much. And the CRO program also ceased during the
27 pandemic. There was not a single occasion where anyone came
28 to my home, or I was notified someone wanted to come to my

1 home to provide me with information during the pandemic. It
2 just never happened. I will tell you that after -- at the
3 conclusion of the pandemic the process did resume. In my
4 current portfolio as the Minister of Defense, they frequently
5 come to my home and share that information, but it did not
6 happen while I was the Minister of Public Safety.

7 **MS. ERIN DANN:** The Commission has heard
8 evidence that three intelligence products relating to Michael
9 Chong were disseminated by CSIS to your office in advance of
10 an issues management note in May of 2021. Did you see, or
11 were you briefed, on any of these products?

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am, I was not.

13 **MS. ERIN DANN:** During your interview with
14 Commission counsel, you were shown a document that set out
15 the distribution lists for various CSIS intelligence products
16 about the PRC's targeting of MPs, including Michael Chong and
17 Kenny Chiu. There is -- perhaps we can pull up WIT102 at
18 page 6? There's an explanatory note in the summary, Minister
19 Blair, that says -- or that indicates that you were a named
20 recipient for many of these products. If we can look at page
21 6, paragraph 18? At the time these were disseminated, did
22 you see, or were you briefed, on any of these intelligence
23 products?

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am, I did not,
25 and I was not briefed.

26 **MS. ERIN DANN:** When did you become aware
27 that you were intended to see these intelligence products?

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Approximately two years

1 later when it was reported in the paper, and I believe an
2 interview with one of the MPs here indicated that he had been
3 briefed on this matter. It was the first time that I had
4 heard Mr. Chong's name mentioned in relation to any matters
5 of foreign interference. And then, so on further inquiry, it
6 was told to me that apparently, I had been on a mailing list,
7 but that that mail had never been delivered to me.

8 And during that period of time in May of '21
9 there was a number of occasions where I had conversations
10 with the Director of CSIS and he never mentioned this to me.

11 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Okay. Have you seen the
12 intelligence products now or since?

13 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Subsequently? I have
14 had the opportunity to review the document to which you
15 referred. But it was actually during the process of this
16 inquiry that it was presented to me for the very first time.

17 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. And what if
18 anything would you have done if you had seen the intelligence
19 products at the time they were initially disseminated?

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Well, first of all, when
21 I became aware of that information, I was very concerned. I
22 would not, as the Minister of Public Safety, have necessarily
23 in any way directed to CSIS operationally on how to respond
24 to this, but I would have had a number of questions that --
25 and the questions I would have asked, had I been -- had this
26 information been made available to me, is I would want to
27 know what steps are being taken in order to, first of all,
28 inform Mr. Chong, and what steps were being taken to ensure

1 his safety and the safety of his family. But, unfortunately,
2 that information had never been shared to me at the time and
3 it wasn't until it was revealed in the papers and then
4 subsequently through this inquiry process that I became aware
5 of this information.

6 MS. ERIN DANN: Court Operator, could you
7 please pull up CAN 18796?

8 --- EXHIBIT No. CAN018796:

9 Defensive briefings to two Members of
10 Parliament regarding PRC foreign
11 interference activity

12 MS. ERIN DANN: Minister, this is an issues
13 management note. The email is dated May 31st, 2021. If we
14 just scroll -- if you scroll down under good afternoon, we
15 see -- oh, I'm sorry, scroll just a bit. Thank you.

16 "Please note that this distribution
17 is confined exclusively to: DM
18 Public Safety, Minister Public
19 Safety, [Minister Public Safety Chief
20 of Staff], and NSIA."

21 And perhaps, actually, Court Operator, if you
22 can just scroll up, so we can see the list of email
23 addresses?

24 Minister Blair, are you able to confirm that
25 none of the redacted email addresses belong to you or were
26 email addresses that you had access to?

27 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: No, I -- I'm not
28 familiar with any of these email addresses. None of them

1 belong to me, and I'm not familiar with any of them as having
2 belonged to anyone with whom I would otherwise have contact.

3 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. The Commission
4 has heard evidence that issue management notes were
5 communications that CSIS used, and they were intended as a
6 heads up to sensitive senior officials and staff to issues
7 that may become public. During your time as Minister of
8 Public Safety, were you aware that issue management notes
9 existed as a concept?

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** They weren't being
11 shared with me, so I had no knowledge of these. I note, by
12 the way, it's classified as top secret, and there's only one
13 way in which that could have been shared with me, and that
14 would be in a secure location, and these were never shared
15 with me.

16 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Excuse me. So this was never
17 shared with you, and if there were any other issue management
18 notes disseminated during your time as Minister of Public
19 Safety, you did not receive them?

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** That's correct.

21 **MS. ERIN DANN:** If we can just scroll a bit
22 further down that page, we see the subject line of the issues
23 management brief says,

24 "Defensive briefings to two Members
25 of Parliament regarding PRC foreign
26 interference..."

27 And if we go down to the next page, we can
28 see the content. Minister Blair, can you confirm that you

1 did not receive a copy of this IMU in May of 2021?

2 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Ma'am, I can
3 confirm that. And I had no knowledge of this or that these
4 two individual MPs were the subject of even defensive
5 briefings. That was -- I was never advised that CSIS was
6 doing any defensive briefings, and they never mentioned the
7 name of either Mr. Chong or Mr. Chiu to me at any time prior
8 to it being reported in the newspapers in 2023.

9 **MS. ERIN DANN:** In your stage one interview
10 addendum, you remark that this -- the intelligence never came
11 to you in this format, as you've just testified to this
12 morning as well. And you stated that if the CSIS Director
13 felt it was necessary for you to be briefed on a matter, the
14 Director would arrange to meet you in a SCIF; is that right?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Either meet me in the
16 SCIF or communicate -- the SCIF also has other forms of
17 secure communication, so it was sometimes virtually ---

18 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Yes, I'm sorry, I should have
19 said ---

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, to be very
21 clear, this information was never shared with me, certainly
22 not in 2021. And my expectation, because it is of the top-
23 secret nature, that it's -- that if CSIS felt it was
24 appropriate to bring it to the attention of Minister, there
25 was only one mechanism that that could have taken place in
26 2021, and that would be in a secure location directly from
27 CSIS.

28 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Okay. Is it possible that

1 the Director thought you were receiving these type of
2 communications, and, therefore, would not have been aware of
3 the need to brief you?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I -- again, I'm not
5 going to testify for the Director, and I work very closely
6 with Mr. Vigneault. I found him to be a very conscientious
7 individual. I don't know what he may or may not have
8 thought. The only thing I know with absolute certainty is
9 this information was never shared with me.

10 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. It appears,
11 however, that CSIS was sending -- and we spoke about the
12 three intelligence products and the distribution or the list
13 of intelligence products that you're shown the distribution
14 list for. It appears that CSIS was sending material for your
15 receipt. Did you ever have any discussions with anyone at
16 CSIS about the manner in which they were providing
17 intelligence to you during the pandemic?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I had no knowledge
19 whatsoever that any of this information was being sent in my
20 direction. I'm -- but with absolute certainty, it never got
21 to me, but I had no knowledge of that. I was receiving top-
22 secret information on administrative matters and other
23 matters that I've already referenced from CSIS during that
24 period of time, and there was one way in which I was doing
25 that. This system of information sharing frankly just didn't
26 connect to me or my office. And it's information that would
27 have been, I think, useful to know, but in as much as neither
28 the Deputy Minister nor the agency had the Director of CSIS

1 ever brought this to me during this period of time in any of
2 the conversations that we had. I had no way of knowing this
3 existed, and, therefore, no way of raising with them that I
4 wasn't getting something I didn't know existed.

5 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Right. You mention that you
6 became aware after a media article. And I understand that
7 you conducted an internal investigation in an attempt to
8 determine what had happened in relation to information flow.
9 What were the results of that investigation?

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I -- well, internal
11 investigation maybe. I made some inquiries. And ---

12 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Okay.

13 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** --- through other
14 processes that I was also engaged in subsequently because --
15 when this information was made available to me. I'd been
16 advised that this information never came to the Ministry
17 Office, never came to me, and, clearly, we did not have
18 access to the CTSN. And as well, confirmed that that
19 information flow during the pandemic had ceased.

20 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. One last
21 intelligence product to look at, CAN 5811.

22 **--- EXHIBIT No. CAN005811:**

23 PRC Foreign Interference in Canada: A
24 Critical National Security Threat

25 **MS. ERIN DANN:** If you can just scroll down
26 to the title. So this is a -- if we go to -- and if we go to
27 page 2, we'll see the date. Minister Blair, this is an
28 intelligence assessment dated July 20th, 2021. And I

1 understand from your previous testimony that this -- excuse
2 me -- that you did receive this assessment contemporaneously
3 to when it was disseminated.

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** It wasn't in -- on the
5 20th of July, but subsequently, I was -- I did have an
6 opportunity to review this document. It was shared with me
7 by CSIS.

8 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And not on the specific date
9 ---

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And I apologize. I
11 don't know the date this was shared with me, but it was in
12 that general timeframe.

13 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. It would have
14 been in sometime in 2021?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, I believe so.

16 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And do you recall how you
17 received this assessment?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I don't. But it would
19 have -- because it's TS material, it would have been shared
20 with me directly by the Director of CSIS.

21 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And I note you noted in your
22 previous evidence before the Commission that there was no
23 explicit mention of MP Chong in this document that the
24 reference is to, that there is no named MPs in this
25 intelligence assessment.

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes.

27 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Is that your understanding?

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I believe on the second

1 page. There's a paragraph that makes reference to
2 interference directed towards somebody who was seeking
3 information about a particular MP. And but it did not name
4 Mr. Chong, and, frankly, I had no -- at that time, no way of
5 knowing what MP they were referring to, and no one at any
6 time suggested to me that that was Mr. Chong or any other MP.
7 That information was not shared with me.

8 **MS. ERIN DANN:** What was your reaction to
9 this assessment more generally when you reviewed it?

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, just on that
11 portion of the assessment, I think it's a useful document,
12 because I think it's a useful document, because I think it
13 does outline our concern, our collective concern on foreign
14 interference. But with respect to that particular paragraph,
15 it simply mentioned that the PRC was seeking information
16 about an individual and that in and of itself did not cause
17 me great concern. And again, I had no context for the
18 information in that paragraph. I had no idea who it was
19 directed to or what timeframe it may have taken place,
20 whether it was contemporary or in the past.

21 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Moving on to my next topic, I
22 want to discuss a particular warrant that you reviewed and
23 approved, a warrant application that you reviewed and
24 approved during your time as Minister of Public Safety.

25 I'll start -- just we can take down that
26 document, Ms. Court Operator. A few questions about the
27 warrant application approval process in general. You told
28 the Commission that you expected warrant applications to be

1 dealt with promptly and properly within your office. Did you
2 convey that expectation to your staff?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, at all times.

4 **MS. ERIN DANN:** We have heard evidence that
5 CSIS generally built in about 10 days for the Minister to
6 review warrant materials, unless the warrant application was
7 particularly urgent, in which case they may require a shorter
8 turn around. Were you aware of the length of time that CSIS
9 would build in for Ministerial review?

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, I was not. First of
11 all, if I may, I think it's -- I accept that there is a
12 certain amount of due diligence that would take place between
13 the Agency, CSIS, the Deputy Minister of Public Safety, and
14 the Minister's Office, but my involvement in these is when
15 that work is completed and it's brought to my attention that
16 they would like me to go to a secure location to review the
17 document and fulfill my statutory obligation to review and
18 approve the warrant application.

19 And so then I don't have -- I did not have
20 information and CSIS never told me that this other work goes
21 on.

22 But I've been an affiant on a number of Part
23 6 and -- I've been the officer in charge of many Part 6
24 investigations when I was a police officer. So I'm aware of
25 the work that goes into development of such a warrant
26 application. But my role in that application was not to
27 provide any information or input on who or how or where or
28 why, but rather, my responsibility, statutorily, was to

1 undertake my authority and to exercise my authority to
2 approve the application going forward to a Federal Court
3 Judge.

4 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Can you explain at all
5 whether there would -- there could have been differences in
6 urgencies required for different types of warrants? And in
7 particular, whether the urgency for a renewal of a warrant
8 versus a new warrant? Help us understand the time pressures
9 in relation to those?

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** During my tenure as the
11 Minister of Public Safety, there were a number of warrant --
12 a fairly significant number of warrant applications that were
13 brought forward for me to address. There were some
14 circumstances, and you made reference already to a renewal,
15 so where there was an existing warrant that would terminate
16 on a particular date, and if CSIS brought forward an
17 application to renew that warrant, there would be some
18 urgency to make sure that that process was completed, my
19 approval and then going back before the Federal Court Judge
20 for renewal before the termination or the conclusion of the
21 existing warrant. So that sometimes put a timeline. And it
22 would be brought to my attention, "This is a renewal."

23 And renewal processes, unless there was
24 significantly new information contained in the package, were
25 perhaps a little bit more straightforward. But CSIS would
26 convey that there was a timeline, that this had to be done by
27 a certain date, and we would work hard to make sure that we
28 met that date.

1 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. I understand from
2 your in camera hearing summary that warrant applications
3 during your time as Minister of Public Safety generally took,
4 on average, between four and eight days after being sent by
5 CSIS to move through Public Safety officials and your
6 Minister's Office for your review and approval?

7 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Again, I wasn't involved
8 in that process, but it sounds -- that timeline sounds fairly
9 consistent to me, and I have no way -- I have no basis upon
10 which to say that's not correct. But I can also share with
11 you that when the warrants were brought to my attention, they
12 were always dealt with fairly expeditiously. I think it's my
13 responsibility to review the documents that are placed before
14 me fairly thoroughly. It usually took a couple hours,
15 sometimes three hours, depending on the size and the
16 complexity of the document, to review that document. After
17 which, in each and every case, I signed it immediately.

18 **MS. ERIN DANN:** You have provided evidence to
19 the Commission that you approved -- that you reviewed and
20 approved two other warrants around the time frame of the
21 approval of the particular warrant that we're going to speak
22 about, and that you did so within that four-to-eight-day
23 range. Is that correct?

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I have no basis of -- I
25 can't testify to -- about things I have no knowledge of, how
26 long it took to bring those other two warrants to my
27 attention. I can just -- I can confirm that I did authorize
28 two warrants, other warrants, in that general timeframe.

1 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Thank you. Did you generally
2 have a briefing in advance of the first time that you would
3 review a warrant application from CSIS?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** It would have to be done
5 in a top-secret location, and so it was -- there was, in some
6 circumstances, a briefing provided, either nearly before or
7 after I've had the opportunity to read the documentation.
8 But frankly, the review of the application, unless there was
9 some additional complexity or issues around timelines, et
10 cetera, it was pretty straightforward.

11 **MS. ERIN DANN:** You've mentioned that your
12 part of this process began when you were informed that there
13 was an application that required your review. Who is
14 responsible for notifying you when a warrant required your
15 review?

16 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** My office would notify
17 me and place it in my calendar. They would determine my
18 availability, and to go to the Regional Office in Toronto of
19 CSIS and tell me that an appointment would be scheduled for
20 me to attend the Regional Office, and it was indicated on my
21 calendar it was for the purposes of a warrant. But no
22 information was provided in a non-secure setting about what
23 that warrant was about. And so I would go and, frankly, in
24 the secure setting I would become aware of the subject of the
25 warrant at that time.

26 **MS. ERIN DANN:** I'll turn now to questions
27 about the specific warrant.

28 Could we have COM615, please?

1 Minister, based on several of the publicly
2 available summaries, Commission counsel have created this
3 timeline.

4 Can we just scroll up a bit so we can see?
5 Thank you.

6 And you'll see that we've listed as day zero,
7 the date at which letters were signed by Director Vigneault
8 to you and to Deputy Minister Stewart requesting that the
9 Minister authorize an application for a warrant, and in
10 closing materials related to that warrant. Day four on this
11 chronology indicates that there was a signed consultation by
12 Deputy Minister Stewart. Day 13, an initial briefing, and
13 day 54, a briefing to you, at which point you approved the
14 warrant application.

15 We heard evidence that your Chief of Staff --
16 or your Chief of Staff testified that she reviewed -- she
17 received the package at some point between what is identified
18 as day four and day 13 in this timeline.

19 Can you tell us when on this timeline did you
20 learn that there was a warrant requiring your review and
21 approval?

22 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** A warrant. Not this one
23 specifically. I had no knowledge of this one at all. I
24 would have been notified that -- in my calendar and when they
25 sought my availability to attend at the Regional Office at
26 Headquarters. So it would have been in fairly close
27 proximity to what you've referred to as day 54 in this
28 document.

1 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Would that have been -- when
2 you say close proximity, do you mean within ---

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Within two or three
4 days.

5 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Two or three days.

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** That there was a
7 requirement for me to attend to the secure location for the
8 purposes of reviewing a warrant application.

9 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And when did you first find
10 out the subject matter of the warrant.

11 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** On what you refer to as
12 day 54, but for me was day 1 on the day I attended at the
13 regional office, and the package was put before me, and
14 that's when I became aware of the subject matter of the
15 warrant.

16 **MS. ERIN DANN:** I understand from your
17 evidence that several months before the application was sent
18 by CSIS that you received a briefing from the director and
19 deputy director of CSIS regarding intelligence relevant to
20 what would eventually be the subject matter of this warrant?

21 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, that's correct.
22 And it was actually several months before what you've
23 indicated to be day zero.

24 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Several months before day
25 zero. Thank you. During that briefing, what, if anything,
26 were you told about whether the Service was contemplating a
27 warrant in relation to this matter?

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** There was no discussion

1 that -- during that briefing of any further investigative
2 activity that the Service was undertaking. They briefed me
3 on what they knew at that time based on the information and
4 analysis that they had available to me, but they did not
5 indicate to me their intention to do anything else at that
6 time.

7 I -- if I may, also, I anticipated from the
8 briefing that they could continue to investigate the matter,
9 but they did not disclose to me at that time their intention
10 to pursue any particular investigative ---

11 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And between the time of this
12 meeting, several months before day 0, and when you became
13 aware of the warrant on what we call day -- or what's listed
14 here as day 54, did you have any additional discussions with
15 Director Vigneault, or anyone else at CSIS about the subject
16 matter of the eventual warrant?

17 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

18 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Were you surprised on day 54
19 when you saw the subject matter of the warrant?

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

21 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Did you discuss with anyone
22 outside of those in attendance at the briefing -- I'll call
23 it the several months before briefing, did you discuss with
24 anyone outside those in attendance at the briefing the
25 subject matter of the briefing?

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

27 **MS. ERIN DANN:** For example, did you discuss
28 it with the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's Officer, or

1 other members of Cabinet?

2 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I believe that would
3 have been entirely inappropriate, and, no, I did not.

4 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Why inappropriate?

5 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Because the information
6 that was shared with me was of a top-secret nature, and it
7 was shared with me in my capacity as the Minister of Public
8 Safety. I did not believe it would be appropriate for me to
9 disclose that. *Security of Information Act* I think is rather
10 clear, and I had taken an oath to maintain the secrecy of
11 those things that were shared with me that were secret.

12 **MS. ERIN DANN:** We have evidence from
13 Director Vigneault that -- noting that Ms. -- let me back up
14 a moment. Was Ms. Astravas, to the best of your knowledge,
15 present at the several months before briefing?

16 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I apologize. I don't
17 recall exactly who was in the room. I remember the
18 conversation I was having with Director Vigneault, and I
19 believe as well his deputy director may have been present in
20 the room as well, so Ms. Tessier, but I don't recall if
21 anyone else was there.

22 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. Director
23 Vigneault provided evidence that Ms. Astravas was forthcoming
24 and transparent in discussions relating to this warrant. Is
25 that a view that you share?

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, it is.

27 **MS. ERIN DANN:** On our chronology, we have at
28 day 13 an entry that indicates CSIS gave a secure oral

1 briefing to your then chief of staff, and that you did not
2 attend that briefing. Were you aware that briefing -- that
3 that briefing took place?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

5 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Upon learning that that
6 briefing had taken place, did you have any concerns?

7 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am. I -- again,
8 CSIS, the deputy minister and my chief of staff would engage
9 with each other in discussions. I was not party to that. It
10 was when they concluded their collective work together that
11 it was brought to me for my consideration.

12 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Ms. Astravas' evidence was
13 that she asked a number of questions during that initial
14 briefing for her own information, including about how
15 activities described in the warrant application met the
16 threshold to obtain a warrant. Were those questions -- I
17 think we have your -- know your answer on this, but I want to
18 ask for clarification. Were those questions asked on your
19 behalf?

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

21 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Were you aware that Ms.
22 Astravas was asking these sorts of questions in her
23 interactions with CSIS officials?

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

25 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Do you have any views on
26 whether those are appropriate or within the scope of your
27 chief of staff's role?

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I believe it's well

1 within the chief of staff's role to ask questions, but at no
2 time did anyone raise any concerns with me with respect to
3 this process. They didn't inform me that those discussions
4 were taking place until on my day 1, your day 54 it was
5 brought to my attention, and none of those concerns were
6 raised to me at that time.

7 **MS. ERIN DANN:** The Commission has heard
8 evidence about an internal CSIS email sent the day after what
9 we call the initial briefing, so this would have been on day
10 14, and the author of that internal CSIS email expressed
11 concern that the warrant application was in danger of not
12 being approved by the minister. On day 14, had you expressed
13 any view about this warrant?

14 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am. I wasn't
15 aware of this warrant.

16 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Was this warrant, from your
17 perspective, ever in danger of not being approved?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

19 **MS. ERIN DANN:** The Commission has heard that
20 Ms. Astravas also received a briefing on the Vanweenan list
21 sometime between day 13 and day 54 on this chronology. Were
22 you aware of that briefing?

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

24 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Had Vanweenan lists been
25 included in any other warrant applications that you reviewed
26 during your time at Public Safety?

27 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I believe they had. It
28 is a requirement to identify known persons. It's a Supreme

1 Court of Canada decision and one of which I'm quite familiar,
2 because, as I've said, I was the officer in charge of many
3 Part 6 *Criminal Code* investigations. I'm aware of the legal
4 requirement and I'm familiar with the requirement for
5 identifying known persons whose -- who may come up in these
6 conversations.

7 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. Was anything that
8 Ms. Astravas learned during that briefing on the Vanweenan
9 list passed on to you?

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am. I've --
11 again, no one shared with me, either the director or the
12 deputy minister or the chief of staff any element of their
13 conversations with respect to the Vanweenan list. I'm --
14 again, it was presented to me for the first time, and I'm
15 pretty comfortable with the format of the warrant application
16 ---

17 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Was any information that your
18 chief of staff learned during the -- or as part of the day 13
19 initial briefing, was that -- was any information from that
20 briefing provided to you?

21 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Ma'am.

22 **MS. ERIN DANN:** If we can turn to what we
23 have labelled as day 54, what you've called day 1 ---

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Well, I have no
25 information on your chronology. My own personal evidence is
26 that my first day was on the day that the warrant application
27 was presented to me, and I signed it.

28 **MS. ERIN DANN:** I understand. Where did that

1 -- where were you when you reviewed the warrant application?
2 Was that at the regional office in Toronto?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Ma'am. It was on
4 the -- in the regional office. I can give you the address,
5 but I don't think CSIS wants me to tell you.

6 **MS. ERIN DANN:** We don't need that. Thank
7 you. I understand from your previous evidence that you did
8 not see any dates on the materials that were placed before
9 you, and perhaps I should particularize, you did not see any
10 dates on the -- let me take one step back. On the day that
11 you received the warrant package for your review, did it
12 include the letters from Director Vigneault that were
13 directed -- that had been directed to your attention?

14 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No. It contained -- the
15 warrant package that I reviewed, I recall, there was -- one
16 of the statutory requirements of my approval of the
17 application is the recommendation from the deputy minister.
18 The documents that were put in front of me had been freshly
19 printed, and did not contain the signatures or dates or
20 timestamps of any of those individuals. They were not
21 photocopies, but they were printed of the documents. I
22 actually inquired, has the deputy minister signed the advice
23 that he is statutorily required to provide to me, because I
24 can't proceed with the warrant unless -- and I was advised
25 verbally during the briefing for this application, that he
26 had in fact signed it. But I was not provided with the date.

27 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. And did you
28 confirm the -- when you confirmed that the Deputy Minister

1 had signed the consultation, did you confirm the date on
2 which he signed it?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No. I only asked if he
4 had signed it because that was the statutory requirement for
5 my approval, that it include the -- it be based on the
6 recommendation of the Deputy Minister.

7 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And we've heard evidence
8 about a memo or cover letter from the Deputy Minister
9 recommending that you approve the warrant. Was that included
10 in the package of materials?

11 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** It was not.

12 **MS. ERIN DANN:** It was not. Was it unusual
13 not to see any date on the consultation note that required
14 the Deputy Minister's signature?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, the copy that
16 was presented to me did not have that signature or the date.
17 And so I inquire, "Has he signed this?" And the answer was
18 yes, because as I say, it's a statutory requirement. And
19 having satisfied myself through those inquiries that it was
20 in proper form, I proceeded with my own review of the
21 document and my approval of it.

22 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Was it unusual that the -- it
23 not contain the signature? Was that a common practice? Or
24 that you would receive the documents without dates or
25 signatures?

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, I believe
27 that when I attended at the office in Toronto, that
28 photocopies were made of these documents -- or excuse me, not

1 photocopies, but they were printed as new documents and they
2 did not contain signatures and dates. That's why I had to
3 inquire if it had been approved.

4 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And so we've heard some
5 evidence that there was a physical warrant package available
6 in -- that would have been sent to your Minister's Office in
7 Ottawa, and as I understand your evidence, a separate or --
8 that package was recreated or printed out for you at the
9 Toronto Regional Package?

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And the document that I
11 signed in approval, it did not contain the things that -- in
12 a subsequent appearance here, a document was presented to me,
13 and that's not the document that I signed.

14 **MS. ERIN DANN:** All right. And so you would
15 have signed a document in Toronto.

16 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes.

17 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And how did you -- or do you
18 have any awareness of how that would have been sent or
19 produced back in Ottawa to CSIS?

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, that's -- I signed
21 it and handed the entire package signed by me to CSIS,
22 including the documents with my signature on it. That was
23 entirely turned over to CSIS and administratively what they
24 do with that afterwards is -- I'm not aware of how that
25 works.

26 **MS. ERIN DANN:** We heard evidence from Deputy
27 Minister Stewart that it would have taken CSIS some time to
28 get the Minister and his staff comfortable with this

1 particular warrant. From your perspective, did you require
2 time to get comfortable with the warrant?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Frankly, I do not know
4 what the Deputy Minister is talking about. But I can tell
5 you that the warrant package was presented to me on the date
6 it was presented. I read it. I was -- I received certain
7 information and made certain inquiries, as I've already said,
8 about was it correct in form. It took me time to read it. I
9 was, because of a previous briefing that I had received
10 several months before, familiar with the subject. Frankly
11 I've signed many of those warrants. I'm quite comfortable
12 with the process. I focused very much on my statutory
13 responsibility to approve those warrants to go forward and
14 what made me -- what I needed to know is, frankly, the
15 information as to who is named in such a warrant or the
16 investigative techniques that are going to be employed, or
17 the technology that they might use is not a concern to me.
18 Those are operational matters. But only if it is presented
19 in a correct form that would provide a Federal Court Judge
20 with reasonable grounds upon which a decision can be made to
21 authorize the application. That's all I needed to be
22 comfortable with, and I became quite comfortable with it over
23 the course of reading the document and any -- and getting
24 answers to the questions that I asked. So I'm not sure what
25 the Deputy Minister might have meant that he thought it might
26 take time because the issues that were addressed were the
27 things that I was very well familiar with.

28 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Okay. And that time period

1 that you say when -- that you took to review the warrant,
2 that all would have been on day -- what we call day 54?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And which of course I
4 call day one, because that's the first day it was presented
5 to me, but yes. And it took a period of time, probably about
6 two to three hours, because there was some other discussions
7 that also took place during that time. I know how long I was
8 at CSIS Headquarters. The bulk of the time would have been
9 focused on dealing with the administrative matters of
10 addressing the warrant application.

11 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And during that Minister's
12 Briefing, was Director Vigneault available if you had any
13 questions via the secure video?

14 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes. And I had no
15 questions of Director Vigneault. The document, quite
16 frankly, speaks for itself. And I reviewed it. My only
17 question was the signature of the Deputy Minister. Had he
18 approved it? And I was assured that he had, and that enabled
19 me to proceed.

20 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Did you tell anyone outside
21 of those in attendance at the, what we call the Minister
22 Briefing on day 54, about the warrant or the subject matter
23 of the warrant?

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, ma'am.

25 **MS. ERIN DANN:** The Commission has heard
26 evidence about an internal -- another internal email from
27 email from the CSIS from the affiant that expressed concern
28 about the perceived delay in obtaining your approval of this

1 warrant. The affiant identified concerns which included a
2 concern that the longer the application is delayed, the more
3 dated the information in the application becomes, and
4 further, that if asked by the Federal Court about the delay
5 in approval by the warrant -- by the Minister of the warrant
6 application, the affiant would describe the delay as unusual.

7 Do you view the delay in presenting the
8 warrant application to you as unusual?

9 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I have no information --
10 first of all, I don't know the basis of the affiant's
11 concerns. And -- but I do understand, having been an affiant
12 myself on a number of occasions, that it's important that the
13 document you presented to the Federal Court Judge for
14 approval would have to be complete and contemporaneous to the
15 application.

16 So I understand the concern, but I have no
17 knowledge of delay, as you've -- or what was transpiring
18 during the interval that you've described. And again, I have
19 no basis upon which to comment on concerns and internal
20 emails that I don't have access to and never saw.

21 But as I say, when the matter was brought to
22 my attention, I dealt with it very expeditiously and
23 promptly. And at no time did the Director CSIS, or the
24 Deputy Minister, or my Chief of Staff, ever suggest to me any
25 concern with the situ of delay or the interval that it took
26 to complete this.

27 **MS. ERIN DANN:** You've anticipated my next
28 question, Minister, but we've heard evidence from Ms.

1 Tessier, the then-Deputy Director of Operations at CSIS, that
2 at the operational level, CSIS employees were very frustrated
3 by what they perceived as a delay in obtaining your approval
4 for the warrant. Were those concerns conveyed to you?

5 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Not by Ms. Tessier and
6 not by the Director of CSIS, nor by the Deputy Minister, nor
7 by my Chief of Staff. That was never conveyed to me.

8 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Did the Director, the Deputy
9 Director, or your Deputy Minister ever raise any concerns
10 about the involvement of Ms. Astravas in this warrant
11 process?

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No.

13 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And in relation both to the
14 concern -- any concerns about Ms. Astravas or about delay
15 were, any concerns raised to you after, in any time period
16 after the approval of the warrant?

17 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, ma'am. And in fact,
18 in the interval that you've identified in your timeline, zero
19 to 54, it's never came up. At no time did any of the
20 individuals you've named ever speak to me about a warrant
21 application or any concern with respect to it. And in the
22 two years following, again, no one ever raised any concern
23 with that interval or the process that was undertaken to
24 approve this warrant, and it wasn't until it was reported in
25 the newspapers that there was some concern being expressed by
26 an anonymous informant with respect to delay that I became
27 aware that that concern even existed.

28 **MS. ERIN DANN:** And I appreciate that you

1 weren't aware at the time of the timeline that's before you
2 now. With the benefit of the information you have now
3 learned, can you tell us whether your expectation that
4 warrants be dealt with promptly was met in this case?

5 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** My expectation is that
6 all of the officials responsible for bringing this
7 application to me were all doing their job. I really can't
8 comment, because I have no information as to what discussions
9 took place. I appreciate the timeline that you've provided,
10 but none of these officials ever either during the interval,
11 or in the two years subsequent, ever expressed to me any
12 concern with respect to bringing this forward.

13 And again, from my perspective, the matter
14 was brought to my attention that I needed to go and sign a
15 warrant and a couple of days later that was arranged, and I
16 went into CSIS, and the very first time I saw it was on the
17 day that you've identified as Day 54. And again, from my
18 perspective, it was dealt on that day with all appropriate
19 diligence.

20 **MS. ERIN DANN:** When you learned that the
21 warrant had been in the Minister's office for more than a
22 month before it was presented to you and you approved it,
23 what was your reaction?

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, we had -- at
25 that time we had already initiated a number of inquiries with
26 respect to it. And so, I -- and I was no longer the Minister
27 of Public Safety. So I had not had the opportunity to go
28 back, and I didn't think it was appropriate to go back and

1 start talking to potential witnesses with respect to what had
2 transpired there.

3 This was quite a -- it was news to me, I'll
4 just simply say that, that there was any concern. Because at
5 no time did the Director of CSIS, or any of his senior
6 leadership team, or the Deputy Minister, or my Chief of
7 Staff, ever suggest to me that there was any issue with
8 respect to bringing that warrant before me on your Day 54.

9 MS. ERIN DANN: Again, I appreciate that you
10 were unaware of the time period, and have you learned
11 anything about the reason for that interval between Day 0 and
12 Day 54 as a result of the inquiries that you made once you
13 did learn of that interval?

14 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: I followed the
15 testimony, the sworn testimony that's been given in this
16 hearing with respect to this matter. And I have no basis
17 upon disputing any of it. This is -- people have testified,
18 I think before this hearing and under oath, as to what
19 transpired during this interval. Again, I had no awareness
20 of it.

21 But if I may, I would also have expected that
22 if during this interval, any of the officials, including the
23 Director or the Deputy Director of CSIS, or the Deputy
24 Minister, or my Chief of Staff, had any concerns that they
25 thought should be elevated to me that anyone of them could
26 have and would have done so, but that did not happen. None
27 of them expressed any concerns with the process of bringing
28 this before me prior to that. I wasn't aware of any of those

1 quite frankly, again, in reference to my statutory
2 obligations, I don't believe at all that it is my place as
3 the Minister responsible for approving these warrants to go
4 forward to a Federal Court Judge, to in any way engage with
5 CSIS on who, or how, or even the why. But only to ensure
6 that the application that they were bringing forward was
7 correctly prepared and sufficient in form to be brought
8 before a Federal Court Judge.

9 MS. ERIN DANN: You can't exercise your
10 statutory obligation unless you are aware that there is a
11 warrant that requires your review and approval?

12 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Yes, Ma'am. I can't
13 approve something I don't know anything about.

14 MS. ERIN DANN: All right.

15 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: And so, when it was
16 brought to my attention, it was always my practice, and quite
17 frankly more than practice, it was in every case dealt with
18 very promptly.

19 MS. ERIN DANN: Did you ever have any
20 concerns that you were not being notified in a timely manner
21 about your need to review and approve a warrant in order to
22 fulfill your statutory obligations?

23 MS. ERIN DANN: No, Ma'am. I would have had
24 no basis to form that concern, because no one suggested to me
25 that there were any difficulties in bringing those matters
26 forward in a prompt way.

27 MS. ERIN DANN: Finally, just to return to
28 the topic of the intelligence flow during the pandemic, you

1 mentioned that there was a reduction in the amount of, sort
2 of, paper intelligence that you were receiving. Did that
3 cause you any concern at the time?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Most of the information
5 that will be supplied is useful, and I have always found it
6 so. But I did understand during the pandemic that there were
7 new challenges presented because those officials were not in
8 the workplace, I was operating out of another city, the
9 sharing of top-secret material, because the CRO program had
10 ceased during the pandemic we didn't have access to the
11 information that normally had previously flowed through the
12 Department of Public Safety. That in order to receive top-
13 secret material it caused me to go more frequently to the
14 Toronto regional headquarters to be briefed on TS material.

15 But I was not concerned because I was --
16 frankly, I had confidence that the Director of CSIS, that if
17 he had information that he needed and wanted to share with
18 me, that he would do so.

19 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Do you have any concerns that
20 he may have been unaware of the need to provide you with that
21 information because he believed you were receiving it through
22 other means?

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I think it's very clear,
24 and I accept completely the Director's testimony that when he
25 put me on a mailing list and sent it through to the CTSN,
26 that it was his intention that that information would get to
27 me. Unfortunately, that was not happeningm and there was not
28 a single occasion where he inquired about, you know, have you

1 seen this information, or there's something you need to make
2 sure that you look at. It just never came up in any of the
3 conversations, many conversations I had with him. So
4 unfortunately, I have no doubt of his intention, but it was
5 not executed.

6 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Thank you.

7 Commissioner, doing my part to try and keep
8 us staying on time, those are all my questions.

9 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

10 We'll take the break right now. So we'll
11 come back at five to 11:00.

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

13 This sitting of the Commission is now in
14 recess ---

15 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Commissioner? I apologize.
16 I wonder if given the time constraints, whether we could -- I
17 know we're scheduled to come back at five to 11:00, perhaps
18 we could have a shorter break.

19 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Ten (10) to 11:00?

20 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Yes.

21 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Ten (10) to 11:00.

22 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Yes. Thank you.

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Thank you, Commissioner.

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

25 This sitting of the Commission is now in
26 recess until 10:50 a.m.

27 --- Upon recessing at 10:37 a.m.

28 --- Upon resuming at 10:51 a.m.

1 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please.

2 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
3 Commission is now back in session.

4 The time is 10:51 a.m.

5 **--- HON. WILLIAM BLAIR, Resumed:**

6 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So first one this
7 morning is counsel for Michael Chong.

8 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. GIB van ERT:**

9 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Minister.

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Good morning, Sir.

11 **MR. GIB van ERT:** This may be a slightly
12 unconventional way to start a cross-examination, but I've
13 told the Commissioner this already and I'll tell you. I'm
14 old fashioned enough or maybe naïve enough to think that when
15 a former cop comes to a solemn proceeding like this and
16 swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
17 the truth, that's what he's going to do. And I think when
18 you came here on the 10th of April and gave your evidence
19 that's what you did. But I do have to ask you, so let me
20 just put it to you. On the 10th of April when you gave your
21 evidence to this Commission, did you tell the truth, the
22 whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Sir. I've
24 testified very many times and taken that oath, and I believe
25 very strongly that it is appropriate and necessary to tell
26 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

27 **MR. GIB van ERT:** That was very much my
28 impression when I saw you here that day. Sir, this warrant -

1 - well, let me back up and say, you told us the truth, but at
2 that point, we weren't talking about 54 days, and I gather
3 that's because you weren't aware of this 54-day period when
4 you gave your evidence on the 10th of April; is that right?

5 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Again, I have no
6 information even now, other than the timeline that's been
7 presented to me, what transpired in the interval prior to the
8 date in which I actually received and signed the warrant.

9 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Okay. Thank you. Now that
10 you have since learned that there was this 54-day interval,
11 do you know now why it took 54 days?

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, not entirely. I've
13 followed some of the evidence that has been presented here,
14 not exhaustively, because I'm busy, but I followed it and
15 gained some understanding of some conversations that I was
16 not aware of at the time that took place.

17 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Right. Thank you. And
18 have you discussed it with Ms. Astravas since and asked her
19 why did it take 54 days?

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Sir, I have not.

21 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Thank you. Do you accept,
22 Sir, that 54 days is much longer than it should have taken?

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I understand the concern
24 with the interval of time that's been identified. Again, as
25 I've testified, I have no information about what transpired
26 during that time that could have caused that length of
27 interval, other than the testimony I've been made aware of
28 here.

1 **MR. GIB van ERT:** So I think you're saying
2 that you can't accept that it was too long?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, I'm -- again, my
4 expectation would have been if there were concerns with
5 respect to the interval, that -- first of all, if I may, I
6 expect that there is a certain amount of due diligence that
7 takes place between the agency, the deputy minister and my
8 office. I believe that that in every case takes place. If
9 there had been any concern with the length of the interval,
10 my expectation would have been that either the agency had,
11 the director of CSIS or the deputy minister or my chief would
12 have brought that to my attention and none of them did.

13 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Yes. No, I've heard your
14 evidence on that. I appreciate that point. There is concern
15 outside in the rest of the world, I think it's fair to say,
16 that 54 days is awfully long. And, of course, you've heard
17 now -- you didn't know at the time, but you've heard now that
18 even the affiant was prepared to tell the Federal Court that
19 that was unusual. So what I'm asking you is, knowing what
20 you know now, can you accept that 54 days was longer than it
21 should have been?

22 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, I have no
23 basis to come to that determination because I don't have much
24 -- all the information about what was transpiring during that
25 interval. It is -- I accept that the affiant was concerned.
26 I understand the concern the affiant would have. I've been
27 an affiant myself. But at the same time, again, I think it's
28 -- this hearing will determine whether or not there was any

1 justification for the interval that took place. Based on my
2 limited knowledge of it, I'm aware of it. My expectation
3 always is that these things be dealt with, with all due
4 diligence, but as promptly as necessary.

5 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Yes. There absolutely has
6 to be the due diligence, and you know that very well. You've
7 explained that you've done many of these before. It needs to
8 be done promptly, and the reason for that is that every day
9 that goes by where the intelligence agency thinks it needs
10 these powers but doesn't have them is a day where lacking
11 those powers it cannot advance its investigation, it may be
12 losing opportunities to gather evidence. So that's why it
13 needs to be done promptly. Do you agree with me that far,
14 Sir?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Well, again, my
16 expectation, if I may, Sir, was -- would be if the CSIS had
17 that concern, the deputy director would have communicated
18 that to me, but ---

19 **MR. GIB van ERT:** I guess what ---

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** --- he did not.

21 **MR. GIB van ERT:** --- I'm suggesting, Sir, is
22 that there's always that concern with any warrant, whether
23 the director tells you in a particular case or not.

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Again, my expectation is
25 if that concern existed that the deputy director would have -
26 - or, excuse me, the director of CSIS would have communicated
27 that to me and he did not.

28 **MR. GIB van ERT:** I see. You explained that

1 while you didn't know about this particular warrant
2 application and the target of the warrant application until
3 what I'll call day 54, you had had previous discussions with
4 the director about the target of the warrant application;
5 right?

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I have previously
7 testified this morning that several months before the day in
8 which I received the warrant application that I had had --
9 received a briefing from the director that spoke to the
10 subject of the subsequent warrant.

11 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Right. Thank you. That's
12 what I'm getting at. And having had those previous
13 discussions, did you ever ---

14 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** If I may be precise, a
15 discussion.

16 **MR. GIB van ERT:** A single discussion?

17 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes.

18 **MR. GIB van ERT:** All right. Thank you. And
19 having had that discussion, did you subsequently discuss with
20 your chief of staff or anyone in your office words to the
21 effect of if CSIS brings me a warrant about this person,
22 bring it my attention straight away.

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I did not have such a
24 conversation simply because CSIS had not indicated to me
25 their intention to bring forward a warrant until I actually
26 saw it.

27 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Understood. And likewise,
28 did you have a discussion with anyone in your office to the

1 effect of if CSIS brings me a warrant about this person, I'm
2 not in any hurry about it?

3 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Absolutely not.

4 MR. GIB van ERT: Thank you. There was some
5 discussion about warrant renewals versus warrant
6 applications. I just want to be clear, this wasn't a warrant
7 renewal. This was an application.

8 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: That's correct.

9 MR. GIB van ERT: Thank you. I'll ask the
10 Court Operator to turn up WIT 159, please, at paragraph 16,
11 please. Thank you. The paragraph reads as follows,

12 "As to whether there were any systems
13 or procedures that [you, Sir,] might
14 recommend when dealing with
15 politically sensitive warrant
16 applications ([example] warrants
17 targeting members of the governing
18 party, or an opposition party),
19 Minister Blair testified that the
20 oath taken by the Minister of Public
21 Safety supersedes [all] political
22 considerations, and that the Minister
23 has a responsibility to the country
24 to do his job without fear or
25 favour."

26 That's a very admirable sentiment, Sir, and I
27 commend you for it. The reason why -- and I would expect
28 nothing less from a former chief of police, if I may say so.

1 The reason why that is -- let me put it this way. Was this a
2 warrant application that required you to exercise that
3 consideration to do your job without fear or favour?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I will tell you when
5 this warrant application was put before me, I never
6 considered anything else other than my statutory
7 responsibility to review and, if appropriate, approve the
8 warrant. There was no other consideration, and certainly no
9 political consideration.

10 **MR. GIB van ERT:** No, I understand that, and
11 I heard you say that this morning, but your evidence here is
12 that there was some discussion about politically sensitive
13 warrant applications and what the obligations of a Minister
14 are where dealing with politically sensitive warrant
15 applications.

16 And what I'm suggesting, Sir, is that in your
17 evidence behind closed doors about this, you weren't
18 discussing it in the abstract. This actually was relevant to
19 the warrant that we're talking about, because this was a
20 politically sensitive warrant application.

21 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Sir, I might suggest
22 that your characterization is not correct. A particular
23 question was put to me with respect to what was characterized
24 as a politically sensitive warrant and I tried to make very
25 clear that my oath, as the Minister responsible under the Act
26 to approve those warrants, superseded any political
27 consideration. And so whether or not a warrant might be
28 considered politically sensitive is not, in my opinion, a

1 relevant consideration. The only consideration is the law, -
2 --

3 MR. GIB van ERT: Was ---

4 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: --- and my statutory
5 requirement to fulfill my obligations under the law.

6 MR. GIB van ERT: Yes. Yes. And I'm asking
7 in short, was this a politically sensitive warrant
8 application?

9 MR. BARNEY BRUCKER: Well I think we're
10 getting into subject matter of the warrant and we'd object to
11 that question on national security grounds.

12 MR. GIB van ERT: Well, Commissioner, this is
13 the evidence that this witness has already adopted, so I'd
14 like to ask you to rule on that objection.

15 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: I think you're going too
16 far.

17 MR. GIB van ERT: Thank you.

18 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: And we'll write down the
19 question and if need be, I will follow up with the question.

20 MR. GIB van ERT: Thank you.

21 Sir, on the issue of the various intelligence
22 products concerning my client, Mr. Chong, I appreciate that
23 you didn't see them and you have various explanations for why
24 you didn't see them. Do you agree that you ought to have
25 seen them?

26 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Frankly, I have not -- I
27 don't believe I've provided various explanations. I've
28 simply said I didn't receive them. And I think that's been

1 corroborated by the testimony of others. So to be clear, I
2 just did not receive them.

3 And secondly, as I've said also in testimony,
4 I would have liked to have known that information. I would
5 be concerned about any threat against any Canadian, including
6 my colleagues, members of Parliament, and I was not made
7 aware of this information. I'm not suggesting that I would
8 have directed CSIS to do anything else other than the things
9 that it did, but I would have certainly asked questions about
10 what steps were being taken to ensure the safety of anyone
11 who was being targeted for political interference.

12 **MR. GIB van ERT:** I think you told Ms. Dann
13 this morning that you'd never seen an Issues Management Note.
14 So ---

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** They were not shared
16 with me.

17 **MR. GIB van ERT:** I mean that sort of
18 document. I'm not talking about the particular Issues
19 Management Note concerning my client. I think what you told
20 Ms. Dann is that you had never seen any Issues Management
21 Note.

22 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I don't recall ever
23 having one of those issues management documents, as it's been
24 entitled, was ever ---

25 **MR. GIB van ERT:** All right.

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** --- presented to me.

27 **MR. GIB van ERT:** CSIS' evidence previously
28 in this Commission has been that it was sending, on average,

1 two to three a week. I don't know that they were all
2 addressed to you, Sir, just to be clear, but that's quite a
3 volume.

4 So I take it then that there may be other
5 intelligence products that went in the form of an IMU that
6 were addressed to you but that you never saw?

7 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, the document
8 that was shared with me today wasn't addressed to me. And --
9 -

10 **MR. GIB van ERT:** The IMU is addressed to
11 you, Sir.

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I believe it indicates
13 that I'm -- but on the email list that I was provided, and I
14 was questioned about, I didn't recognize any of those
15 addresses.

16 **MR. GIB van ERT:** No, no, I appreciate that
17 it didn't go to your email address.

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Thank you.

19 **MR. GIB van ERT:** But no, I understand that.
20 But it says, "For distribution to the Minister of Public
21 Safety", and that was you at the time.

22 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And as I've testified,
23 that information did not get to me and was not shared ---

24 **MR. GIB van ERT:** I understand that. And
25 what I'm saying is that if you've never even seen an IMU
26 before, goodness knows how many other things you were meant
27 to see that you haven't seen.

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Well and again, I

1 absolutely understand and accept that the Director of CSIS
2 intended that I see it. Unfortunately, the steps that would
3 have actually allowed that to happen did not take place.

4 **MR. GIB van ERT:** You have explained in your
5 evidence, and you said again this morning, that upon learning
6 this story in the *Globe and Mail* and there may have been
7 things that didn't get to you, you asked your officials in
8 your office at the time to look into this and figure out what
9 happened, and they concluded that these materials hadn't got
10 to you. And Sir, the evidence that I've heard from -- we've
11 all heard from Ms. Astravas is that that was down to a
12 failure by the Department.

13 As you know, Mr. Stewart, the Deputy
14 Minister, sees it differently. There's a disagreement about
15 that.

16 What I want to suggest to you, Sir, is this.
17 You were the Minister of Public Safety and you were
18 responsible for that Department; yes?

19 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes.

20 **MR. GIB van ERT:** You were also responsible,
21 of course, for your own office?

22 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes.

23 **MR. GIB van ERT:** And as Minister of Public
24 Safety, you also have responsibility for the Service; right?

25 And so whether the blame in any particular
26 case for failing to communicate some intelligence product to
27 you can be properly put on the Director and the rest of the
28 Service, or on the Deputy Minister and the Department, or on

1 your office, one way or another, at the end of the day, you
2 are the leader of all those organizations and the
3 responsibility for intelligence not getting to you when it
4 should have is ultimately yours.

5 Do you accept that the responsibility for
6 these various failings, we can point all around town as much
7 as we like, but at the end of the day, constitutionally, you
8 are the person responsible? Do you accept that?

9 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And first of all, I very
10 much accept, if I may answer that, I very much accept the
11 principle of Ministerial responsibility, and I agree that I
12 am -- was at all times responsible for the Department of
13 Public Safety and with the five agencies were under that
14 portfolio. It was, unfortunately, impossible to know
15 information that we were not receiving from them until it
16 subsequently became public that information existed and it
17 had not been shared.

18 The responsibility that you reference is to
19 fix that, and steps were taken following the pandemic, and
20 when it became known that that information was not reaching
21 the Minister's Office, steps were taken to ensure that that
22 took place. I believe that's been the testimony that
23 corroborates that.

24 And so I believe the exercise of that
25 Ministerial responsibility, if information is not reaching
26 its intended target, then it needed to be fixed.

27 All I can also testify to is that
28 information, notwithstanding it may have been the intention

1 of CSIS to get it to the Minister's Office, they were not
2 able to make that happen and it did not get to us.

3 **MR. GIB van ERT:** Thank you, Commissioner.
4 Those are my questions.

5 Thank you, Minister.

6 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

7 Next one is Me Choudhry for Jenny Kwan.

8 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:**

9 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Commissioner, Minister,
10 good morning.

11 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Good morning.

12 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** For the record, my name
13 is Sujit Choudhry. I'm counsel to Jenny Kwan.

14 Minister, just a kind of a stage setting
15 question. So during your time as Minister of Public Safety,
16 can you estimate how many CSIS warrants you reviewed and
17 signed?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** That -- I don't have the
19 precise number. I can tell you in the general timeframe that
20 we are talking about, there were, I believe, three times, in
21 the general time frame, the 54 days, a few days before, and a
22 few days after.

23 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** But you were Minister
24 for a couple of years; correct?

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Sir.

26 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So over those -- over
27 that timeframe, can you estimate how many CSIS warrants you
28 reviewed and signed?

1 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: And again, I don't have
2 a precise number, ---

3 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Sure.

4 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: --- and I don't want to
5 guess for you, Sir, but it was not routine, these are very
6 significant legal matters and applications that are brought
7 forward. I had -- I did several and I'm a little bit
8 reluctant to offer a precise number, because I don't have
9 that.

10 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: So your former Deputy
11 Minister, Mr. Stewart, testified that there were -- he
12 estimated as well when I put the question to him. He said
13 between eight and a dozen a year. Does that sound roughly in
14 the range?

15 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Well it's pretty
16 consistent with my suggestion there was several.

17 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Okay. Okay, good.
18 There we go. Okay. So, Minister, as you know, Ms. Astravas
19 was here testifying. I'd like to put some of her evidence to
20 you.

21 So could we please call up WIT158, and
22 particularly paragraph 16?

23 **--- EXHIBIT No. WIT0000158:**

24 In Camera Examination Summary: Zita
25 Astravas

26 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Good. So I'd like to
27 direct you here. So this is Ms. Astravas' -- this is a
28 summary of her in camera testimony that she adopted as her

1 evidence when she was examined here, and I just want to take
2 you to the end of what -- that paragraph. And it's three
3 lines up from the end. It says, she said, that is Ms.
4 Astravas, said that the Director, that is Director Vigneault,
5 and the Minister, that would be you:

6 "...had discussed issues related to the
7 warrant a number of times before the
8 warrant application arrived."

9 And then there's an additional sentence where
10 her evidence is:

11 "She also said the Director had
12 advised the Minister that CSIS would
13 be moving forward with this warrant
14 application."

15 So I want to ask you some questions about
16 that.

17 So this morning you said there was a single
18 discussion ---

19 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** That's correct.

20 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** --- that you had.

21 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** A single discussion on
22 this -- the subject matter that subsequently became the
23 subject matter of a warrant application.

24 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** I see. Well, let's look
25 at this sentence. Ms. Astravas says:

26 "...the Director and the Minister had
27 discussed issues related to the
28 warrant a number of times..."

1 In the plural. So she is -- the plain and
2 ordinary meaning of that sentence -- admittedly it's a
3 summary -- is that there was more than one discussion
4 regarding issues related to the warrant. So -- but you said
5 that there was a single discussion some months before.

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes.

7 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So is this -- do you
8 disagree with Ms. Astravas's evidence?

9 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I believe Ms. Astravas
10 is referencing the briefing, and it was a fairly extensive
11 briefing that I had received several months before a warrant
12 application. And a warrant application was not referenced in
13 that briefing, it was just the intelligence they had at the
14 time.

15 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And so -- and was it
16 typical, in your experience -- and we've established that you
17 reviewed a number of CSIS warrants in your time -- to receive
18 such an advanced briefing from the Director or any member of
19 CSIS prior to the warrant application actually formally
20 arriving at the ministry?

21 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** There were a number of
22 briefings provided to me in a secure location, Top Secret
23 briefings that -- other matters that CSIS was also involved
24 in investigating, and whether or not they subsequently became
25 the subject of a warrant application was not connected to
26 those briefings. So it wasn't the first time I saw a warrant
27 application that was related to a subject for which I had
28 been previously briefed.

1 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay, fair. And so now
2 I want to, then -- that's a good link to my next question.
3 So her evidence is she also said the Director had advised the
4 Minister that CSIS would be moving forward with this warrant
5 application. Do you recall being advised by Director
6 Vigneault, again, before Day Zero?

7 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, not before Day Zero,
8 and far closer to Day 54.

9 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** But that would have been
10 after. When you say, "Far closer to Day 54," are you
11 referring to after Day Zero?

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, very much. What
13 I'm saying is that in the lead-up to the request that I go to
14 CSIS Regional Headquarters for the purposes of signing a
15 warrant, that was when I first became aware that they were
16 moving forward with the warrant application. But we did not
17 discuss, because we didn't have secure communications, the
18 subject of the warrant, only that it was being brought
19 forward.

20 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So just to clarify, so I
21 think what Ms. Astravas's evidence here is that the Director
22 had advised the Minister that CSIS would be moving forward
23 with this warrant application; that's prior to it actually
24 being brought to the ministry. Did that discussion happen or
25 not?

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, not prior to what is
27 referred to in the timeline provided as Day Zero, I was not
28 aware that the -- CSIS was intending to bring forward a

1 warrant application prior to -- actually I became aware of
2 this particular application on what is referred to in the
3 timelines as Day 54.

4 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So I want to ask you
5 some questions about this, what you call a discussion -- what
6 Ms. Astravas says is a number of them, but we'll leave that
7 as it is -- and if you can't answer the question on grounds
8 of national security, please say so, Sir. It's not my
9 intention to trip you up in any way, it's just to put on the
10 record the question and then the Commissioner and her team
11 can follow up with you if they wish to.

12 And so in this briefing, this advance
13 discussion, did the Director disclose the target of the
14 investigation?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And, Sir, I'm not going
16 to talk about the particulars that were provided to me by the
17 Director, but I have acknowledged that there was a briefing
18 that took place that was related to the subject matter of the
19 subsequent application that we've been speaking of, but I
20 can't speak about the target.

21 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Now, you know that Ms.
22 Tessier from CSIS testified on a CSIS panel last week, and
23 she provided evidence that after this, that there was a
24 further meeting she had bilaterally with Ms. Astravas, prior
25 to the warrant application arriving. Are you aware of that
26 meeting?

27 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Sir.

28 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And her evidence was

1 that she shared with Ms. Astravas at that meeting the name of
2 the target of the warrant. Were you aware of that fact?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Again, I had no idea
4 that that conversation ever took place.

5 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So going back to this
6 discussion with the Director, months before Day Zero, did you
7 -- did the issue of the third parties whose communications
8 with the target arise as a point of discussion? And if you
9 can't answer, you can say so.

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I'm afraid, Sir, that
11 you're taking me into areas of the briefing that I think
12 could compromise the national interest and I'm -- I would
13 defer to ---

14 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay.

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** --- the Justice as to
16 whether or not I should answer that.

17 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** No, the question will be
18 written down and we'll follow up if need be.

19 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Good, thank you,
20 Commissioner.

21 And thank you, Sir. And so ---

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** It's the usual
23 procedure, just for you to know.

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Oh, it's fine. Thank
25 you, ma'am.

26 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Yeah, it's a bit of
27 pageantry, Minister, but we have to go through this process.

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And as you can imagine,

1 I'm also trying to be appropriately cautious about my
2 legal ---

3 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** No, Sir, I understand.

4 And so I want to come back to a question I
5 think Ms. Dann might have raised, which is about Ms.
6 Astravas's participation in this meeting, or what she calls a
7 number of discussions, with CSIS, with Director Vigneault
8 prior to the warrant arriving. And you said you can't
9 recall, if I'm correct, that -- whether she attended this
10 discussion.

11 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I can't confirm with
12 certainty that she was in the room.

13 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So here's the thing,
14 though, she's provided evidence about the existence of that
15 discussion or the occurrence of that discussion. So would
16 you agree with me that either she was there, or you told her
17 about it afterward?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yeah, I did not discuss
19 with -- outside of that secure room in which I received the
20 briefing, I didn't discuss this with anyone.

21 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** I see.

22 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And so if Ms. Astravas
23 has testified she was aware of it, then she may have been
24 present during that discussion, but I can't recall -- I want
25 to be able to testify truthfully here, and I can't recall
26 whether or not she was in the room but that would be
27 consistent with her.

28 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay, that's helpful.

1 Okay. So then I just have a few kind of final questions,
2 then.

3 So Minister -- and Mr. van Ert put this to
4 you, it's this idea of kind of putting your legal obligations
5 as Minister of Public Safety before any partisan or party
6 considerations, and there was evidence about that. So I want
7 to just drill down to what that might mean specifically, if I
8 could, in practical terms.

9 So hypothetically, if a warrant application
10 came to you and you knew the target, would you recuse
11 yourself from any decision regarding that warrant?

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I've been involved in
13 very many warrant applications, Sir, as an officer in charge
14 and as an affiant and as the Minister, which I have known the
15 people named. I would only recuse myself if I felt a
16 conflict existed, and in none of the warrant applications
17 that were ever brought before me did I ever feel that any
18 conflict existed.

19 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** I see. So it's only if
20 there were a conflict of interest of some kind that you'd
21 recuse yourself.

22 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And, again, I think it's
23 very important to make sure that we are always -- knowing
24 individuals, and certainly I believe I always have been, but
25 I -- there has never been a warrant application in which I
26 felt that I was in any way conflicted in fulfilling my legal
27 obligations as the Minister of Public Safety to approve a
28 warrant application. And, in fact, every application that

1 was ever brought before me, in fact, I have approved.

2 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And so I want to ask you
3 the same type of question about the Vanweenen list, which
4 seemed to be a point of particular interest for Ms. Astravas,
5 and as you know that's something -- the intercept list is
6 something that's a standard part of this type of a warrant.

7 And so if you were to know any of the names,
8 hypothetically, on a Vanweenen list, would you -- what steps
9 would you take in relation to your role in approving that
10 warrant?

11 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And, quite frankly,
12 knowing -- the Vanweenen list is a list of known persons.
13 And so knowing people on that list, again, exercising my
14 statutory responsibilities for the approval of the warrant
15 application to go forward, whoever's named in the warrant as
16 a target, or who may be named on that Vanweenen list of known
17 persons whose communications could be intercepted is frankly
18 irrelevant to my determination as to my responsibility to
19 approve that warrant if it's properly formed.

20 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** And would the same kind
21 of conflict of interest analysis that you just -- you offered
22 up as a limiting principle or rule in relation to the
23 approval of a warrant's target, would you apply the same lens
24 in relation to the Vanweenen list and the names on it?

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Again, it's very
26 hypothetical because at no time did I ever feel in any way
27 conflicted with approving the information that was put before
28 me. Some of the -- again, I don't want to -- I've got to

1 avoid talking about -- there has never been a circumstances
2 where anyone named in any warrant application, or quite
3 frankly, even in my experience as an affiant and the officer
4 in charge of bringing forward these applications under part 6
5 of the Criminal Code, there has never been an occasion for me
6 where I felt any conflict of interest in fulfilling my legal
7 obligations to fully disclose and to act upon my legal
8 responsibilities.

9 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Okay, Sir. So in my
10 time remaining there's one last theme I want to return to.
11 So if the Registrar could please call up WIT121?

12 **--- EXHIBIT No. WIT0000121:**

13 Addendum to In Camera Examination
14 Summary: Mr. David Vigneault, Ms.
15 Michelle Tessier and Ms. Cherie
16 Henderson

17 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** This is -- there were a
18 number of witness statements provided by your former
19 colleagues at CSIS, or your current colleagues, I should say.
20 And so, I'm interested in paragraph 12, please, if we could.

21 And so again, Minister, you'll recall that I
22 asked you a minute ago about a briefing that Ms. Tessier had
23 held with Ms. Astravas prior to the warrant being submitted.
24 And I just want to take you to the first sentence here in
25 paragraph 12. And so this -- and I should just tell you that
26 this was confirmed in cross-examination:

27 "Ms. Tessier also briefed the
28 Minister's Chief of Staff prior to

1 the warrant being submitted so it did
2 not arrive without warning on the
3 Minister's desk."

4 So I'm just curious about that. Is it the
5 case that CSIS routinely gives advance briefings to the Chief
6 of Staff of the Minister of Public Safety to warn them in
7 advance that a CSIS warrant application is arriving at the
8 Ministry?

9 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I have no idea, quite
10 frankly. Because frankly, Ms. Tessier or Ms. Astravas have
11 never told me about this discussion. I don't know what their
12 intention or what the routine is.

13 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** So you've never heard of
14 such a thing?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Well, and again, I'm not
16 surprised that officials would talk to each other, it's kind
17 of their job.

18 **MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY:** Well, and what -- why
19 would you want to give warning? So here's the thing, Sir,
20 that I'm trying to understand. The warning would be to you,
21 because it is your decision ultimately, to approve or not
22 approve a warrant application, and that warning was passed up
23 through the Chief of Staff. Why would CSIS have wanted to
24 warn you in advance that they warrant application was on its
25 way?

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Frankly, I have no idea.
27 It's a question best put to the person who suggested that
28 they were issuing a warning. I did not require one, and in

1 fact in this case or any other case, I did not receive one.
2 In every case CSIS, Public Safety, my office, worked together
3 and when the warrant application was complete for my approval
4 it was then brought to my attention and I went and approved
5 it.

6 MR. SUJIT CHOUDHRY: Thank you, Sir. Thank
7 you, Commissioner.

8 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Thank you.

9 Next on is Mr. Jarmyn for Erin O'Toole.

10 --- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. THOMAS JARMYN:

11 MR. THOMAS JARMYN: Good morning, Minister.
12 Tom Jarmyn, on behalf of Erin O'Toole.

13 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Morning, Sir.

14 MR. THOMAS JARMYN: I'm going to ask you a
15 couple questions, maybe that fill in some blanks around what
16 my colleagues have asked. And the first one is, prior to
17 COVID's onset, you were getting information, briefings, et
18 cetera, in the regular flow of business at your office in
19 Ottawa. Is that correct?

20 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Yeah, for a relatively
21 brief period of time period but prior to COVID there was more
22 information coming through the Department of Public safety
23 from CSIS.

24 MR. THOMAS JARMYN: Right. And you're aware
25 that there's positive control over top secret documents?

26 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Yes.

27 MR. THOMAS JARMYN: And we can determine
28 exactly where those documents land at any one time?

1 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Well, I'm aware of --
2 frankly, I'm very aware of the system that we have in place
3 in the Department of National Defence and the tracking of all
4 those top-secret documents. I think that the testimony that
5 has already been entered before this Inquiry shows some
6 deficiency in the tracking of top-secret documents. Not
7 compromising their security, but who they actually got to.

8 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Possibly within your
9 office, was such a tracking system in place within your
10 office?

11 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Again, I believe that
12 information that was received was tracked, but we didn't of
13 course -- we weren't able to track the information that was
14 not shared with us.

15 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Right. Thank you.
16 You have political staff working for your
17 office, and we refer to them as exempt staff. Is that
18 correct?

19 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** That's correct.

20 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** And they exist to
21 represent you with respect to the various departments that
22 you're dealing with?

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** There are a number of
24 different functions within every ministerial office, issues
25 around policy, parliamentary affairs, working with other
26 members of parliament, there are issues of people that deal
27 with my scheduling, et cetera, and part of the Minister's
28 staff.

1 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** All right. Thank you.

2 And we heard from Ms. Astravas that there
3 were two people in your office in Public Safety who were
4 assigned the responsibility to review warrant applications.
5 Is that your understanding?

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, Ms. Astravas
7 ran the Minister's office and had personnel who had certain
8 duties and assignments with respect to it. I know that that
9 work was done and is necessary to be done, working with
10 Public Safety and CSIS to bring the document, when ready, for
11 my attention and action.

12 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Were those staff
13 providing you with advice with respect to the warrants?

14 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, the advice
15 that I received from the warrant is based statutorily. It
16 really comes from -- I did not receive advice either from the
17 Chief of Staff with respect to the signing of a warrant, or
18 any of the exempt staff that you referred. My legal
19 responsibility with respect to those warrants was determined
20 by a letter of recommendation signed by the Deputy Minister,
21 and then a briefing provided by CSIS officials.

22 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** So if your staff were not
23 providing advice, what was the purpose of having them review
24 warrants?

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, they would
26 work, I think, with them to make sure that the document was -
27 - any questions that needed to be resolved prior to it being
28 brought to my attention, that that work would be done. My

1 expectation that all the parties responsible would exercise
2 due diligence in bringing the warrant forward to make sure
3 that it was appropriate in both form and substance, for my
4 consideration and approval.

5 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** And you'll agree these
6 words were fairly complicated documents, often verging on 80
7 to 100 pages with respect to the affiant's case that the
8 warrant should be executed?

9 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I certainly would agree
10 that they can be quite complicated, and there are -- I mean,
11 in addition to the affiant's statement that is submitted in
12 support of the application, there are a number of other
13 related documents that are part of that. And although I'm
14 quite familiar with the form and substance of such
15 applications, it can be complicated.

16 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Yes. And neither Ms.
17 Astravas, nor the other staff member assigned to review the
18 warrants was a lawyer, were they?

19 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I don't believe at that
20 time there were any people with law degrees on the staff.

21 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Are you aware whether or
22 not they had prior experience with respect to national
23 security documents, prior to working for you?

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I don't believe they
25 did, but they were of course vetted, and there was some
26 training that was provided by PCO and by the national
27 security agencies with respect to the security of the
28 information that was being shared.

1 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Was that the only
2 qualification they would have with respect to the review of
3 warrants?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** They did not have legal
5 training, as you've pointed out, but there was some training
6 about and requirement that they become familiar with the
7 process, and through discussions as has been previously
8 entered as evidence, that there were a number of these
9 applications coming forward.

10 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** All right. Thank you.

11 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** So they would be
12 familiar with those, those processes.

13 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Were you ever briefed
14 with respect to concerns regarding Han Dong and the Don
15 Valley North race?

16 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, I have been
17 subject -- I have had a number of briefings from CSIS. I'm
18 going to turn to you with respect to this matter, but ---

19 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** There are documents
20 before the Commission where staff of the Liberal Party and
21 the Prime Minister's office are briefed in September and
22 October of 2019. Do you recollect contemporaneous briefings
23 with respect to Mr. Dong, or Don Valley North, shortly after
24 your appointment as Minister of Public Safety?

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Shortly after my
26 appointment of Minister of Safety, I had conversations with
27 the Director of CSIS as part of the several months before
28 briefing to which we've already referred in this hearing, in

1 which information with respect to potential political
2 interference involving a number of people was discussed. And
3 at that time, I became aware of the information you've
4 referenced.

5 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Okay. Thank you.

6 Can we bring up EOT17 and go to the bottom of
7 page 17, PDF, please?

8 **--- EXHIBIT No. EOT0000017:**

9 NSIRA 2022 Annual Report

10 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Sir, this is the 2022
11 NSIRA Annual Report. NSIRA reviews the activities of CSIS.
12 If we can go to the bottom of the page, please? And you'll
13 see there, Sir, that it records that in 2020, 15 section 21
14 applications were approved; and in 2021, 31 were approved.
15 For the prerequisites for approvals, of course, that you
16 approved the warrant being presented to the Federal Court.
17 Do those numbers seem consistent with your experience?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Sir. I have no
19 basis to dispute that. As I have earlier testified, I don't
20 know the precise number, and if this is the number that NSIRA
21 has provided then I accept it.

22 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Okay. So particularly in
23 2020, when you were the Minister for the entirety of that
24 year, that means you would have attended at a SCIF at least
25 15 times to receive a briefing with respect to these
26 documents?

27 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I can tell you that in
28 every single case where I signed off on these documents, they

1 were presented to me in a secure facility, a SCIF, every
2 single time.

3 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** And there would have been
4 ample opportunity to present other top-secret documents to
5 you as well during those present -- those occasions?

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** There's no reason why
7 not. If other top-secret documents CSIS wanted to share them
8 with me that I would be in a location where that could take
9 place.

10 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** And during your -- in
11 your evidence, you testified that the standard or the usual
12 process was 4 to 8 days for the presentation of a warrant to
13 you. Do you agree with that?

14 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Well, again, I think
15 there are some circumstances, as we've already testified,
16 there are some circumstances where CSIS would indicate that
17 there was a matter of urgency with respect to the signing,
18 and that could be an operational urgency and it could be an
19 administrative one if, for example, an existing authorization
20 was expiring ---

21 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Okay.

22 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** --- and they needed to
23 renew it.

24 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** All right. And I would
25 draw upon your previous experience as a law enforcement
26 officer, you've had extensive experience dealing with
27 warrants, both as a supervisor and as an affiant; is that
28 correct?

1 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Sir.

2 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** And as a result, you're
3 aware of the importance of timeliness of the presentation of
4 the affiant's evidence to the court?

5 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** It can be quite
6 important.

7 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Well, isn't it always
8 important?

9 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And it needs to be
10 accounted to, to the Justice when you're bringing the
11 affidavit and the application forward.

12 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Because the longer the
13 time passed, the greater the likelihood that the Justice will
14 say, "I need contemporaneous evidence in order to evaluate
15 this affiant."

16 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, a lot would
17 depend on the circumstances, and so it's hard to comment on a
18 hypothetical, but at the same time, I do understand the
19 principle of timely -- bringing forward the information
20 before a Justice for their consideration.

21 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** And when these
22 applications were presented to you for approval, they always
23 included the affiant's affidavit and whatever supporting
24 evidence and exhibits were attached ---

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** That's correct.

26 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** --- to those. And you
27 reviewed those in detail; didn't you?

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Sir, I did.

1 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** And wouldn't you have
2 noticed the date of the affidavit when the affiant swore the
3 evidence?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, that
5 information was not available to me. I did not see anything
6 in those applications that caused me any concern. And again,
7 in my conversations with the director, he did not indicate
8 any concern with the timeliness of ---

9 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Sorry, Sir ---

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** --- the application.

11 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** --- that's not my
12 question. My question is, when you reviewed the documents,
13 you're reviewing the affidavit. The date of the affidavit is
14 actually an important part of the application.

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, I have no
16 recollection of what the date on any of those applications
17 were, but I did read through the application to determine its
18 substance. And as I've previously testified, under no -- not
19 at any time did the director of CSIS or any CSIS officials
20 express to me any concern with the timeliness of my approval.

21 **MR. THOMAS JARMYN:** Sir, but I'm putting it
22 to you, your concern as an experienced law enforcement
23 officer, aware of the importance of timeliness of these
24 things, did you -- you would have paid attention to the date
25 of the affidavit ---

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, if I may, Sir, I
27 read the document in total. I did not see anything that
28 caused me concern with respect to the timeliness of the

1 application and CSIS did not raise to me any concerns either
2 at the time or subsequently ---

3 MR. THOMAS JARMYN: Forgive me, Sir, I'm not
4 ---

5 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: --- with a delay.

6 MR. THOMAS JARMYN: --- speaking about any
7 particular warrant. I'm talking about as a general matter of
8 practice you would have looked at the date of the affidavit;
9 wouldn't you?

10 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Again, Sir, I looked at
11 the affidavit in its totality, and there was nothing in the
12 affidavit in that or in any other warrant application that
13 caused me any concerns with respect to the timeliness of the
14 application.

15 MR. THOMAS JARMYN: I'll conclude with this
16 last question then. When your staff were reviewing the
17 documents, or the affidavit documents, if it came to their
18 attention they had a personal relationship with either the
19 target or someone identified on the Vanweenan list, was it
20 appropriate for them to continue giving you advice?

21 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: My expectation is if any
22 of my staff -- and this has been well communicated. There --
23 we have standards of conduct, and my expectation is everyone
24 would understand the rules with respect to declaring a
25 conflict of interest. That did not take place in any of
26 these matters.

27 MR. THOMAS JARMYN: Thank you, Sir. Thank
28 you, Commissioner.

1 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

2 Counsel for the Conservative Party, M. Lew?

3 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. NOAH LEW:**

4 **MR. NOAH LEW:** Thank you, Commissioner. For
5 the record, my name is Noah Lew, and I'm counsel for the
6 Conservative Party of Canada.

7 Minister Blair, I want to ask you about the
8 employment relationship you had with your former Chief of
9 Staff Zita Astravas. Ms. Astravas was hired as your chief of
10 staff at the same time you're appointed as the Minister of
11 Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness; correct?

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** That's correct.

13 **MR. NOAH LEW:** Had you worked with Ms.
14 Astravas previously?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Not directly. I was
16 aware she had served as a chief of staff to another minister
17 in another ministry.

18 **MR. NOAH LEW:** But you'd never worked
19 together directly in any capacity?

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No.

21 **MR. NOAH LEW:** How did Ms. Astravas come to
22 be your chief of staff, and in particular, did the Prime
23 Minister's Office play any role in her becoming your chief of
24 staff?

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No. I interviewed a
26 number of people. I had -- in a previous ministerial role, I
27 had another person who had served as my chief of staff, and
28 that person was leaving the public service at that time, so I

1 had to interview available qualified people for that
2 position. And, again, Ms. Astravas came with pretty
3 exceptional experience, and particularly in a large ministry,
4 the Department of National Defence, and so she was eventually
5 selected by me to serve as my chief of staff.

6 **MR. NOAH LEW:** And did anyone recommend Ms.
7 Astravas to you?

8 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Many of the people I
9 talked to talked about -- including the minister with whom
10 she had formerly worked, recommended her for her experience,
11 her diligence, and that was very consistent with my
12 discussion with her and my subsequent working with her.

13 **MR. NOAH LEW:** But the PMO, no one in the PMO
14 played any role in recommending or suggesting Ms. Astravas?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** They did not share with
16 me any objections or concerns with respect to my selection of
17 Ms. Astravas, but Ms. Astravas was my choice to be my chief
18 of staff.

19 **MR. NOAH LEW:** I'm going to move to
20 discussing the warrant application that we've been discussing
21 extensively this morning. Have you ever discussed the
22 individual that was the subject of the warrant with anyone
23 that works or worked in the Prime Minister's Office?

24 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Sir, never.

25 **MR. NOAH LEW:** And so I just have one final
26 topic. The Vanweenan list that was associated with this
27 warrant, did you review that list carefully?

28 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I reviewed the entire

1 application package that was put before me very carefully,
2 yes.

3 **MR. NOAH LEW:** Would it surprise you to know
4 if in the spring of 2021 your chief of staff did not know
5 what a Vanweenan list was?

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** It's a -- it's not a
7 well-known element of law. It's -- it was a Supreme Court
8 case from 1988, one of which, frankly, I was the officer in
9 charge of dozens of wiretap investigations at that time, and
10 I was quite familiar with it, but it is a somewhat, prior to
11 this discussion, an obscure element of a requirement of
12 warrant applications. And so I'm not surprised that someone
13 may not have been familiar with that legal requirement.

14 **MR. NOAH LEW:** Right, someone generally,
15 perhaps, but your chief of staff, that doesn't surprise you
16 that the chief of staff of Public Safety, who'd been dealing
17 with warrants from CSIS already for some time now?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I can't comment on what
19 someone may or may not have known about that legal
20 requirement. As I said, it's -- the list of known persons is
21 something quite familiar to those of us who dealt with those
22 matters in part VI and in other legislation, but a lack of
23 familiarity with it does not surprise me.

24 **MR. NOAH LEW:** Minister, did you personally
25 or professionally know anyone on that Vanweenan list?

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I can't comment on that.
27 And, frankly, for me, that was irrelevant. Whether I knew
28 anyone on a list of known persons isn't part of my legal

1 obligation to review and approve the warrant if it's correct
2 in form. So not a consideration that I took any note of.

3 **MR. NOAH LEW:** Did you recognize any of the
4 people on the Vanweenan list as being parliamentarians?

5 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And again, I'm not going
6 to say anything that has -- would have the effect of
7 potentially identifying anyone because that would be quite
8 improper.

9 **MR. NOAH LEW:** And I have one final question
10 for you, Minister, were any of your Cabinet colleagues
11 included on the Vanweenan list?

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And, again, a clever
13 question, but the answer's the same. I'm not going to say
14 anything that would tend to identify any individual on that
15 list because it would be quite improper.

16 **MR. NOAH LEW:** Okay. Notwithstanding that,
17 Commissioner, I trust that those questions will be noted and
18 hopefully asked of the Minister in camera if they haven't
19 already been.

20 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** They are noted.

21 **MR. NOAH LEW:** Okay. Thank you very much.

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Next one is Mr. Sirois
23 for the RCDA, the Russia Canadian Democratic Alliance, Mr.
24 Blair.

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Thank you.

26 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:**

27 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** You'll probably be
28 happy to learn that I won't be asking any questions about a

1 warrant.

2 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: I don't mind, Sir.

3 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: No. During your
4 testimony before this Commission, you testified in the
5 spring, you testified that you did not see any evidence of
6 Russian interference directed at the outcome of the 2019 and
7 2021 General Elections. Do you remember that?

8 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Yes, Sir.

9 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: But you also mentioned
10 that the Russians were influencing other types of public
11 opinion during both elections, although it was not directed
12 at the outcome of the elections. Do you remember that?

13 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Yes, Sir.

14 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: We didn't have time to
15 finish that conversation last time because we had very
16 limited time, but I want to give you an opportunity to
17 explain what types of public opinion the Russians were
18 influencing during both elections, if you remember?

19 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: Yeah, we have seen
20 evidence in that election and subsequently in political
21 interference, the hostile activity of a number of different
22 countries, including Russia, which is intended -- you know,
23 different countries have different approaches to influence
24 and interference, but what we were seeing rather
25 predominately at that time from Russia was misinformation and
26 disinformation, which I believe had -- was intended to have
27 the effect of causing -- undermining public confidence in
28 important public institutions and inciting dissent more

1 broadly, and that, in and of itself, could be challenging.

2 What I did not have evidence of and did not
3 witness during that particular election was overt efforts of
4 that country to interference with the election itself, but
5 rather with Canadian society and Canadian perceptions of
6 elections, et cetera.

7 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** So we've seen pretty,
8 like, clear attempts to interfere with elections during the
9 2016 U.S. presidential election and the 2017 French
10 presidential election as well. So do I understand from your
11 testimony that we didn't see that in Canada and that's ---

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And to be clear, I was
13 not presented with evidence of that. There was, I think, a
14 necessary and appropriate focus among our national security
15 intelligence agencies on a number of concerning activities
16 that were overt, covert, and represented a significant
17 national security risk to important public institutions like
18 our electoral system that were deeply concerning and which we
19 have testified to, but I did not -- I was not presented with
20 evidence specifically of Russia engaging in that activity,
21 save and except for what I've already described.

22 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** All right. I
23 appreciate that. And even though there was no, like, massive
24 hack and steal attempts from Russia in the subsequent
25 disinformation that we've seen in the U.S. and in France, I'm
26 wondering if it's only theoretical to think that certain
27 political parties may use this dissent that is amplified by
28 Russia for their own political gains during the election, for

1 instance?

2 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: And again, I think
3 you're asking me to opine on something that I really don't
4 feel qualified ---

5 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Okay.

6 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: --- to offer.

7 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: That's fair.

8 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: I have not -- I'm not in
9 receipt of information intelligence that I could rely on to
10 form that belief. And again, I am well aware of the hostile
11 activities that certain foreign actors engage in in
12 undermining our institutions and attempting to interfere with
13 important aspects of our society and those institutions. But
14 with respect to the motivation of others, not those hostile
15 states, but others, I don't feel comfortable and confident to
16 be able to offer an opinion.

17 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Oh, that's totally
18 fair. And I appreciate your answers.

19 I'll move to a different topic now, one that
20 concerns your current functions as Minister of National
21 Defence.

22 I'll be blunt. Would you agree that Russia
23 is engaged in a hybrid war with the west, including Canada,
24 at the moment?

25 HON. WILLIAM BLAIR: In what kind of war,
26 Sir?

27 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Hybrid warfare. One
28 that is short of, like, actual military confrontation,

1 kinetic confrontation, but everything that is short of that,
2 including disinformation and interference with elections?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** We also -- if may,
4 there's also a number of non-kinetic hostile activities that
5 Russia is clearly engaged in, including cyber attacks, even -
6 - some criminal and some obviously politically motivated,
7 cyber attacks on our critical infrastructure, our data, our
8 information systems. As I've already alluded to, they're
9 engaged in a number of misinformation and disinformation
10 activities.

11 I think the motive that is apparent from
12 Russia is to disrupt and cause chaos and social division
13 within the country.

14 There are other approaches by other hostile
15 nations that are a little bit more long-term, and perhaps a
16 little bit more strategic, but that's my observation for the
17 concerns we have.

18 Some of it is kinetic, and so we're seeing
19 also activities from certain countries, including Russia,
20 much related to the current war in Ukraine, but also issues
21 of concern with respect to Canada's high north and the
22 Arctic.

23 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Would it be fair to
24 say, I know you mentioned the Arctic, it's a very interesting
25 topic as well. Would it be fair to say that Russia sees
26 itself in a war with the west, including Canada?

27 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Not a declared war. I
28 think very clearly, and I am very comfortable saying that

1 they engage in what we have termed as hostile activities of a
2 state actor that is directed towards the west generally, and
3 includes Canada.

4 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And I'm wondering if
5 we could pull up RCD88 at page 25?

6 **--- EXHIBIT No. RCD0000088:**

7 Cognitive Combat: China, Russia and
8 Iran's Information War Against
9 Americans

10 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** But first I'll present
11 to you the document, because we've heard from some witnesses
12 that Russia's engaged in cognitive warfare, hybrid warfare,
13 cognitive combat, information warfare. So there are a lot of
14 words being thrown around, and I understand your testimony --
15 please, can we stay at the first page for now. I'll present
16 the document to the witness first.

17 Yes, so there's a lot of terminology being
18 floated around. And I'm not sure that's the proper forum to
19 have that debate, but I'm wondering if we have any -- if we
20 can discuss about what follows from this situation? What
21 kind of recommendations would you have to better counter
22 Russia's aggressive behaviour towards Canada, including and
23 especially our democratic institutions, which is the focus of
24 this Commission?

25 So this is an article from -- an edited -- a
26 monograph edited by Bradley Bowman titled *Cognitive Combat:*
27 *China, Russia, and Iran's Information War Against Americans*
28 published on June 2024.

1 We can go now to page 25, please.

2 Would "information war" be an appropriate
3 term, Minister Blair?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Can I just suggest, I'm
5 very reluctant here testifying under oath to comment on a
6 newspaper article I have not yet read.

7 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Okay.

8 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And quite frankly, I
9 don't know anything about the basis -- the evidentiary basis
10 for what is written here.

11 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Yeah.

12 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And so I'm very
13 uncomfortable with the idea of commenting on newspaper
14 articles, for example.

15 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Oh, yeah. Just for
16 the record, this is not a newspaper article. This is an
17 academic article published by academics and post-doctoral
18 fellows, but in any event, I'm -- I'll try to move on just
19 from the idea of the terminology, because that's not the main
20 issue here.

21 There are some recommendations in this
22 article, and I want to have your opinion how to counteract or
23 better counteract Russia's hostile activities in Canada
24 directed at our democratic institutions, which again is the
25 focus of this Commission of Inquiry.

26 One of the recommendations -- well there are
27 three recommendations here, but globally, generally, they say
28 that:

1 "It is time to take the fight to
2 Moscow in the information domain.
3 That will require countering both
4 Russia's information-technical and
5 information-psychological efforts.
6 The following recommendations can
7 help Washington proactively counter
8 Russian disinformation and reach key
9 audiences within Russia and
10 elsewhere..."

11 So if it may help you be more comfortable, I
12 asked a similar question to Mélanie Joly yesterday and she
13 essentially agreed that sharing more information, more
14 truthful information with Russians abroad and with the Global
15 South were recommendations that she's already implementing in
16 fact, that she's already having interviews with radios across
17 Europe to promote democracy and the ideals.

18 But I want to know from a national defence
19 perspective, is it something that you'd agree is a
20 recommendation that Canada should implement?

21 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Well first of all, let
22 me strongly agree that I think one of the best antidotes for
23 -- to misinformation and disinformation is the truth. And so
24 I think it's very important that we should always tell the
25 truth.

26 I think there are also -- because the media
27 of this misinformation and disinformation is often online.
28 And so some of the legislative reforms that our government

1 has introduced with respect to dealing with online harms is
2 also an appropriate response to that threat.

3 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** And what's your
4 department's role, Department of National Defence's role, in
5 doing that?

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** The Department of
7 National Defence, our primary function is deterrence and to
8 protect the national interests and the national security. We
9 work -- national defence and national security are very
10 closely aligned and they're all within the umbrella of
11 Canada's foreign policy.

12 And so I think it's a whole-of-government
13 response, and I think that's what Minister Joly would have
14 also have indicated to this panel, there are a number of
15 things that we can, and are, doing in response.

16 Quite frankly, it would not be in the
17 national interest to discuss that too openly here.

18 **MR. GUILLLAUME SIROIS:** All right. I
19 appreciate your answer.

20 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

21 Ms. Teich for the Human Rights Coalition.

22 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MS. SARAH TEICH:**

23 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Good morning, Minister
24 Blair.

25 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Good morning.

26 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** As the Minister of Public
27 Safety, your portfolio included CBSA, CSIS, and RCMP, is that
28 right?

1 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, as well as the
2 Parole Board and Correction Services Canada.

3 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Okay. And as current
4 Minister of National Defence, your portfolio includes CSE
5 among other agencies, is that right?

6 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, ma'am.

7 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** So I'm going to focus my
8 questions on these agencies' work with various communities
9 and getting your thoughts on where they might improve.

10 So I'm going to start with Eritrea, and I'm
11 not sure if you watched the community panels last week, but
12 we heard from Ghezae Hagos Behre about ongoing repression by
13 the Eritrean regime in Canada, and he particularly flagged
14 that there may be some Eritrean proxy organizations in the
15 country.

16 To the best of your knowledge, has any
17 investigation into potential Eritrean proxy organizations
18 been undertaken or commenced by any of the agencies under
19 your portfolio?

20 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I'm sorry, ma'am, I
21 can't disclose any information about ongoing or potential
22 investigations. That would not be appropriate, nor would it
23 be in the national interest.

24 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Fair enough. As a general
25 matter do you think such an investigation would be valuable?

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And, again, that is to
27 be determined by the evidence and the situation that our
28 agencies may be dealing with.

1 But, again, I believe it's completely
2 inappropriate to discuss in this forum any investigation that
3 may or may not be taking place with regard to any of those
4 matters.

5 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Okay. In your opinion, do
6 you feel there is room for improvement within these agencies
7 so that they can better respond to and protect the various
8 diaspora communities most vulnerable to transnational
9 repression?

10 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I will certainly
11 acknowledge to do better is always possible. And I've also
12 dealt with this as a law enforcement official for decades. I
13 think it's important to reach out to those communities and to
14 provide them -- we have one of the most diverse countries in
15 the world, and in order to support that important diversity
16 in this country it's important that all of our government
17 agencies have a deep understanding, a cultural competency on
18 some of the challenges such communities might face, and good
19 lines of communication so that we can support and serve them
20 better.

21 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** I agree with all of those
22 suggestions. And beyond cultural competencies, I wonder what
23 your thoughts are on subject matter expertise and training.
24 And this is something that numerous diaspora communities have
25 recommended, which is they've advocated for increased
26 training of law enforcement so that if and when they call
27 with instances of transnational repression, the folks who
28 they speak to know what that is, know how to respond. In

1 your opinion would you agree that increased training for law
2 enforcement would be valuable?

3 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** And, again, I spent much
4 of my life in law enforcement and was in charge of the
5 largest municipal police service in the country. We work
6 very hard to develop that cultural competency within our
7 organizations. I -- just as an example, I used to maintain
8 nine different cultural consultants to communities where
9 leadership from those communities would be brought in on a
10 monthly basis to meet with our senior officials and to engage
11 with my officers. The intent being that we would learn from
12 them and that we would develop a trusting relationship with
13 them that would enable us to better serve them.

14 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Numerous diaspora
15 communities have also advocated for the relevant hotlines or
16 networks to be available in multiple languages. What do you
17 think of this suggestion?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I think -- I've already
19 mentioned cultural competency, but I think language
20 competency is also really important, and particularly in
21 diverse communities. And so it's always a work in progress.

22 Also in my experience, reaching out to those
23 communities and engaging with them to help us to provide
24 those -- that language competency and those services to all
25 of the diverse communities in the country is also very
26 valuable and I think it's proven its value a number of times.
27 Certainly I'm aware it can be very challenging, but it is
28 also very helpful.

1 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Do you have any other
2 suggestions for possible improvements, based on your
3 experience?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Based on my experience.
5 I've tried to actually operationalize anything I might
6 suggest, but as I've said I think because of the diversity
7 and some of the challenges our various diaspora communities
8 experience, I think that's always going to be a work in
9 progress and it needs to be a focus for all of us who have
10 responsibility for keeping people safe.

11 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Numerous diaspora
12 communities have also advocated for provision of physical
13 support, psychological support, mental health support. What
14 do you think of these suggestions?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, ma'am. I
16 understand an awful lot of people that have come from these
17 diaspora communities, based on the trauma that they've
18 experienced in the countries that many of them have fled in
19 order to come to Canada, and I think the services and support
20 that we're able to provide to them will enable them to live
21 rich, prosperous lives in Canada and to contribute to our
22 nation.

23 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Thank you so much. I have
24 no further questions.

25 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.
26 Attorney General?

27 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:**

28 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** I am correct, Minister

1 Blair, that in every case when you were asked to attend the
2 SCIF at CSIS in Toronto you'd be advised or notified a few
3 days in advance, and if you were going to be asked to approve
4 a warrant you'd be notified that -- not about the details of
5 the warrant, but that you would be asked to approve a
6 warrant?

7 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, that's correct. It
8 would actually appear in my schedule as -- they would
9 coordinate a time when I was available to attend, and it
10 would appear in my schedule as "Attend at CSIS for warrant".

11 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** Okay. On this
12 particular attendance when you were -- received a briefing
13 from the Director and you signed the warrant, do you know if
14 the affidavit was sworn or in draft form?

15 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Again, I don't recall.

16 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** Okay. You said that
17 there was no -- you were not notified of any particular
18 urgency to sign a warrant. I believe you indicated that in
19 some cases, one example you gave was the renewal of a warrant
20 when the warrant may be expiring. Did you have experience
21 when you were told that it was urgent that you sign a
22 warrant?

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yes, Sir.

24 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** And did that occur in
25 this case?

26 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Sir.

27 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** And their timeline that
28 was referred to -- I think it's COM156 -- indicates that the

1 warrant was approved by the Court three weeks after the
2 briefing and when you approved the warrant. Does that give
3 you any sense as to the urgency of this particular warrant?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I have no idea what
5 transpired in the ensuing three weeks from the time I signed
6 the application until it went before the Court. The time
7 does strike me as long, but I have no basis to determine
8 whether that was appropriate or not.

9 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** In respect of Mr. Chong
10 and the reports that were referred to in your examination and
11 cross-examination, have you ever, at any time, received any
12 information that there was a threat to Mr. Chong's safety or
13 the safety of his family?

14 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** No, Sir.

15 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** Am I correct that a
16 decision to approve a CSIS warrant was yours and yours alone,
17 and it would be inappropriate to seek that -- or discuss that
18 approval somewhere else?

19 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** I believe that would be
20 extremely inappropriate, Sir. It was solely my authority
21 under the Act.

22 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** You've spoken about, and
23 have declined to answer, a number of questions with respect
24 to questions that might impede upon national security. What
25 is the -- can you elaborate what the risk is that you're
26 concerned about?

27 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yeah, a couple of
28 things. First of all, I think the integrity of those

1 authorities needs to be protected. It is not -- I think it
2 would be very inappropriate to compromise the integrity of
3 that warrant application process; I think it needs to be
4 protected.

5 I'm also very concerned that it would
6 potentially have the effect of identifying someone who's not
7 accused of a crime but who was the subject of an
8 investigation. And I've been engaged in many of those
9 investigations and the protection of that process, the
10 integrity of the investigation, and the protection of their
11 rights as citizens needs to be considered in the release of
12 that information. And to do otherwise, in my opinion, would
13 compromise not only their rights but also the country's
14 ability to maintain national security. Those authorities are
15 important and need to be defended.

16 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** And could there possibly
17 be a risk to confidential sources or methods of operation?

18 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** One of the things that I
19 think we always need to take into consideration is the
20 protection of investigative technique, the methods and
21 technology that our agencies might employ, and that should
22 not be discussed in a public forum. And also because much of
23 the information that CSIS or the police may rely upon comes
24 from human sources, and disclosure of certain information can
25 tend to identify those individuals. And the protection of
26 those individuals is also a responsibility of all of us who
27 are involved in those processes.

28 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** And is there also a

1 concern with respect to information that might be obtained
2 from partner agencies and protecting their -- that
3 relationship?

4 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Yeah, one of the things
5 that Canada relies and benefits tremendously from is our very
6 trusting relationship and what is often referred to as the
7 Five Eyes partnership, which is our relationship with the
8 United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New
9 Zealand. The five countries have a long-standing history of
10 sharing very sensitive and top-secret information, and that
11 sharing is predicated on trust. Trust among all of the
12 allies that we will treat our secure information, secret
13 information, and theirs, with the utmost care to make sure
14 that it is not improperly disclosed.

15 **MR. BARNEY BRUCKER:** Thank you. Sir, those
16 are my questions.

17 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

18 Ms. Dann, do you have any questions in re-
19 examination?

20 **MS. ERIN DANN:** No. Thank you, Commissioner.

21 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So you're free to go,
22 Minister Blair. Thank you for coming ---

23 **HON. WILLIAM BLAIR:** Thank you very much,
24 Justice.

25 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** --- and for your time,
26 and have a good weekend.

27 So we'll resume at 1:35. I think because the
28 witness is scheduled for 1:35, so.

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

2 This sitting of the Commission is now in
3 recess until 1:35 p.m.

4 --- Upon recessing at 12:00 p.m.

5 --- Upon resuming at 1:36 p.m.

6 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please.

7 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
8 Commission is now back in session.

9 The time is 1:36 p.m.

10 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** [No interpretation]

11 **THE REGISTRAR:** Madam Minister, could you
12 please indicate your name, your whole name, and spell your
13 last name for the record?

14 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Pascale St-Onge, S-t-
15 dash-O--n-g-e.

16 **THE REGISTRAR:** And now for the solemn
17 affirmation.

18 --- HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE, Affirmed:

19 **THE REGISTRAR:** You can go ahead.

20 --- EXAMINATION IN-CHIEF BY MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:

21 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Ms. St-Onge, we
22 will start by filing as evidence the document of your summary
23 897, WIT897 (sic).

24 Could we show the French version, please?

25 --- EXHIBIT No. WIT0000097.FR:

26 Résumé d'entrevue: l'honorable

27 Pascale St-Onge

28 --- EXHIBIT No. WIT0000097.EN:

1 Interview Summary: The Honourable
2 Pascale St-Onge

3 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** So we can see the
4 first page of the interview we held with you on July 3rd.
5 have you had the opportunity to read this document before
6 giving your evidence today?

7 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes. I have a little
8 correction to make.

9 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** [No
10 interpretation]

11 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** On page 6, paragraph
12 15, a country is mentioned, Iceland. The country should be
13 Finland.

14 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** We will note that
15 change. The document will say Iceland, but the correction
16 has been noted. So the Commission will see the proper name.
17 So do you accept that this be part of your
18 evidence before the Commission?

19 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes.

20 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** I will ask you to
21 describe your journey since you came into politics.

22 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I was elected for the
23 first time as the MP for Brome-Missisquoi in 2021, and my
24 first role in Cabinet was Minister of Sport and Minister
25 responsible for the economic development agencies for the
26 regions of Quebec. And then during the last Cabinet shuffle
27 in 2023, I was named Minister of Canadian Heritage.

28 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** So there's a

1 relevance to what you did before entering politics. I would
2 like to ask you what your professional career was before
3 entering politics, briefly.

4 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Well, briefly, I
5 studied French literature and Quebec literature and
6 journalism. I worked for La Presse newspaper for 21 years in
7 administrative positions. I got very soon involved in union
8 activities at La Presse, and then I was elected at the
9 National Federation of Communication and Culture as general
10 secretary. Then I became president.

11 I did that for nine years until the 2021
12 elections. And what I did was represent people who were
13 working in the information media sector and in medial
14 generally speaking, and also people who work in the cultural
15 sector.

16 So I devoted a large part of my career, first
17 of all, to work and working in the media area and to defend
18 it and to understand the functions of journalism and its role
19 in our society.

20 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** So before speaking
21 about your role as Minister of Canadian Heritage, I'd like it
22 if you could speak to us about this idea of the evolution of
23 the media landscape of the information news ecosystem over
24 the past two decades and your professional pathway that, as a
25 Minister, is relevant.

26 So you were witness to the evolution of the

27 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I was hired at La
28 Presse in 1997, and the functioning that media was very

1 defined. So news had to assume responsibility for a press
2 room, so that requires a lot of investment. These are --
3 this is employment. It's people who do this work, so it's
4 very expensive. And the news media which had a large part of
5 the advertising revenue in Quebec, and so newspapers' main
6 income were subscriptions and advertising revenue.

7 And in the -- my functions over my career, I
8 was able to see and to experience the effects, obviously, of
9 internet, but also the arrival of two main competitors for
10 the advertising market in Canada and everywhere in the world,
11 so I'm talking about Google and Facebook who, over time, had
12 up to 80 percent of advertising revenue, which was a huge
13 economic loss for the news media in Quebec and in Canada.

14 And very soon, I realized that we wouldn't be
15 able to solve these economic issues within each of the
16 newspapers by cutting jobs, by modifying operations, that the
17 problem was much broader than this, and that it would require
18 a different approach to try to save what we can all call a
19 pillar of our democracy, an essential component for the
20 proper functioning of our society, so journalism and
21 information media.

22 So for a long time, I worked with economists,
23 I studied this. I worked with lawyers, professionals to try
24 and find the best way of responding to that media economic
25 crisis. And very soon, we came to the conclusion that the
26 hemorrhaging was huge, that it was decreasing at great speed
27 over 10 years. More than 500 media closed their doors in the
28 country. Thousands of journalists lost their job. And so

1 there are fewer people who dedicate their lives to find out
2 what is fact and to present various perspectives to the
3 Canadian and the Quebec population.

4 I found that very concerning, and I told
5 myself that an economic situation could not be a sufficient
6 pretext to let the slow death of unpaid news happen. So we
7 arrived to a conclusion that the government had to take
8 measures to provide income and also to work on public
9 policies, regulations, legislation that would allow a better
10 balance of power between the web giants and the news media.
11 And that was produced by labour organizations, by experts in
12 the sector of media, researchers.

13 And we can also -- we can ask ourselves
14 constantly the best way of acting, but it required
15 determinative actions. And one of the things that we decided
16 on was to adopt measures that would allow supporting the
17 newsrooms but also conserving the independence of the media,
18 so to ensure that the state would not have any influence on
19 the work of journalism, on their capacity to do their work in
20 total freedom, freedom of press, freedom of information.

21 The best way we found to do this was a fiscal
22 measure, so a tax credit on the salary that allows to reach
23 the most objective criteria rather than subjective ones to
24 reduce the economic problems of the newsrooms. So they were
25 tax credits on the salaries of journalism -- journalists,
26 rather. That was the most important fiscal measure that we
27 put in place, and that worked, especially in Quebec, where
28 this measure was also adopted by the Quebec government, so

1 there was a double tax credit, federal and Quebec.

2 And I think it would be completely adequate
3 that other provinces do the same thing to slow the erosion of
4 the media world and the loss of journalism jobs that
5 continues, despite everything.

6 The second economic measures that we proposed
7 but that was also put in place by the government was the
8 creation of a fund called the Initiative for Local
9 Journalism. And this fund responded to specific issue,
10 communities, regions that weren't being well served by news
11 media. And this fund allowed us to support, year after year,
12 some 400 journalists throughout the country. So it was a
13 band-aid solution to a major problem, a major economic
14 problem.

15 And the second initiative was a series of
16 legislative changes that we were suggesting to the
17 government.

18 One of the things -- one of the examples
19 observed by the media sector was what Australia had done. It
20 created a framework within which there was an obligation for
21 the large platforms and the other media players to negotiate.
22 It worked very well. Google and other major players
23 participated and we suggested we do the same thing in Canada.
24 And this was done over the last few years. This was done by
25 the federal government.

26 It's an Act that was brought in by
27 predecessor, Pablo Rodriguez, and I finished up the drafting
28 of the regulations. This was sent to the CRTC and the

1 independent administrative tribunal that's in charge of this
2 took over.

3 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Thank you.

4 There are an awful lot of elements that we'll
5 come back to in the coming hour, but I do thank you for this
6 overview of the landscape.

7 Before discussing your mandate as Minister of
8 Canadian Heritage, I'd like to discuss misinformation,
9 disinformation as you view it within the media ecosystem in
10 the country.

11 We heard some evidence, and I think everyone
12 is aware of the fact that over the last few years, the theme
13 of disinformation as it ties in with foreign interference has
14 become a concern, an area of interest in public affairs
15 generally speaking. So what's the landscape looking like now
16 in the context of disinformation, misinformation?

17 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** There have been
18 attempts to interfere. All of these propaganda tactics have
19 already existed. What has changed are the means used by
20 groups or foreign states in order to create even more room
21 for propaganda and misinformation. I would refer to the
22 internet, which is immense, and social media, and I would say
23 that it's even more concerning that this space be more and
24 more occupied by sources of misinformation, disinformation
25 and foreign interference, especially in the context of the
26 media crisis that we're experiencing here in Canada, but not
27 just in Canada, throughout the world because the best
28 solution -- and I would refer to a lot of studies done by

1 experts in the area. The best solution to combat
2 misinformation, disinformation, it's two-pronged.

3 First of all, we must ensure that there are
4 credible sources of information out there that have the trust
5 of the people, that enjoy their trust in order to
6 counterbalance this abundance of disinformation and
7 misinformation. And within that space, in my view, and it's
8 the opinion of many experts as well, journalism and the news
9 media become even more essential in order to protect our way
10 of life, our democracy, our institutions. So that's one
11 thing.

12 The second thing is that we must ensure that
13 we have all sorts of mechanisms to improve the general
14 education level of our population. This begins in school.
15 School programs must include teaching about the way democracy
16 works, about the role of news media. There must be education
17 on the new forms of propaganda and disinformation. So this
18 should target children, future generations in order that
19 people become more resilient vis a vis what they can find on
20 the internet and other civil society organizations can also
21 carry out this work for all levels of society, adults,
22 seniors, et cetera.

23 These are the best solutions in a democracy
24 to combat disinformation and propaganda, and I believe that
25 we must be concerned when these tools for democracy are
26 attacked or rendered fragile for economic reasons or reasons
27 that I would qualify as political. For example, a government
28 that wouldn't react, that would remain inert when faced with

1 this crisis would be a concern, or if a government wanted to
2 defund or shut down its own public broadcaster would be a
3 source of concern because these are elements that belong
4 within the sphere of mechanisms for security in order that
5 our country remain resilient vis a vis countries that would
6 be opposed to our democracy.

7 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I have a question, Ms.
8 St-Onge.

9 We've always recognized, and I would hope
10 that we continue to recognize, the importance of the role
11 played by the media in a democracy, the counterbalance that
12 media offer to disinformation which is omnipresent.

13 My understanding, and you'll correct me if
14 I'm wrong -- I'm not an expert in the area of media
15 relations, et cetera, media work, but I think there's another
16 element that's important. It's the instantaneous nature of
17 news.

18 Once the news comes out, it's no longer news,
19 mostly because it's taken up by various platforms. So
20 there's some kind of pressure that seems to be exercised on
21 the media. In order that the news channels remain
22 attractive, you've got to churn out more and more news, stay
23 up to date.

24 And in the short, medium or long term, this
25 might also have an impact on the quality of the information
26 provided by traditional media. And if we want the media to
27 be able to continue to play their counterbalancing role, how
28 can we not resolve but change things? What can we do to try

1 to change things to ensure that the media that play this
2 counterweight role carry out their role with all of the
3 traditional journalistic rigor that we've always asked them
4 to ensure given the competition these media outlets are
5 facing?

6 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Excellent question,
7 and I think there are several dimensions at play here.

8 First of all, I would say that the race for
9 the next scoop, for the next news bite is something that has
10 already existed in the media, and it will remain. But we
11 must consider the fact that the financial difficulties the
12 media have experienced over the last few years have had an
13 impact on the way the newsrooms function.

14 Clearly, when you have less money, less
15 resources to send out your reporters to study in depth
16 various issues, if you have less funding to gather news and
17 carry out in-depth studies so as to offer various
18 perspectives around the same facts in order for the
19 population to have a better overview of the situation and to
20 make their own choices, well, all of this requires resources.
21 And I believe that our newsrooms were very destabilized in
22 their capability to carry out this work.

23 Fortunately, several newsrooms are continuing
24 to do this work, especially for issues, files that have a
25 higher public interest value.

26 What I would also say is that the media world
27 is going to continue to evolve and define its role vis a vis
28 the other types of sources of information that are out there.

1 And experts or professionals or associations of journalists
2 will probably be able to discuss this in greater detail with
3 you but, for example, the role of the media is perhaps more
4 to announce the death of someone who's well known. It will
5 be announced in social media first and foremost, perhaps, but
6 traditional media can delve into news like this in a more in-
7 depth way. And this requires work and resources.

8 So my response would be that one of the ways
9 we can ensure that the media retain the trust of the public -
10 - because, in the end, in our democracy journalism rests on a
11 principle of trust. If that trust is shattered, threatened,
12 as it could be vis a vis the justice system, well, things
13 will falter. And the media should have as a priority
14 ensuring very tight links with the communities they serve.

15 This trust be maintained, defended,
16 protected. And I would say that there are instruments that
17 are in place that can help, for example, codes of ethics that
18 frame the way in which reporters must do their work in order
19 to give a balanced view, an impartial view of the news so as
20 to maintain this level of trust with the population. And
21 mechanisms that allow those who are dissatisfied by
22 journalism, by the coverage given to news to be able to file
23 a complaint, ask for an investigation, an inquiry.

24 There are press councils in Quebec, there's
25 the ombudsman for CBC-Radio Canada who does this work as
26 well. This is important in order to be able to correct
27 professional errors if such errors are committed.

28 These are all tools, instruments that are in

1 place to assist reporters, to help them exercise their role
2 with integrity. Unions play this role as well. For example,
3 a newsroom or journalists, if they're being pressured by an
4 advertiser who isn't satisfied, isn't happy with negative
5 press coverage of its company or if someone is exercising
6 pressure for political reasons, the reporter could call upon
7 the union in order to be free to do his or her work.

8 All of this is important and all of this
9 requires the necessary funding in order to carry out this
10 work in the best possible way.

11 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

12 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** On this last
13 point, the mechanisms for protection that you discussed vis a
14 vis traditional media, if we look at the online platforms or
15 social media, are there similar mechanisms in place or should
16 there be mechanisms in place to ensure that there is not some
17 instrumentalization of these platforms to a given end, for
18 example, political?

19 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** That's the whole
20 problem, in my view, with social media, that don't respond,
21 don't follow the same code as journalism as a business, as a
22 professional activity. These are companies whose main
23 objective is profit.

24 They are trying to give a maximum of
25 dividends to their shareholders, so their goal is not public
26 interest. It's not their main interest.

27 We've seen with the platforms like Google,
28 Facebook and others is that, on the contrary, rather than

1 having -- rather than perceiving legislative frameworks and
2 regulatory frameworks as a good thing to create public spaces
3 that are well managed, that are positive or that create
4 social cohesion, well, these businesses fight against every
5 attempt by every government to look after public interest and
6 to put in safeguards.

7 The main problem with platforms, and I'm
8 talking about social media platforms, mainly, is that they
9 claim to have no responsibility over the content that they
10 host because these contents are generally put online by the
11 users themselves, so they refuse to have any accountability
12 as relates to what's found on their platforms.

13 And I'd say that when Facebook was created
14 and Twitter was created and Twitter had a previous owner,
15 there was that intention. I remember that Facebook, at the
16 beginning, was saying that this is the new personal journal
17 or diary for everyone, and so there was an effort to gain the
18 trust of users so that many could be on the platform. It was
19 the new place to find information, and that's how they
20 promoted the platform.

21 But what we saw over time is that the
22 moderating teams who were in place to make sure that there
23 was no harmful or pernicious content, that it was taken off
24 the platforms, were mostly fired or laid off, and that self-
25 regulation degraded over time and it went into what I'd call
26 a disastrous phase since Elon Musk has taken over control of
27 Twitter.

28 So what we see is that he -- they weren't

1 already -- they didn't have the intention of behaving like
2 responsible businesses, but now it's a lot worse. And every
3 time a government tries to legislate something, there's a
4 huge resistance from these platforms.

5 I think that those who saw the government try
6 to adopt a new law and online moderation and others and then
7 the *Online Harms Act*, these Acts are the -- or these attempts
8 are the object of great disinformation campaigns by these
9 platforms and the influencers on their networks to really
10 amplify their resistance to governments putting in place
11 legislation.

12 So for example, the *Online News Act* where
13 there was a huge disinformation campaign. Same thing for the
14 *Broadcasting Act* where, for a -- the platforms said that the
15 government was trying to censor users or that we had to --
16 wanted to add more taxes because we were asking them to pay
17 for the Canadian content made by Canadians.

18 And so that's the difference between
19 information media who can be held accountable for the content
20 that they're broadcasting. If it's defamatory or otherwise,
21 there are mechanisms so people can complain, but that's not
22 the case for these platforms. People who try to contact Mr.
23 Zuckerberg or Mr. Musk to get content taken off almost always
24 hit doors that are closed. So that's the difference.

25 So I think that governments should not
26 abandon their efforts. They have to continue to try and
27 propose -- promote public interest through various
28 legislative matters.

1 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** In that context, Ms. St-
2 Onge, we know that these platforms are very powerful given
3 their economic weight. They're everywhere in the world. And
4 so when a country like ours, which is relatively small in
5 terms of the weight we can carry faced by these platforms,
6 they really can do whatever they want.

7 And we saw it with the *Online News Act*. They
8 decided they were no longer going to carry some contents.

9 So are there efforts being made in that
10 context so that several laws -- countries adopt similar
11 regulations or even identical regulation?

12 So I think it's the same thing for tax
13 avoidance. So if we know that we're doing something alone,
14 well, it's not done, but if it's done at a larger scale, it's
15 more effective. So is that being done in terms of regulation
16 of platforms, discussions between various states, or does
17 everybody play the game just for themselves?

18 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes, it is done. And
19 you mentioned something very interesting.

20 You talked about the power of these platforms
21 because of their economic weight, but I would also add to
22 that their -- the weight of influence that they have, the
23 power of influence. So they manage this public space through
24 their algorithms and their data management, so that's a huge
25 power that they have.

26 And yes, countries, especially those who
27 share our democratic values and who share this attachment to
28 the pillars that are the very basis of our democracy, do

1 discuss this on international level. And each country --
2 even though the principles are similar in various countries,
3 but every country has to adapt those principles to their own
4 jurisdiction. And that's why there are various models that
5 have emerged, but that mostly respond to the same principles.

6 On the one side, there's the principle of
7 equity of power relationships between these platforms and our
8 information media, and also to impose a form of moderation or
9 accountability on the content. And that takes time, and
10 countries are not all at the same stage, but that is a part
11 of discussions among various departments or Ministers when we
12 meet our counterparts of the G7 or the G20 or in bilateral
13 meetings with various countries, and that's why Canada was
14 inspired by the Australian experience, which New Zealand is
15 trying to apply as well.

16 And we know that Brazil and the U.S. is also
17 interested in the same principle, so there's kind of
18 coordination. But for Canada, which is the neighbour of the
19 U.S. and has a market that's much smaller for the platforms
20 than, for example, Europe or the U.S., the challenge is even
21 greater.

22 And it's not for nothing that Meta decides to
23 choose Canada to oppose itself that legislation because that
24 market does not have a lot of impact on its income, and also
25 that sends a message to the rest of the world.

26 So be it for issues of national security, for
27 interior national issues, it's also important on the world
28 scene that Canada continues to hold its position in that way.

1 So as far as Meta is concerned now, the law
2 has been implemented and it's at the implementation phase by
3 the independent tribunal, which is the CRTC. So the CRTC
4 will be asked to make a decision on this law and Meta over
5 the coming months, and I think there will be changes.

6 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** So now the
7 introduction is over. So I would like you to present to us
8 the role that you play as Minister of Canadian Heritage.

9 Your officials were here earlier this week,
10 but I'd like to have the Minister's perspective.

11 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** So Canadian Heritage
12 is a department that has the role of ensuring -- of
13 supporting the cultural and media production ecosystem in
14 Canada. It's an organization that grants loans and grants
15 for producing to independent organisms who can directly fund
16 content or organizations that create content.

17 In Canada, we decided that it's not the
18 government that was going to determine who was deserving,
19 what cultural content was deserving to be showed to the
20 Canadian population because there was great risk that it
21 would be politicized choices rather than enshrined in freedom
22 of creation, so we created independent organisms that have
23 experience in the sector that have professionals who have the
24 mandate to support the production of cultural content
25 throughout the country and also media production in the
26 country. And that's why most of the legislation related to
27 broadcasting or online news now is managed by an independent
28 organization that manages the compliance with these

1 regulations and laws.

2 So we want to protect our country, we want to
3 protect freedom of expression and protect the cultural
4 linguistic freedom that we have in Canada. So that's a major
5 part of the mandate of Canadian Heritage.

6 And I would say that with these issues with
7 social media, with disinformation and also artificial
8 intelligence, which is the most recent technological change,
9 Canadian Heritage is called to play an important role there
10 in terms of developing public policies to create a framework
11 for this.

12 And an interesting thing that was done at
13 Canadian Heritage in terms of disinformation, to my mind, is
14 the Global Citizen Initiative, which seeks to support
15 research on disinformation and foreign interference online
16 and also to support organizations in civil society that work
17 on what we talked about at the beginning, so resilience of
18 communities and of the Canadian population faced by this
19 disinformation and sometimes focusing on communities that are
20 particularly vulnerable to this.

21 So these are more recent developments that
22 have been added to the mandate and that follow technological
23 evolution in the country.

24 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** So when I listen
25 to you speak, we also think about what other government
26 witnesses said earlier in these hearings, that the role of
27 the state in relation to certain issues such as
28 disinformation, it's not to be an arbiter of truth. And when

1 you say that the role of the state has to be limited in order
2 to protect some basic values, we have found that in other
3 institutions.

4 So you talked about cultural funding, and we
5 can see the same values that support these two things.

6 So in terms of disinformation, what is the
7 role of the state? This is a general question.

8 We know there are initiatives. So what would
9 be the role of the state, according to you, in terms of
10 disinformation?

11 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** The role of the state
12 is not to be a censor. The day that the government becomes
13 the arbiter of truth, I think that we can really question as
14 to whether it's functioning democratically. There are values
15 protected in the *Charter*, such as freedom of expression, that
16 must always guide the actions of a government.

17 And that is a line that we should not cross,
18 to ask the government to be the arbiter of what should be
19 seen or not seen by Canadians. That's exactly what dictators
20 do in authoritarian countries such as Russia or China.

21 And I think that the other thing, and it's a
22 choice that we made in Canada, to have organizations,
23 several, not just one -- so several independent organizations
24 that ensure the support of culture throughout the country,
25 but it's also a government choice to have a broadcaster which
26 produces and presents that culture throughout the country.
27 It's a public service, and not a state broadcaster. And
28 that's what distinguishes us from authoritarian states where

1 their public broadcaster is an arm of the state to broadcast
2 propaganda.

3 So I think we have to respect these
4 principles as much as possible when we think about what means
5 the government should take to combat disinformation or
6 foreign interference.

7 It's more complicated than in authoritarian
8 countries, but in my opinion, if you cross that line of
9 censorship where the government is decided on what the truth
10 is, you are abandoning that principle vis a vis Canadians,
11 vis a vis the people.

12 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** In the same
13 context, and you mentioned this earlier, we've heard that
14 social society has a growing role to play, civil society. So
15 I'd like to hear your views on this.

16 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** One of the roles of
17 the state, I believe, is to support the tools that can
18 support this resilience that can help people play its role,
19 their role. The more a population is resilient, the more a
20 population understands the mechanics of disinformation, the
21 more it will have critical thinking. And the more the
22 population has a reflex that leads it to seek to validate
23 information from various verified and credible sources, the
24 more the population will be resilient. And therefore, the
25 education system is extremely important, as you know, with
26 regard to the jurisdiction of provinces and territories, and
27 this is something that we should have national discussions on
28 to ensure that the tools are provided to all generations in

1 the school system around these issues.

2 There are also researchers, laboratories that
3 carry out the research and make it available to the
4 population with regard, for example, to the events that have
5 been observed where disinformation can be demonstrably
6 proven, where there's evidence of foreign interference.

7 Something else the government is trying to do
8 is reduce online harm with a Bill. There would be a
9 requirement for greater transparency on the part of the
10 platforms with regard to reacting and protecting their users
11 against the seven harms that we've identified in that Bill.

12 That would be another way to increase
13 people's resilience and to better protect people from the
14 most serious forms of propaganda or disinformation, things
15 that we see in media.

16 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** We'll come back to
17 online harm a little later.

18 But getting back to Digital Citizenship ---

19 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I have to write this
20 down because I won't remember.

21 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** So it's a program
22 that has been in place for several years. Your officials
23 spoke to us at length about this this week.

24 The budgetary horizon is March 2025. In your
25 view, and you mentioned this during the initial interview,
26 you said that this is a program that should be retained over
27 time. What's the future of this program as you see it today
28 when you look at the horizon of March 2025? Is there

1 something you could tell us with regard to this program?

2 Is it going to be maintained? Is it
3 advisable that it be maintained?

4 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** It's a rather young
5 program, but I think it has proven its worth. It has shown
6 that research in this area is increasing and the sharing of
7 information, the cohesion and coordination between the
8 various researches has improved with the funding that has
9 been granted through that program. So I believe it is a
10 program that would be appropriate to be maintained.

11 We should continue to help the program evolve
12 so that it remains relevant and flexible in order to respond
13 to the issues, the new issues that are going to emerge, that
14 will emerge over time, month to month, year to year. It's a
15 program that has proven its worth.

16 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Minister Joly
17 appeared yesterday and we discussed with her an issue that
18 had also been covered by GAC officials, the future of rapid
19 response within the working group that oversees election
20 periods and the tools used to supervise the discussions
21 around this.

22 GAC's mandate ties in with this mission of
23 oversight for the national ecosystem and Minister Joly was
24 invited yesterday to comment on this, who could be
25 responsible for this oversight within the Canadian
26 government. And among the proposals, the ideas put forward
27 as an opinion, the Minister underscored this. Your
28 department was mentioned, and this is an issue that was

1 discussed with your officials.

2 This oversight, the operational aspect of
3 oversight, doesn't really tie in very well with your present
4 mandate, the present mandate of your department. So I'd like
5 to hear you on these two statements that were made.

6 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I can understand why
7 my colleague referred to Canadian Heritage because we're a
8 department that is greatly involved in everything that goes
9 on online. But in the present context, I share her view that
10 our structure isn't adequate to fulfil this role. We don't
11 have the tools that would be needed or the expertise
12 required.

13 And I would go even further, saying that this
14 would also be somewhat in contradiction with the present role
15 of Heritage, which is more one of support for content and the
16 distribution of funding. So the present context, the way
17 we're structured, the tools we have, wouldn't allow us to
18 play that role.

19 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Thank you.

20 In the context of your responses, several
21 elements have been mentioned. And I'll come back in greater
22 detail to some of these.

23 The first issue is the work done
24 internationally with regard to issues pertaining to
25 disinformation. What we understand, and here we're a
26 Commission dealing with foreign interference, and you're
27 saying that there's a broader view of things. You aren't
28 just dealing with disinformation related to political

1 interference, it's broader than that.

2 So I would like to hear you with regard to
3 the initiatives, the measures taken internationally to
4 coordinate efforts based on your knowledge of them, the idea
5 being to adopt common ideas or frameworks.

6 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** There are various
7 discussions at various levels around these issues, but this
8 doesn't fall in that closely with my broader mandate. We are
9 responsible for the tools we can support for Acts,
10 legislation that can be put in place to support these tools
11 to combat disinformation and to improve people's resilience,
12 resilience of citizens. These discussions are very important
13 at all levels of the government for each department.

14 When we think of artificial intelligence --
15 and I'll come back to this in a minute, but with regard to
16 social media, it was a first to see governments want to
17 legislate in this sphere, in this area, and the ability to do
18 so quickly was sometimes tricky. It was laborious. But with
19 regard to artificial intelligence, because of our experience
20 with social media, we're perhaps better prepared.

21 There are greater risks with artificial
22 intelligence as far as disinformation is concerned and the
23 ability to share false information tying in with political
24 interference. These discussions are immensely important and,
25 as I was saying, each country must legislate based on its own
26 codes, its own legal framework, but there are principles that
27 are shared by democratic countries. One of these principles
28 is transparency and there's also the principle of

1 responsibility and accountability on the part of those who
2 develop these tools. They must do this in a responsible way
3 and prevent the harm that can be done via artificial
4 intelligence. And it's really at the international level
5 that we must find ways of doing this in order for the
6 framework to be coherent, consistent for these platforms or
7 tools that are available worldwide.

8 So we have to have these discussions with our
9 allies internationally. This is very important.

10 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Now, looking at
11 the same issue but in the context of provincial
12 jurisdictions, you talked about this earlier, the territories
13 and provinces responsible for education. During the
14 interview, you mentioned a recent federal-provincial-
15 territorial meeting held in the Yukon.

16 Could you talk to us a little bit of the work
17 that is carried out with these partners, these necessary
18 partners given the nature of the issue?

19 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** We talked about
20 artificial intelligence that's a concern for my counterparts
21 in the provinces and territories, and we agreed to create a
22 working group on these issues to see how each one of us in
23 our own jurisdictions could work together collaboratively
24 with the complementary tools that we could put in place.

25 The reception of the idea was very positive.
26 The table is made up of officials and its work has begun.
27 These meetings have begun. It was very productive.

28 We also dealt with the issue of

1 disinformation and the role that provinces must play. We
2 discussed the role of the news media. I reminded everyone of
3 the importance of supporting news media in the economic
4 crisis I mentioned. I also said earlier that Quebec put in
5 place tax credits for payroll. It's, unfortunately, not the
6 case in the other provinces.

7 I sensed that all of my colleagues were
8 concerned with disinformation and the impact this has on
9 their communities, but some of my colleagues made criticisms
10 of the media and they seemed to be not too inclined to
11 support media outlets in their own provinces. And I think
12 this is very unfortunate because, as politicians, I think
13 it's normal to not always agree with the journalistic news
14 coverage given because we're often targets of this coverage,
15 but it's appropriate in our society to criticize the work of
16 the media.

17 This is part and parcel of a healthy balance,
18 and it's completely appropriate. However, I believe that, as
19 politicians, it's our responsibility to recognize the
20 essential role of the media and journalists in our society
21 and to respect their work. And I'm very concerned when I see
22 politicians who believe that it's appropriate to let our
23 newsrooms die, that it's all right to let journalists lose
24 their jobs and it's even worse when politicians attack
25 journalists, refuse to answer their questions or simply
26 decide to not respond, to ignore them.

27 I find that as public players with a
28 privileged role in our society, we hold power and we have

1 decision-making power and it's our responsibility, as such,
2 to respect and recognize the essential role of counter power
3 players in our society, and journalists hold this power and
4 it's power that belongs to communities, to citizens, and we
5 must act in a responsible way.

6 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Another topic in
7 terms of the federation, it's a program of numeracy and
8 working with the provinces to put that in place. Do you
9 think that -- or rather, digital literacy. Do you think that
10 would -- is something that should be put in place to have a
11 coordinated approach at the national level to ensure that
12 this ideal of citizen resilience could be nourished by
13 education programs?

14 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** The education programs
15 are managed by each of the provinces and it's their
16 jurisdiction, 100 percent. So given that we deal with civil
17 society organizations that put into place digital literacy
18 programs, we put those organizations in contact with our
19 counterparts in the provinces. They have their own
20 resources. Some already have programs in the schools, and
21 that's their jurisdiction and their responsibility, which I
22 entirely respect.

23 On our side, the digital literacy programs we
24 have can be implemented through the organizations that create
25 those programs who themselves have contacts and points of
26 entry into schools and other groups. And I would say the
27 other thing is that each within our jurisdictions because the
28 provinces and territories also have their public broadcasters

1 that are usually more oriented to education and they also
2 take part in this digital literacy and media literacy.

3 And so government also has a public
4 broadcaster which must play its role, Radio-Canada and CBC,
5 which employs about a third of the journalists in Canada and
6 has an important role to play in terms of news, in terms of
7 education on how media work, on how their own newsrooms work
8 and on online literacy in a general way, so there are various
9 ways that we can cooperate with territories and provinces.

10 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Thank you.

11 I'd like to come back on the *Online Harms*
12 Act, or Bill. You mentioned it earlier.

13 Could you explain to us, generally speaking,
14 what kind of harms are targeted and what are the mechanisms
15 that this Bill would like to put into place?

16 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** The general idea of
17 the online harms Bill -- and I want to emphasize that it's my
18 colleague, the Minister of Justice who's responsible for it.
19 The principle or the general idea of this Bill is that the
20 most serious harms in the *Criminal Code*, that these be
21 applied in a similar way, if I can say it that way, in the
22 digital world.

23 So the principle of the Act is to make the
24 platforms accountable in terms of sharing content that
25 violates the most serious elements of the *Criminal Code* and
26 to have the obligation of withdrawing them from the platform
27 within 24 hours. And we talk about the most serious harms.
28 We're not talking about insults or political opinions that

1 are not popular. We're not talking about that sort of thing.

2 We're talking, for example, about juvenile
3 pornography, about sexual images, content sexual that's
4 shared non-consensually and content that victimizes victims
5 of sexual assault. We talk about content used to radicalize
6 people, to incite them to action, to violent action, hateful
7 action. So we're talking about the most serious harms.

8 And what the Bill wants to do is to make
9 these platforms responsible to develop the appropriate tools
10 to protect the population against those harms. And the
11 application of that law, the enforcement of that law would be
12 managed by an independent commission that could obtain some
13 information from the platforms so that they demonstrate that
14 they're putting the necessary tools in place and also that
15 they respond to the requirement of withdrawing the most
16 pernicious content within 24 hours. And if they don't do it,
17 there would be serious financial sanctions.

18 So I would say that's the general intent of
19 the Bill and I would say that it's a Bill that's already
20 facing a major opposition campaign which is led partly by the
21 digital platforms and partly by people who perceive this as
22 an attempt to censor the population, whereas these are
23 already things that are forbidden in the *Criminal Code*.

24 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Is this a Bill that's
25 inspired by existing legislation elsewhere or is it
26 completely original? Is it totally Canadian?

27 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** It is Canadian. It's
28 definitely adapted to the Canadian reality, but it's inspired

1 by what's being done in Europe and what is being implemented
2 in other jurisdictions because all country have -- did trial
3 and error. Germany proposed a Bill, then went back and
4 proposed something else. But generally, one of the most
5 advanced jurisdiction is the European Union, so several
6 European countries.

7 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** So we asked you
8 during the -- during the interview, we asked why is
9 disinformation not in this list of harms.

10 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Because we want to
11 ensure that we don't go into a much more nuanced unclear zone
12 where there is a lot of grey, and exactly so when we talk
13 about keeping the balance between the state's responsibility,
14 so to protect the security of people, but also to maintain
15 freedom of expression, to make sure that we don't put our
16 foot in something that leads us towards censoring or, really,
17 having less freedom of information, so we really applied it
18 to the most serious harms.

19 And you have to remember that in democratic
20 society, the government can adopt laws when there is a
21 certain social consensus. So it's urgent that we act to
22 ensure national security, to ensure the safety of people
23 online, but this must be done as much as possible with the
24 approval and the support of the population.

25 So I think that when we go into areas such as
26 disinformation for which there's no clear definition, we have
27 to be very cautious.

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Madam St-Onge, We see

1 with the American election campaign -- we really can see that
2 phenomenon, but -- we could talk about it for a long time,
3 but it won't be the object of my question.

4 But we see this fact checking phenomenon
5 which is carried out, essentially, what we saw during the
6 first debate, the Presidential candidate debate. We saw that
7 the journalists or the hosts there were fact checking as the
8 debate evolved.

9 Is -- would this be maybe the goal of an
10 organization without becoming an arbiter of truth that could
11 verify facts? And I think during an election campaign, has
12 that already been explored and, if it has been, what are the
13 advantages and the disadvantages?

14 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes, it was explored.
15 It has been explored.

16 I think that fact checking is more efficient
17 when it's done live, like right away, before the erroneous
18 information is spread -- widespread. It's hard to put the
19 toothpaste back in the tube.

20 So in the Presidential debate, so the
21 journalists immediately when wrong -- things that were wrong
22 were said could correct it right away and the people who were
23 there could also balance it. So I think that's a very
24 efficient way and very appropriate way of doing it for that
25 kind of a debate, political debate.

26 And various researchers and also there are
27 newsrooms that do a lot of fact checking, and I would say
28 that when it's done by journalists in general, that's

1 accepted well. But that capacity of being able to react
2 right away to find what is false, that takes time and then
3 the damage has already been done. So that means that fact
4 checking does not -- is not as widespread in the population
5 as the fake news itself.

6 And what's happened over the past few years,
7 we said that platforms had put in space some models of
8 content moderation and there's a lot of experience there.
9 And finally, the platforms, especially when we're talking
10 about political content, they stopped doing that. And I'm
11 particularly referring to Facebook here.

12 And that happened during the last electoral
13 campaign in the U.S. People began to fight back and to
14 interpret the fact checking that was being done by platforms
15 because sometimes they were saying that this content has not
16 been verified or that it was false and sometimes they
17 withdrew content that was spreading more serious
18 disinformation.

19 And at one point -- well, Donald Trump said
20 that the platforms themselves were interfering in the
21 elections campaign, so some people said that one should not
22 prevent politicians or -- to share these things even if
23 they're not fact based.

24 So in order for such a mechanism to work, it
25 has to be accepted by the population, and so there's still a
26 lot of experimenting to do there. But it is one of the tools
27 that could help the population to distinguish truth and
28 falsehood and to use facts that have been verified to some

1 degree.

2 But there's no magical solution because it
3 takes multiple tools in order to have an appreciable effect
4 on the population and on our capacity of engaging in more
5 coherent, more peaceful debates fact based rather than
6 fantasies.

7 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I'll mention two
8 specific examples that were presented during the work of this
9 Commission. There's disinformation identified in relation to
10 Michael Chong and also in relation to Kenny Chiu. And I'm
11 not talking about attributions or anything like that or who's
12 behind it, but there were some disinformation campaigns that
13 were active.

14 So several people that we heard speak of the
15 -- among the officials are saying that even when we're aware
16 of it, it's not what we -- clear what we can do. And that's
17 something I'm going to have to reflect on that.

18 Can one think of a mechanism, even if it's
19 not right away, that will allow us to correct that, even if
20 it's not a complete correction? The question is, who has the
21 capacity to do this? Should we look at the media people or
22 think of an organization, a new independent organization, a
23 kind of council of the wise?

24 Probably not the government for the reasons
25 you mentioned, but is that something that some people in your
26 department or elsewhere are thinking of?

27 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I will read your
28 recommendations with great interest.

1 (LAUGHTER)

2 HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE: Well, immediately what
3 I would say is that we can maybe imagine other mechanisms,
4 but I would say that information media and journalism should
5 look at this issue of public interest, especially in an
6 electoral period, and also be interested in suspecting that
7 there are campaigns that are on. Sometimes it's very hard to
8 discern them, to shed light on them, but I think that that
9 could be in part the role of the media and journalists to do
10 that work, especially in -- during the elections.

11 Now, do they have all the tools and the
12 resources to do them at scale, that's another question, but I
13 would say that we can't expect and we mustn't think that the
14 whole responsibility would rest on one journalist, one
15 newsroom, one media. What's of interest is to have a
16 plurality of sources of information at the local level as
17 well.

18 In the context of an election, those who will
19 be following more closely the local campaigns, well, it's the
20 people there, the community. If there are suspicions that
21 there are efforts made by a foreign state to harm the
22 campaign of a candidate, it's locally that these issues will
23 be identified. So if you have local media, even in the
24 smaller communities, well, this is extremely important.

25 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: I imagine that, at the
26 same time, the candidate who is the target of a
27 disinformation campaign will realize this quite quickly, so
28 there's also the possibility that the alarm bell will be

1 launched by the person who's targeted as opposed to players
2 who could intervene, organizations that might intervene. But
3 we could envisage some central organization that people who
4 are targeted might call upon, but I understand that, for the
5 time being, there's no work being done in that area.

6 That's more what I was looking at, is there
7 something under way in this area, is there work being done on
8 this.

9 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I believe that there
10 are independent observatories that are carrying out this
11 work. I think you heard this talked about here during these
12 hearings.

13 There are independent organizations that have
14 expertise and that have the technology required to do some of
15 this work. That's an avenue that could be looked at. And
16 they must be able to act instantaneously as well.

17 On the other hand, there's also the
18 capability to spread this information with a view to having
19 an impact on the people during an election campaign, not
20 afterwards. Not once the election is over. So there are
21 challenges here, but we must explore avenues, especially in
22 an election period.

23 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I'm looking at the
24 clock. I'm taking over your time.

25 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** It's your
26 Commission, so I'm at your service.

27 **(LAUGHTER)**

28 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** We should be able

1 to conclude within the timeframe.

2 Based on the exchange you've just had with
3 the Commissioner, during your interview we talked about a
4 private platform like WeChat in the context of oversight
5 regulations, but you've mentioned here that there are
6 additional challenges sometimes.

7 There are massive exchanges with thousands of
8 people involved and the state -- the government cannot
9 necessarily act in this area. We're talking about public
10 platforms.

11 What's the challenge, the additional
12 challenge when this is done privately by a group of
13 individuals?

14 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Well, the challenge is
15 immense and total. I don't think the government has a role
16 to play in the context of conversations, private
17 conversations between individuals.

18 When we think of Facebook, we're looking at a
19 news thread that is made public. It's not private
20 information.

21 Same thing for the online harm Bill. It's
22 really much more complex if we're talking about allowing the
23 government to access private exchanges even if they involve a
24 lot of people. Some of these platforms are coded as well, so
25 there are technological challenges.

26 Personally, it's something that we shouldn't
27 necessarily feel comfortable with.

28 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Second question

1 going back to your exchange with the Commissioner, and this
2 takes us back to the Media Observatory, in some situations
3 there can be campaigns, disinformation circulating online,
4 and the intervention of traditional media could amplify some
5 false information that might have been more limited in its
6 distribution. So I'd like to hear you on this.

7 Official traditional media could amplify some
8 news, feeding into disinformation, misinformation.

9 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Indeed. And there are
10 cases where this happened, where the fact that disinformation
11 was discussed amplified it even if the initial idea was to
12 flush it out.

13 So it's not a simple situation. In fact,
14 what I would say is that this illustrates to what extent
15 people themselves, citizens themselves are the main actors in
16 all of this.

17 We as individuals are vulnerable for all
18 sorts of reasons, be it because of our milieu, because of our
19 level of education. For all sorts of reasons, individuals
20 might fall into certain traps.

21 I continue to believe that the best solution
22 is to work as a society on the resilience of the population,
23 and we've seen a lot of countries emphasize this, devote a
24 lot of efforts to this because they've been victims for much
25 longer of disinformation or foreign interference.

26 This does work and people are therefore, in
27 those countries, better able to combat disinformation when
28 they're being sold a bill of goods of false information.

1 They react. As a society, this is what we must strive to do,
2 and I think that all levels of government and all of civil
3 society's players must intervene, be it at the level of the
4 provinces, territories in the area of education, be it
5 federally when we're dealing with media. Civil society must
6 intervene.

7 This all comes back to the pact we have in
8 our society. We want to live in a free society, a democratic
9 society, but we have to play our role as participants, as
10 citizens. And my fear is that sometimes this role is not
11 well understood, well taught, well understood.

12 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** A final point
13 before moving on to the *Broadcasting Act*. Your Deputy
14 Minister, during the interview, mentioned that there are
15 avenues that are being explored to demonetize disinformation.
16 There can be profits made here.

17 I'd like to hear you on this idea that is
18 counterintuitive initially perhaps, but what is the
19 situation? What is your opinion?

20 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I believe it's an
21 avenue that must absolutely be explored because
22 disinformation isn't just limited to the actions of a foreign
23 government. It's also actions of groups that earn money,
24 make money with this because an explosive title attracts a
25 lot of clicks, a lot of visits, so it's a source of income,
26 unfortunately.

27 And even for states it can be a source of
28 income, so this is an avenue to be explored. We must find

1 ways of demonetizing this type of content.

2 And briefly, last issue, the *Broadcasting*
3 *Act*, the CRTC, you are responsible for the *Broadcasting Act*.
4 And in the context of the Commission's work, we've heard
5 suggestions during some consultations that the CRTC should
6 play a greater role to control content that is broadcast by
7 foreign media no matter their status, be they on the list or
8 not. That's not the aim of my question here. But a
9 representative of the CRTC explained to us the way the
10 various facets of its mandate come into play.

11 Do you believe that the CRTC or the
12 *Broadcasting Act* should be dealing with this? Should the
13 CRTC be acting to control this content coming from foreign
14 states and does this tie in with the difficulties you
15 mentioned earlier regarding state-controlled content?

16 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I believe that the
17 CRTC has put out ideas that are correct. The CRTC, as it
18 stated, is not an organization that is supposed to play the
19 role of censor, but it must apply the Act. And as we saw
20 with *Russia Today*, there are levers that the CRTC can use,
21 but this hasn't been done very often, if I'm not mistaken, so
22 it's something rather new for the CRTC. And I think it is
23 questioning its own role in this area.

24 But I'm not convinced, I'm not certain that
25 we would want to give it that kind of authority, those kinds
26 of powers. The CRTC isn't equipped to determine if a country
27 is authoritarian if it's acting in an organized way. I don't
28 think that aspect of the matter falls under the CRTC.

1 We could reflect upon this, but I think we
2 must preserve the role of that tribunal, which is to apply
3 and enforce an Act, which is also to be independent from
4 others -- other players like intelligence services, police
5 services or the government proper. That's very important.

6 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** Thank you very
7 much, Minister.

8 Commissioner, those are my questions.

9 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

10 I would suggest that we move right away to
11 the break, and then we'll move to the next steps, and this
12 will allow people to work on their questions.

13 So we will come back at 3:15.

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

15 This sitting of the Commission is now in
16 recess until 3:15 p.m.

17 --- Upon recessing at 2:57 p.m.

18 --- Upon resuming at 3:17 p.m.

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

20 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
21 Commission is now back in session.

22 The time is 3:17 p.m.

23 **--- HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE, Resumed:**

24 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So the first one is -- I
25 want to make sure I get it right -- counsel for Jenny Kwan.
26 Ms. Kakkar.

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

28 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Thank you, Commissioner.

1 Thank you, Ms. St-Onge.

2 I will ask my questions in English, and so
3 bear with me if there is a lag and you respond in French,
4 which you're welcome to do, of course.

5 I wanted to just have a conversation with you
6 about a few of the things that you testified to. One of the
7 things that you said in your testimony was that the role of
8 sort of individuals in creating resiliency is really
9 important because that, you found, in other jurisdictions has
10 been really effective to deal with disinformation.

11 And when you say "resiliency" amongst a
12 population or amongst citizens, I imagine that as individuals
13 or citizens being able to understand or identify
14 disinformation. Is that correct?

15 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes, partly. When we
16 talk about the population's resilience in order to understand
17 and when confronted with disinformation or propaganda, we
18 often talk about a population who will have the reflex to go
19 and validate things with credible sources of information
20 before accepting things to be true.

21 We're talking about a population who
22 understands that we can't rely on everything that we see
23 online on digital platforms or on internet in general and
24 that all the information to which we have access don't have
25 the same weight, and it's that effort, that particular
26 understanding of the university in which we exist, the
27 digital universe, that's very important for the population.

28 And also to have necessary tools to find

1 information that helps us determine if some content is
2 disinformation or if it's false or if it's incomplete, so a
3 series of things that would permit the general resilience of
4 population to increase.

5 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** No, I appreciate that, and
6 that context is very helpful. I think my question centres
7 around AI and with the emergence of deep fakes where you may
8 not even realize what you're watching is in need of being
9 verified or checked because it looks so convincing and real.

10 Do you think as that evolves resiliency is
11 going to be less helpful a tool ---

12 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** To the contrary.
13 Resilience and the understanding that there is a probability
14 that images that we see, that they are the product of
15 artificial intelligence, so even to develop that awareness
16 that these images may be doctored is essential. But there
17 are other things that can be done to help the population
18 distinguish when they're looking at images made in real time
19 or images that have been created with artificial
20 intelligence.

21 These are discussions that we constantly have
22 with other allied countries on these major issues and the
23 solution that's presented most often is this concept of
24 transparency, that there's an obligation for those who are
25 creating AI tools that there is an indication on the images
26 themselves that they are the product of AI.

27 And I don't think that's a concept that is
28 that new. Maybe in the world of AI it is, but it's a concept

1 that's existed forever, especially when we're talking about
2 news media or information media. So we have access to
3 verified journalistic information, but there's also access to
4 advertising. And there was always a code to indicate what
5 was part of advertising and what was information or news, so
6 the population knows that something that's been cut --
7 interrupted by an ad that people understand that it's not
8 news, that it's an ad.

9 So if we can identify identification codes
10 such as that, it would help the population distinguish what
11 is a product of AI, but for that, there have to be
12 obligations imposed on the people who develop those tools and
13 who use them.

14 So these are solutions that need to be
15 studied and so that one can determine how it would be
16 possible to do this. Would it be through legislation and
17 regulation or in other ways? So that's a discussion that's
18 in progress.

19 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** And is that a discussion
20 that's in progress with other Ministers in other countries
21 that are perhaps responsible for the same role as you are?

22 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes, definitely. I've
23 had discussions on these things with Ministers who have the
24 same functions as I have, but they're in other countries, so
25 with my counterpart in South Korea, for example, and recently
26 with counterparts from the European Commission.

27 And in a broader way with all my
28 conversations at the international level, it -- are the

1 officials from Canadian Heritage with their counterparts in
2 other jurisdictions, they also have these discussions about
3 possible paths to solutions or the best solutions.

4 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** I appreciate that, and I
5 imagine you're already anticipating the backlash you may get
6 from these AI companies when the time comes to pass any
7 legislation.

8 But moving on from AI, I wanted to talk about
9 another idea that you had raised in your testimony, which was
10 the idea of demonetizing disinformation, so making it less
11 financially appealing for those who might engage in it.

12 My question around that is, and you had
13 mentioned this before, it's difficult to have the government
14 or even for others to be the arbiter of truth. That's a very
15 sensitive role in a social fabric for citizens to get used to
16 and to trust.

17 Whether you're demonetizing or you're
18 regulating otherwise, don't you have to figure out what is
19 disinformation, decide and be the arbiter of truth in some
20 regard even if you're going to try to demonetize and
21 deincestivize (sic) it that way?

22 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I think that when we
23 talk about demonetizing, we're talking about the content and
24 how it is presented by the platforms. It's the way in which
25 the platforms promote some content that attracts advertising
26 revenue, so they want to make sure that content that attracts
27 more clicks, more income will be prioritized.

28 And so in terms of advertising, so it's not

1 directly related -- it's not, in the case of the government,
2 who is a holder of truth in terms of what's disinformation or
3 misinformation, but the methods that platforms use in order
4 to promote some content. So I don't have an answer on how
5 that needs to be done exactly. I'm saying that's one of the
6 means that's being discussed and that could be promising, but
7 obviously it cannot -- should not be done by creating a
8 situation where, all of a sudden, the governor becomes the
9 censor, the one who decides what's true and what isn't true.

10 And what's what we always keep in mind when
11 we look at any idea of public policy, but it's a -- the
12 government needs to explore how to decrease the prevalence of
13 these phenomena. And when we know there are people in their
14 basements who are creating this kind of content because it's
15 fund and it brings them income, maybe there are ways of
16 attacking this without touching the content itself, but more
17 the revenue that it generates.

18 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** I guess my question is, how
19 do you affect the revenue if, at some point in that chain,
20 you don't identify which content is being disincentivized or
21 -- because I think what I understand from your answer is --
22 and correct me if I'm wrong. I don't have to quite call my
23 son yet to ask about how to work social media, but I'm also
24 not on the other end of the spectrum. You'd be looking at
25 algorithms; right? So you'd be looking at amplification as
26 to how the platform amplifies certain stories and makes some
27 more profitable because the ones that are amplified, the ones
28 that get more clicks, views, more advertising dollars are

1 financially more lucrative.

2 So if it's looking at the algorithm, if it's
3 looking at what shouldn't be amplified because it may be
4 disinformation, how do you figure out what is disinformation
5 in the first place, what the algorithm -- because someone
6 needs to program it -- what the algorithm is looking for?

7 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** There already are
8 existing mechanisms in the platforms that are applied in
9 different ways. Sometimes there are moderating teams,
10 sometimes it's the programming itself or the algorithms, how
11 they're programmed, but there is a possibility in some
12 platforms of selecting content that is disinformation, that
13 people are saying is disinformation. And so that is
14 efficient to varying degrees.

15 And as I said earlier, platforms really,
16 really cut down the work of those people who were doing the
17 moderating and it's become more automatized, so instead of
18 having people, it's more automatic. It's programmed with
19 algorithms. And even in that case, it's not the government
20 that is determining if the information is true or not. It
21 comes directly from the public.

22 So there's a way of putting these things in
23 place, and I'm not saying we will do that. I'm saying that
24 this is one of the avenues that is being considered. And if
25 we did go in that direction at some point, it would be done
26 in a way to protect issues of freedom of expression and to
27 balance that with our obligation to protect the population.
28 So it's in that context that we have to look at that aspect

1 that was raised in the Commission's work, not as a final --
2 not as a solution, but as a way of thinking about it.

3 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Okay. No, I appreciate
4 your answer.

5 I think my final question on this of content
6 moderation, you mentioned the influence that these social
7 media companies have when you try to pass legislation. They
8 sort of are able to have campaigns of their own and possibly,
9 not that I'm going to accused anyone, but maybe disinform
10 about what the legislation will do for users, what it means
11 for the platform. That same company, then, when it's
12 responsible for content moderation, is sort of the arbiter of
13 truth.

14 Has there been discussion around the ways to
15 have transparency and accountability if they are left to be
16 the arbiters of truth in a way?

17 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** That's one of the main
18 challenges that we have with these platforms, specifically
19 with social media. It's the responsibility of the platform
20 to determine what we find on their platform and,
21 unfortunately, there is some protection that exists in the
22 U.S. whereby, at present, you can't sue a platform. A
23 platform can't be deemed responsible for content that exists
24 on their platform, all of this flowing from the pretension
25 that the platform is just a vehicle and it's the users that
26 put content online.

27 But the way things evolved and the attitude
28 of Meta in Canada that decided to prevent Canadians from

1 seeing news online demonstrates to the contrary, that these
2 platforms are already controlling and censoring the online
3 content, and they have complete discretion with regard to
4 what is amplified -- with regard to what is allowed to be
5 posted or not.

6 And I come back yet again to the concept of
7 transparency. We talked about this earlier with regard to
8 AI.

9 I believe that the government should have its
10 say on the programming of algorithms. However, I believe
11 that there should be much more transparency with regard to
12 the way these algorithms function, and this should be
13 discussed by individuals, by Canadians, disinformation versus
14 information, since it's not the government that should
15 determine what's true or what is not.

16 This should be debated within society. It
17 should be discussed in the same way.

18 We can say the same thing about different
19 types of behaviours on the platforms and the impact that it
20 has on social cohesion, on the way we behave. This is one of
21 the elements that is very important, and we must reflect upon
22 it and put in place public policies that would place public
23 interest on top overarching everything, superseding
24 everything.

25 You mentioned transparency at several levels,
26 and there's also accountability on the part of the platforms,
27 their responsibility with regard to what we find on their
28 platform and what they, themselves, promote and enhance and

1 promote for sharing, et cetera. And they impose it on us in
2 their newsfeeds.

3 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** I thank you for your
4 answers. It leads me to just one last question, which is, it
5 seems like you are considering ways in which to regulate
6 algorithms, which I know some others who've testified have
7 suggested may not be that helpful or possible.

8 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Absolutely not. I
9 said that the government mustn't be the one that determines
10 or that dictates to the platforms how to program their
11 algorithms. However, I believe that via requirements for
12 transparency it is possible that citizens obtain more
13 information as to the reasons why they constantly find
14 content in their newsfeeds, certain types of content. And
15 this is a distinction that's important.

16 Let's go back to content. If we think of the
17 most harmful content we can find online and if we want to
18 really target this within legislation, we must go even
19 further to ensure that it's not the government doing this.
20 We want to create an independent commission mandated to
21 verify the tools put in place by the platforms in order to
22 limit the sharing of content -- pernicious content, harmful
23 content on the internet.

24 I think there are ways of doing this so that
25 it's not the government that becomes the referee, the
26 arbitrator, but ensuring greater transparency on the part of
27 the platforms so that citizens understand why they're seeing
28 more of certain types of information or disinformation in

1 their feeds.

2 **MS. MANI KAKKAR:** Thank you so much.

3 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

4 Mr. Sirois for the Russian-Canada Democratic
5 Alliance.

6 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Thank you,
7 Commissioner.

8 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:**

9 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Good afternoon,
10 Minister. I would like to come back to the point you've just
11 covered with Ms. Kakkar.

12 You talked [no interpretation] looking at
13 digital platforms. This would be an acceptable solution -- I
14 don't like the term of "arbiter of truth", but to determine
15 what's truthful and what isn't on social platforms.

16 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Well, there has to be
17 a distance between that and the state.

18 In society, we accept the existence of
19 independent tribunals that apply the *Criminal Code* via all
20 sorts of processes. You draw attention to certain issues and
21 you hand out sanctions, penalties, or not, and that's the way
22 to act, I believe, in a democratic society.

23 That's where the idea of an independent
24 commission comes from, a commission charged with ensuring
25 that digital platforms respect their obligations to protect
26 the public, specifically children, protect them from the most
27 pernicious content that we could now find online. And even
28 if this content is reported to these platforms, often these

1 reports are ignored and people are being revictimized
2 constantly with sharing of images that they've asked be
3 withdrawn.

4 To my mind, that's the proper way to do
5 things and it's accepted and acceptable in our society to
6 have intervenors that are independent from government to
7 apply laws pertaining to fairness and justice.

8 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** So if I understand
9 correctly, it's appropriate to regulate content online to
10 determine what's good and what isn't, but you need the right
11 mechanisms in place to protect the rights of users, et
12 cetera.

13 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** And I don't think it's
14 all of content that we must regulate online. For example,
15 political ideas, even those we don't like, should not be
16 regulated online.

17 I believe that we're in a safe space when we
18 rely on the provisions of the *Criminal Code*, which are
19 broadly accepted by the population. There are things that
20 are prescribed in the *Criminal Code* and these are things that
21 citizens should abstain from doing. We need solid bases like
22 this in order to achieve consensus with regard to parallels
23 between what applies online and what applies elsewhere in
24 society.

25 This is why I say that I don't believe that
26 the content should be regulated.

27 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Some content.

28 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Content that's already

1 prohibited in day-to-day life.

2 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Just to make sure I
3 understood correctly, you are confirming that those types of
4 mechanisms would be -- would permit regulation of certain
5 types of behaviour.

6 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** The Bill provides that
7 the most harmful content would, indeed, be outlined before a
8 commission. But I want to be clear, that content will exist,
9 those types of content. The idea is to give -- to impose
10 requirements on the platforms so that they protect people
11 against or from that content.

12 The idea is to require platforms to withdraw
13 content that is harmful to people who have not consented to
14 having this content posted within a 24-hour timeframe. It's
15 specific content. It's not the content itself, it's the
16 responsibility of platforms with regard to their behaviour
17 when reports come in, and also with regard to the tools and
18 the provisions taken to ensure that their tools are safer for
19 children, for the population generally speaking with regard
20 to the most harmful content.

21 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Very well. I would
22 like to now move to a document. I was discussing it with the
23 Attorney General of Canada.

24 I would ask for the Commissioner's
25 authorization to post this document. I think it would be
26 useful to see what the considerations were with regard to
27 freedom of information. It's HCD98 (sic).

28 **--- EXHIBIT NO RCD0000098:**

Projet de loi C-63 - Loi édictant la
Loi sur les préjudices en ligne,
modifiant le Code criminel, la Loi
canadienne sur les droits de la
personne et la Loi concernant la
déclaration obligatoire de la
pornographie juvénile sur Internet
par les personnes

MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: Thank you.

Let us go, please, to page 9. I don't know if we can see the numbers of the pages.

You remember that you explained that the Bill is in accordance with the *Charter*.

HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE: I must specify that this Act falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Justice and not mine. So I can apprise myself of the details outlined here, but I'm not responsible for that Act.

MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: This is a new document. You didn't have the opportunity to see it before appearing here, so I'd like to go through it with you step by step.

So we're going to look at the considerations that support the compatibility of this Bill with the *Charter*.

We can move down the page, perhaps, and I'll read one sentence to you. It's the sentence at the end of the paragraph:

"A great part of this expression that has been prohibited -- a good part of

1 this expression would be harmful to
2 our freedoms guaranteed by the
3 *Charter*. It exposed other users to
4 risks..."

5 If we could move down the page:

6 "...I'm thinking in particular of the
7 members of vulnerable groups, and it
8 would prevent these groups from
9 participating in civilized
10 conversations online." (As read)

11 I agree with you that it's appropriate to
12 regulate this content because it could be harmful to society
13 overall.

14 **MS. MARIA BARRET-MORRIS:** I'll just interrupt
15 and ask that the witness please be provided the opportunity
16 to read the paragraph as a whole, or the document as a whole,
17 if she wishes.

18 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** For sure. So if you'd
19 like to read what precedes what was just quoted or what
20 follows, please feel comfortable. We must make sure everyone
21 understands the passage in question.

22 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Do you feel
23 comfortable responding now?

24 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Could you just repeat
25 the text once again?

26 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Of course.

27 I was wondering this, harmful -- the harmful
28 content you mentioned earlier is -- can be regulated if it's

1 harmful. We discussed this earlier today -- for the
2 considerations we've just seen on the screen. Would you
3 agree?

4 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** That's what is
5 proposed in the Bill. The idea would be to regulate the most
6 harmful content, and we talk about regulating content. Once
7 again, it's the responsibility of the platforms and the way
8 in which they must act.

9 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I'll go through these
10 elements one by one in the context of propaganda, for
11 example.

12 One of the considerations is this. Might we
13 say that Russian propaganda is harmful to our freedoms
14 guaranteed by the *Charter*?

15 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I don't feel able to
16 respond right away to that question.

17 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Might we say that
18 Russian propaganda exposes other users to harm, namely,
19 members of certain groups?

20 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Once again you're
21 asking me to analyze a specific case in point and I'm not
22 able to respond on the fly.

23 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Another question, and
24 if you can't respond, that is all right.

25 Russian propaganda, does it prevent the full
26 participation of these groups to civilized online
27 discussions?

28 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I'll give you the same

1 response. Your question is very broad and I'm not able to
2 provide to you an analysis of what you've outlined.

3 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I'll give you an
4 example. It might help us. This document was on my list.
5 It's number 42.

6 **--- EXHIBIT NO. RCD0000042:**

7 CRTC Decision RT

8 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Unfortunately, the
9 decision was provided in English only, or that's the only
10 version I have. It's a CRTC decision.

11 Perhaps one of my colleagues might find the
12 French version for me. It's the decision of the CRTC that
13 decided to ban *Russia Today*.

14 So we could just look at the summary because
15 I think it echoes what we said today.

16 *Russia Today*, according to the CRTC, was
17 banned on March 16th, 2022 -- could we go down -- because it
18 wasn't in the public interest and because its content appears
19 to constitute abusive comments since it tends or is likely to
20 expose the Ukrainian people to hatred or to contempt on the
21 basis of their race, nationality or ethnic origin and that
22 their programming is antithetical to the achievement of the
23 policy objectives of the *Broadcasting Act*.

24 Well, maybe I'll repeat my question. So to
25 your mind, could Russian propaganda limit principles
26 underlying the freedom of expression in Canada?

27 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** So you're talking
28 about the enforcement of different laws and mechanisms that

1 are different. Here we're talking about the enforcement by
2 an independent tribunal that has the responsibility for the
3 enforcement of the *Broadcasting Act* and rested on that --
4 relied on that to determine that they were taking away the
5 authorization of service providers to broadcast *Russia Today*.

6 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** My question was
7 broader than that. It's, for example, if we're looking for a
8 new Bill, would it be of interest to include measures in a
9 Bill to regulate Russian propaganda.

10 And we can see that content can be regulated
11 by the CRTC, and I'm just asking, is freedom of expression
12 decreased by Russian propaganda?

13 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** There's several things
14 to consider. First of all, the functioning of broadcasting,
15 of radio waves that are limited and that are attributed
16 through licence to radio and television, it's not at all
17 equivalent to the abundance of content that we can find
18 online. I don't think we can make a parallel between the
19 application of this one to the online world.

20 And the other thing that I would say is that
21 each time that we try to legislate to control social media
22 and the digital platforms' functioning, we are faced by a
23 huge amount of protests, of campaigns led by these platforms,
24 disinformation campaigns about the government's intentions.
25 And even the political Parties in Canada don't share our
26 opinion and the opinion of most of the political Parties in
27 Canada, stating that the government has a role to play in a
28 framework of online practices.

1 Every time we want to legislate it, we have
2 to make sure that we are able to go through the legislative
3 process and, on the other hand, make sure that what we're
4 doing is accepted and understood by the population. And
5 that's why, when it came time to create this Bill on online
6 harms, we were very aware of the -- which interventions would
7 be included in that Bill.

8 And that's why we relied on the most serious
9 provisions of the *Criminal Code*. If, one day, we need to go
10 further in terms of certain types of content, the government
11 will always have to remember to protect freedom of expression
12 and social consensus, the capacity to go through a
13 legislative process, and to ensure that it's adapted to the
14 right framework and the universe ecosystem that's there.

15 So the digital universe is very different
16 from what was involved with radio and television, so I would
17 say that these are considerations we have to have in mind
18 when we look at questions that are more contentious, more
19 controversial, and which leave a lot more room to the
20 propagation of disinformation and misinformation. And it's
21 the work of a democracy to do that.

22 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** I agree entirely and I
23 have no doubt that it's very difficult to do this by means of
24 Parliament. Fortunately, our current forum, Madam
25 Commissioner doesn't need to go through Parliament to make
26 her recommendations.

27 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** She's lucky.

28 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** So I have 15 seconds

1 left. Thank you very much for your time and for your
2 answers.

3 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Alors, the Concern
4 Group.

5 --- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR. NEIL CHANTLER:

6 MR. NEIL CHANTLER: Good afternoon, Madam
7 Commissioner.

8 Good afternoon, Minister. My name is Neil
9 Chantler and I'm counsel for the Chinese Canadian Concern
10 Group. I'll be asking my questions in English, I hope that's
11 all right, and you're free to answer in the language of your
12 choice.

13 In the time I have, I'm going to try and
14 accomplish the following things with you. I'm going to pose
15 what I suggest is a major foreign interference threat related
16 to Chinese language media in this country. Second, I'm going
17 to ask you to consider whether the various efforts undertaken
18 by your Ministry will help to combat that threat, and where
19 they might fall short. And third, I'll ask you what
20 recommendations you might have to combat this threat and that
21 might assist Madam Commissioner with her report.

22 The problem, or the threat, is that Chinese
23 language media in this country is under the near complete
24 control of the Communist Party of China, I propose. And I
25 will take you to a couple of documents to establish that
26 point.

27 Could we please have CC34 brought up?

28 --- EXHIBIT No. CCC0000034:

A Threat to Canadian Sovereignty:
National Security Dimensions of the
Canada-People's Republic of China
Relationship

MR. NEIL CHANTLER: In May 2023, the Special Committee on the Canada People's Republic of China Relationship issued an interim report. You may or may not be familiar with this. It's not all that important. I'm going to take you to a couple of passages, just to establish a point and have you reflect on it at the end.

In preparing this report, the Committee heard from a wide variety of witnesses: experts; politicians; members of the diaspora; and so on, and it came to a series of findings.

PDF page 58, please.

Under the heading "Media", the Committee says the following in its report. I'll start at the second sentence:

"Witnesses voiced concern that the state of Canadian Mandarin and Cantonese-language media is being compromised by the PRC. Their concerns were primarily based on PRC acquisitions of Chinese Canadian traditional media and the use of PRC-controlled social media applications to spread disinformation.

The views presented to the Special

1 Committee on this matter were
2 unequivocal: if the PRC does not yet
3 control all Chinese-language media in
4 Canada, it will soon do so."

5 It goes on to provide some further examples,
6 and I'd like to scroll down to the next page, 59.

7 The next passage I'll read describes how
8 ownership is not the only form of control. Control also
9 comes from pressure put on journalists to toe the party line
10 and advance the interests of the PRC.

11 The first full paragraph reads:

12 "In addition to outright media
13 ownership, harassment and
14 intimidation of remaining Chinese-
15 language media in Canada have led to
16 a chilling effect in which
17 independent journalists refrain from
18 covering certain topics. Cherie Wong
19 specified that many journalists have
20 families or friends who are still in
21 the PRC or PRC-controlled regions,
22 whom they fear endangering if they
23 speak out."

24 This is Alliance Canada Hong Kong:

25 "...evoked a stark status quo for
26 Chinese-Canadian journalists in
27 Canada that includes job losses,
28 death threats, online threats, and

1 threats to relatives in the PRC for
2 unfavourable coverage of the PRC
3 government."

4 The next document I'd like to take you to is
5 CAN1080.

6 **--- EXHIBIT No. CAN001080:**

7 PRC Foreign Interference in Canada: A
8 Critical National Security Threat -
9 CSIS IA 2021-22/31A

10 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** This is a CSIS
11 intelligence assessment.

12 Scroll down, please, to the title.

13 *PRC Foreign Interference in Canada: A*
14 *Critical National Security Threat.*

15 And then please scroll down to PDF page 6.

16 The passage I'll read you now demonstrates
17 that the problem is on the radar of our intelligence service
18 and that CSIS sees this as a form of foreign interference.

19 Under the heading "Media Interference,
20 'Managing the Message' and Positively Portraying the Party",
21 it says:

22 "Chinese-language media outlets
23 operating in Canada, along with
24 members of the Chinese-Canadian
25 community, are primary targets for
26 PRC-directed foreign-influenced
27 activities in the media realm."

28 I'll skip to the first bullet:

1 "PRC government influence over
2 Chinese-language media has become
3 increasingly problematic. In late
4 2020, for example, the former editor
5 for Sing Tao, a popular Chinese-
6 language publication in Canada,
7 risked the ire of Beijing by publicly
8 noting that 'Beijing has become the
9 mainstream now in Chinese newspapers
10 or magazine(s) in Canada. The former
11 editor noted that Canada is now
12 devoid of any 'independent and non-
13 partisan' media outlet[s] that [deal]
14 with 'Chinese affairs'."

15 The document can come down now.

16 So Minister, I know from your decades in
17 journalism that these passages probably cause you some
18 concern, that you'd be concerned about these threats to
19 journalists and the freedom of expression that entails.

20 The passages I've just reviewed with you
21 suggest that Chinese language media in this country is under
22 the nearly complete control of the Communist Party of China,
23 which directs the narratives the Chinese Canadians are able
24 to consume, and it leaves no room for dissenting viewpoints
25 that run contrary to the PRC's narratives.

26 Do you accept my general summary of those
27 passages?

28 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I accept the reading

1 that you've made from these different reports.

2 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** And do you accept the
3 general conclusion of those passages?

4 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** These are things that
5 are of concern and raise many questions, and I congratulate
6 the journalists who testified about these situations.

7 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** You don't have any reason
8 to believe that the concerns expressed in those reports are
9 unfounded?

10 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Well, I haven't
11 analyzed that situation in detail. I don't have access to
12 all the information and it would be very difficult for me to
13 give you a verdict here on the spot, but there's no reason to
14 believe that what's being said is wrong.

15 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Apologies while I wait
16 for the translation to catch up occasionally.

17 Your office has taken considerable steps
18 already to combat foreign interference in the media, and you
19 have testified today, and we've heard from other officials
20 from Heritage Canada and the CRTC about the digital
21 citizenship initiative, about imposing duties on social media
22 through the *Online Harms Act*, enhancing the public's
23 resilience through further education, and promoting
24 journalism, especially in underserved communities and perhaps
25 in the Chinese language community as well.

26 In your view, and I appreciate the complexity
27 of this issue, and we're just here to get your views on the
28 matter. How might some of these efforts that you've already

1 undertaken combat the problem of the PRC's control of our
2 Chinese language media?

3 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** [No interpretation]
4 butt the fact that we have to make sure that we have Canadian
5 -- that we have -- to make sure we have media... kind of
6 situation. And one of the things we have to consider, first
7 of all, the fact that Canada is a multicultural country that
8 has welcomed many newcomers over the past years -- past few
9 years is to ensure through Heritage policies, for example,
10 that we adopt policies that favour the commitment and the
11 hiring of people coming from various communities in Canadian
12 diversity within our Canadian institutions, so media and
13 various cultural organizations, in order to, for example,
14 have -- give alternatives to the Chinese diaspora places
15 where they can turn to get information that's not controlled
16 or dictated by foreign states.

17 So it's more in that sphere that my
18 department operates, Canadian Heritage, and that's why
19 virtually all of the programs that fall under Canadian
20 Heritage have criteria that aim to enhance diversity. That's
21 the limit of the control we can exercise, but many efforts
22 have been made by CBC-Radio Canada to open up the doors of
23 our national broadcaster, our public broadcaster, to the
24 various communities we have in this country so as to ensure
25 that the content that it produces and broadcasts resembles
26 the Canadian population.

27 So I believe that that is one of the ways in
28 which we can help the Chinese diaspora tie into other sources

1 of information to come to an opinion of the world in which it
2 is evolving, be it locally, provincially, nationally or
3 internationally.

4 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** As I understood your
5 answer, you are focusing on content within these media
6 entities, such that if we tackle the issue of content, I
7 think what you're suggesting is that the foreign ownership
8 issue won't matter.

9 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** No, that's not what
10 I'm saying. What I'm saying is that the role of the
11 government is to ensure that it supports the cultural
12 production and media universe in Canada that is produced,
13 made by and for Canadians and, within the various programs,
14 our way of doing things is to ensure that the various
15 communities find themselves represented and create points of
16 contact, points of reference, a trust relationship with the
17 media or cultural organizations that are Canadian. That can
18 be helpful in limiting the impact that other oriented media
19 might have on their communities.

20 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** I understand the idea of
21 providing more and better options to members of diaspora
22 groups, for example, supported by the government. Still not
23 directly addressing the issue of ownership though. Would you
24 agree?

25 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I would say that we
26 must discuss of which media we're talking because, in Canada,
27 there is not a radio or TV licence that is granted directly
28 to foreign companies.

1 There are distributors of content that they
2 offer on their distribution channel foreign media to offer
3 Canadians variety, diversity of points of view of content
4 coming not just from Canada, but from outside the country.
5 That's one thing.

6 The other thing is that with regard to
7 written media, that doesn't fall under the jurisdiction of
8 the federal government. The written press outlets fall under
9 the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories.

10 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Thank you.

11 And you've anticipated a question I have
12 coming, which is that of course the *Broadcasting Act* does
13 presently restrict ownership, foreign ownership, of
14 television and radio entities, broadcast entities, but not
15 newspaper print media. And is that a place where there could
16 be some reform? Is there a reason to tighten controls on
17 ownership, and indirect ownership of media outlets under the
18 *Broadcasting Act* or other legislation to -- and perhaps
19 enhancing the enforcement of those rules with respect to
20 other forms of media?

21 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Your question is quite
22 broad and complex. I believe that the CRTC or the
23 *Broadcasting Act* wouldn't at all be appropriate as far as
24 print media. I don't think that would be the right way to go
25 about this.

26 Recently, we targeted CRTC's intervention for
27 online content, but with regard to the print media, I think
28 we have to be very careful. The reason why, traditionally,

1 we regulated via the *Broadcasting Act* and via an
2 administrative tribunal the public space under television and
3 radio is that because this was limited. We wanted to provide
4 the spectrum, these licences. We granted them to companies
5 that were first and foremost Canadian and that promised to
6 fulfil the requirements set out in the *Broadcasting Act* and
7 which are to serve the interests of Canadians, to enhance
8 freedom of speech, enhance plurality of views, diversity of
9 views, and this is why this was regulated.

10 But when we talk about what is printed,
11 published or what we find on the internet, there isn't the
12 same reality as far as limitation is concerned. Therefore,
13 the idea of exercising control on everything that is
14 published, printed in Canada, well, I would have an awful lot
15 of difficulty seeing how this could be accomplished, done in
16 a realistic way and that, at the same time, would protect the
17 foundations of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the
18 freedom of expression and the freedom of the press.

19 It's a very complex question and I don't have
20 an answer or a recommendation for you to assist you in this.

21 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Let me throw at you
22 another possible avenue to explore, and you may tell me it's
23 another unworkable solution, or you may have some thoughts on
24 it. What about the Canada -- or the *Investment Canada Act*,
25 are you familiar with that Act? Is there room to expand the
26 scope of it to include a more robust national security review
27 for media investments when a foreign country wishes to invest
28 in a media outlet in Canada?

1 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** This is an Act that I
2 work with because the cultural sector is a sector that is
3 protected in Canada and, therefore, when there are foreign
4 acquisitions, Canadian Heritage is consulted, but all of the
5 security issues are determined elsewhere.

6 What we analyze is the net benefit of a
7 transaction in the cultural domain with foreign ownership.
8 We have the ability to prohibit it if the security analysis
9 determines that there's a risk or when the guarantees for the
10 protection of our cultural specificity and decision-making.
11 When we need to ensure that all of this is done in Canada for
12 Canadians when we have fears in this area, we can act.

13 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Thank you.

14 Let me ask you a general question about where
15 the efforts that your ministry is -- or your department has
16 fallen short. Where do you think, despite these valiant
17 efforts to combat these problems, we still have room to grow
18 and we still have advancements to be made?

19 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** There is always
20 definitely more to do. One of the challenges we have is
21 this. I talked earlier about the fact that we have to find a
22 way of ensuring that our media, our cultural organizations
23 connect with the various communities throughout the country,
24 among them, the Chinese diaspora. I think the value of
25 language is a challenge that also requires a lot of
26 resources. Tackling this can be complex, tricky.

27 I believe it's a discussion that must involve
28 cultural organizations themselves, must involve the public

1 broadcaster as well, must involve the entire media universe
2 and cultural universe here in Canada on the way in which we
3 could better connect, open up the space, remove barriers and
4 remove the language barrier.

5 When we talk about the Chinese community, it
6 relies on Mandarin media. For many, it's the only language
7 these individuals knew upon arriving in Canada, so there is a
8 challenge there. It's not a simple challenge, but we must
9 reflect on it further and try to find solutions that
10 shouldn't just come from the cultural milieu or from the
11 government itself, but what -- which must also come from the
12 media and cultural organizations themselves.

13 Even when we look at the evolution of the
14 Canadian population, we know that without immigration, our
15 population is falling back in Canada, is decreasing, and this
16 is one of the reasons why we welcome newcomers to Canada.
17 And I would say that even for our economic viability, the
18 economic viability of the media or cultural intervenors,
19 there's a reason to want to remain relevant at the same pace
20 with the evolution of the Canadian population itself.

21 Once again, I don't have a magic wand, a
22 magic solution, but I think the solutions must also come from
23 civil society.

24 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** You described the public
25 broadcaster, CBC, as a public service in this country, not
26 state media, and that was very clear, the distinction between
27 those things. Would it be a further public service, and
28 would it help us to combat some of this problem of foreign

1 language media being controlled by foreign states, to provide
2 foreign language media as a public service? Is that a place
3 where your department is considering going?

4 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** I believe that the
5 role of our public service must be in accordance with the
6 times and the challenges of our society. And CBC/Radio-
7 Canada definitely has a role to play in the fight against
8 foreign interference and disinformation and the way for a
9 public broadcaster serving the people and not the government,
10 as we said -- the way for this broadcaster to do this is to
11 ensure that it is present, that it has the trust of the
12 communities and that it has links and ties with those
13 communities. And I believe that definitely part of the
14 answer is there. And this must be part of its mandate, its
15 responsibilities, and I believe that it must be part of the
16 thinking of the public broadcaster as to how to open its
17 doors to various diverse communities throughout the country.

18 I must say that a lot of things have changed
19 already at CBC/Radio-Canada. The number of employees from
20 Canadian's diverse population has increased over the years,
21 increased immensely, and these were well thought out
22 initiatives. This was desired by the public broadcaster, and
23 today -- when we see situations such as those you described
24 today with regard to the Chinese community, perhaps the
25 public broadcaster could be part of the solution in this.
26 And this must come from the institution itself, this
27 thinking.

28 **MR. NEIL CHANTLER:** Thank you for your

1 answers.

2 Thank you, Madam Commissioner. Those are my
3 questions.

4 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

5 Attorney General, any questions?

6 **--- CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MS. MARIA BARRET-MORRIS:**

7 **MS. MARIA BARRET-MORRIS:** [No interpretation]
8 Attorney General of Canada.

9 Good afternoon, Minister. First of all, you
10 explained why the online harm Bill does not expressly include
11 disinformation as ones of these harms identified. Might you
12 tell us if there's nevertheless not a link between the Bill
13 and disinformation?

14 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes, certainly.
15 Think, for example, of the content that might lead to
16 violence, incite violence. Oftentimes, this content is based
17 on disinformation based on propaganda and, therefore, there
18 is certainly some disinformation that is included in the
19 content impacted upon by this Bill, the most harmful. And
20 we're really, in this case, talking about disinformation that
21 is much less nuanced than other forms of disinformation and
22 which clearly falls under the *Criminal Code*.

23 So the idea is, once again, to give life -- a
24 parallel application of the *Criminal Code* in everyday life.
25 So something that wouldn't be tolerated on the street or in
26 society should not be tolerated online.

27 And yes, the worst kind of disinformation
28 must be included.

1 **MS. MARIA BARRET-MORRIS:** Thank you.

2 You have spoken about the importance of
3 journalism in our democracy and also about the crisis that
4 media are going through in Canada and in the world. In your
5 opinion, can Canadians still trust their democratic system
6 currently?

7 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes, totally. So we
8 still have a lot of newsrooms. We have hundreds of
9 journalists in the country. We have a public broadcaster
10 that's strong and we can trust their professionalism and also
11 trust in the mechanisms that are in place to ensure the
12 quality of journalism and the recourse to which the
13 population is entitled when they're dissatisfied by the
14 journalism coverage.

15 We still have independent tribunals in
16 Canada. We have all sorts of institutions and organizations
17 or organisms that are independent of the government and that
18 play a role in the proper functioning of our society. And I
19 don't think we should take any alarms that are raised
20 lightly.

21 There are studies that are showing that the
22 population's confidence in information media is decreasing.
23 There's several reasons for this. There's the media's
24 economic crisis that I talked about a lot which has an impact
25 on the quality that we can observe in the media universe
26 sometimes.

27 There are also stronger and stronger attacks,
28 including from politicians, who try to undermine the

1 credibility of information media in Canada, including that of
2 our public broadcaster, which is one of the public
3 broadcaster that's recognized throughout the planet as being
4 one of the most transparent public broadcasters with the
5 highest standards in terms of professional journalism and
6 ethics and also mechanisms to be accountable to the
7 population. And despite that, we see organized campaigns
8 attacking the credibility of our media regardless of which.
9 And this is an alarm signal that has to be sounded very
10 loudly in the population just as -- to instrumentalize police
11 or our court system for political ends.

12 And to my mind, this kind of behaviour must
13 be called out. We see that in Canada, we see it elsewhere in
14 the world. We can see that in democracies throughout the
15 planet there's a greater fragilization.

16 And as a citizen, a citizen who's dedicated
17 her life to defending journalism and information media, and
18 who's tried to find solutions to ensure their viability, this
19 is something that really disturbs me, that shakes me up
20 because there should be minimally from people who want to
21 enter politics and who want to attain positions of power,
22 they should at least acknowledge the role of journalism and
23 the role of media in society.

24 And we can be unhappy with some articles or
25 some videos or some comments, but we should always value
26 their role in society and we have to be as accountable as
27 possible with the information media.

28 Thank you.

1 **MS. MARIA BARRET-MORRIS:** And I have a third
2 question, I'm mixing it up by asking it in English, but
3 please feel free to respond in French.

4 You were asked by my friend a moment ago what
5 work you were doing to assist diaspora groups in relation to
6 PRC controlled Chinese language media in Canada. And I'll
7 just ask the Court Reporter to pull up a document which was
8 not on the Attorney General's list, but it was on the
9 Commission counsel's list, CAN044734.

10 **--- EXHIBIT No. CAN044734 0001:**

11 DIGITAL CITIZEN CONTRIBUTION PROGRAM
12 CALL #5 PRIORITIES

13 **MS. MARIA BARRET-MORRIS:** And this is the
14 digital citizen contribution program call number five. And I
15 note that this document was destined, I believe, to yourself,
16 Minister?

17 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes.

18 **MS. MARIA BARRET-MORRIS:** I'll ask the Court
19 Reporter to turn to page 2. And I'll just read the beginning
20 portion:

21 "The Department is seeking your
22 approval of seven priorities for its
23 next regular call for proposals,
24 which will launch this Fall. With
25 your approval, the Digital Citizen
26 Contribution Program will seek to
27 fund projects that:"

28 And we'll just head down to number seven:

1 "Develop and publish tools to build
2 resilience to mis-/disinformation,
3 stemming from foreign governments,
4 such as the People's Republic of
5 China, targeting diaspora communities
6 in Canada."

7 Minister, can you please explain if this also
8 forms part of the work being conducted by yourself and your
9 department to assist diaspora groups in relation to PRC
10 controlled Chinese media in Canada?

11 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Yes. And to put this
12 in perspective how these projects are suggested and are sent
13 to the Minister of Heritage, it's done in consultation with
14 various departments, with various experts from the various
15 departments, also with researcher in civil society that send
16 us recommendations based on different aspects related to
17 public safety, to national security, and also to what's
18 happening in the world to make recommendations of research
19 projects to support so as to be able to develop better public
20 policy or research that could be published and sent out
21 through the population, disseminated through the population
22 to improve this resiliency we've been talking about for quite
23 a while.

24 And this is a part of the projects, the call
25 for proposals that was proposed to me and which I authorized
26 and which I think will also help us, all of us, collectively
27 -- us as a government and society in general -- to develop
28 better public policy or better mechanisms to respond to the

1 challenges of these attempts for destabilization made by
2 other countries such as China.

3 **MS. MARIA BARRET-MORRIS:** Thank you.

4 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

5 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** I have no further
6 questions.

7 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you very much,
8 Minister. Thank you for your time.

9 As I told your colleague, Minister Blair, I
10 think you have many other tasks, so I appreciate even more
11 the time that you took to meet the team and to come and
12 testify today.

13 **HON. PASCALE ST-ONGE:** Thank you very much
14 for your work also.

15 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So good weekend to all.
16 We'll see each other Monday morning.

17 Oh, not Monday. Sorry. It's a three-day
18 weekend. Tuesday morning.

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

20 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
21 Commission has adjourned until Tuesday the 15th of October at
22 9:30 a.m.

23 --- Upon adjourning at 4:24 p.m.

24
25
26
27
28

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,
certifie que les pages ci-hautes sont une transcription
conforme de mes notes/enregistrements au meilleur de mes
capacités, et je le jure.



Sandrine Marineau-Lupien