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Chair

The Honourable Don Boudria

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● (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.)): Order please, colleagues.

[*Translation*]

To start with, allow me to offer everyone my best wishes for the new year, since this is our first meeting of the year.

[*English*]

As you know, we had briefly started on our mandate of electoral reform just prior to the adjournment at Christmas. At that time we had decided that the minute we came back we wanted to hear from a particular group of witnesses, namely the Law Commission of Canada, and of course as well from Dr. Nathalie Des Rosiers because she of course at the time was leading the group. Now they're in different places, but they're both here together again.

[*Translation*]

This morning I'm pleased to welcome the following witnesses: Nathalie Des Rosiers, Dean of the Faculty of Civil Law of the University of Ottawa; Bernard Colas, Acting President of the Law Commission of Canada; and Steven Bittle, Senior Research Officer of that same organization.

[*English*]

Perhaps I could start with Madame Des Rosiers. I wonder if you or Mr. Colas would have a brief statement to make to us. Then after that colleagues no doubt will be very interested in asking a number of questions.

I want to remind colleagues that we must end our deliberations at 12:30 so that we can have a meeting about agenda. There are agenda items that we have to deal with today, in particular in regard to the plan of the committee and the study we're going to undertake in this regard.

If we don't do it today, we're not going to be able to go to some of the places we want to go because there won't be airline tickets left. We have to do it today. So at 12:30 I'll have to interrupt the meeting.

[*Translation*]

We'll now hear from our witnesses.

Do you want to make a brief statement before taking questions from my colleagues?

[*English*]

Mr. Colas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Colas (Acting President, Law Commission of Canada): Yes, Mr. Chairman, I'll make a brief statement of five to eight minutes.

The Chair: Perfect; go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Colas: I'll make this presentation first in English, then in French, and, lastly, in English again. We've filed written versions of our presentation.

First I would like to thank you very much for inviting the Law Commission to appear before you today.

As you know, in March 2004 the Law Commission tabled in Parliament its final report on electoral reform. Today we have basically two messages to express to the committee. First, the Law Commission went through extensive consultation with Canadians in order to come up with a made-in-Canada constitution-proof solution. We are here also to express our possible cooperation with the committee in order to give the committee access to this wealth of information. Second, the Law Commission's recommendation to add an element of proportionality to Canada's electoral system could act as a vital starting point for examining this important issue. In particular, we would encourage the committee, in order to accelerate the process, to consider our recommendation to prepare draft legislation based on the Law Commission's proposed system. A parliamentary committee could use this draft legislation to initiate a broad-based and inclusive public consultation process on electoral system reform.

Let me say a few words on the Law Commission and the genesis of its project on electoral reform.

The Law Commission is a body that is very precious for Canadian democracy. It is an independent federal law reform agency that advises Parliament on how to improve and modernize Canada's laws. In brief, it is the law reform voice of Canadians to Parliament. The work we undertake stems from the important insights gained by engaging Canadians on issues of law and justice.

In 2000, as part of the Law Commission's work on governance issues, we heard from many Canadians that they were increasingly disenchanted with our system of democratic governance. Committee members will be familiar with the terms that have been used by some critics to characterize a growing concern, including democratic deficit and democratic malaise.

Although we recognized at that time that there is no magic bullet that will address all concerns regarding Canada's system of governance, there was a growing consensus that electoral reform would be a good starting point for energizing and strengthening Canadian democracy. Many Canadians we spoke with stated that it was time to examine whether the existing electoral system continues to meet the democratic goals and aspirations of Canadians.

In addition to noting the distortion between the votes received and seats in the House of Commons—a party could get 40% of the votes and 60% of the seats—many citizens expressed concern with the under-representation of women and certain minority group members and aboriginal peoples in our system of democratic governance. This was the genesis of the Law Commission's electoral reform project.

● (1115)

Allow me now to move on to the two central points of our message, that is to say the public engagement process used by the Law Commission of Canada and the implementation strategy that we propose.

The important thing for the Commission was to determine the views of the largest possible number of Canadians and to permit the expression of various interests. First we conducted preliminary research. Then we asked Canadians questions through a discussion paper. As a result of that discussion paper, we were able to obtain the opinions of a number of citizens and citizens groups. We took part in various events and consultations.

A full list of activities and seminars in which we took part in order to meet Canadians appears on page 188 of the English version of the paper and page 207 of the French version.

This consultation enabled us to prepare the recommendations contained in this report. In preparing them, we developed 10 criteria on the basis of which we could analyze the present system and other existing models around the world. Those criteria are relatively useful and are outlined in Chapter 3: representation of parties, demographic representation, diversity of ideas, geographic representation, effective government, accountable government, effective opposition, valuing votes and regional balance.

Using these various criteria, we were able to design the system we recommend. In fact the idea is to add an element of proportionality to the present system. Two-thirds of members would be elected under the current system, and one-third would be elected from lists established by parties. Those lists would be provincial or territorial. We also ensured that the recommendations contained in this paper were consistent with the Constitution of Canada. So there would be no need for any constitutional change. In our view, we've managed a real coup in finding a solution suited to Canada as a whole.

The second point concerns action that the committee should take immediately. Our report was drafted without any political afterthought. We tried to consider Canada, its geography, its history, as well as Canadians' demands and values, before coming up with these proposals. To expedite the process, we suggest that the committee rely on the report, incorporate its essential points in a bill and present that bill to Canadians in order to consult them and see what they think of this solution. In that way, Canadians would be able to examine something concrete rather than have to define common reform principles. The process can also enable Canadians to speak out on other elements that could be reformed in order to improve our parliamentary democracy.

[*English*]

In brief, the Law Commission of Canada believes that adding an element of proportionality to the electoral system would allow Parliament to more completely represent our society and to lower the barriers to greater diversity among our representatives, including women, certain minority group members, and aboriginal people. It would promote fairness and encourage the entry of new voices in the legislature, which would in turn invigorate this country's parliamentary democracy. Our position reflects the sentiments of a growing number of Canadian citizens and provincial governments, who believe it is time to seriously examine and reform the electoral system. All of these initiatives underscore the importance of the committee's work here today.

In conclusion, I would encourage you to consider the insight that the Law Commission has gained throughout the course of our electoral reform project, particularly the strategies we employed to engage citizens on this important issue. In addition, we believe that our work could act as an important basis for this committee's work on electoral system reform.

Once again, thank you very much for allowing us to appear here today.

My colleague Steve Bittle, who is the senior researcher, which means that he made sure this would come to an end and be to the satisfaction of the Canadian people, as well as my colleague Nathalie Des Rosiers, who was president at that time and who made sure that Steve worked correctly and also that all commission members could agree on a text that would help Canadian democracy, and I will be very happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

● (1120)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Professor Des Rosiers, do you have a statement?

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers (Dean, Faculty of Civil Law, University of Ottawa): I only want to say two things. I was president when the project was conceived. I had been vice-president of the Commission since 1997. Since the inception of the new organization that was the Law Commission of Canada at the time, our concern had been to determine what the Commission's research program should be. It was then that we conducted consultations to determine what we should look at. Most of the stakeholders had noted Canadians' withdrawal from their democratic institutions. Most thought that Canadians' skepticism with their democratic institutions had to be assessed and addressed. That's when we came up with this concept.

The Commission developed an initial research axis based on the governance reports that were intended to increase Canadians' confidence in their institutions. This project thus emerged from those consultations. Lastly, we started out in an entirely neutral way, being quite “agnostic”, as it were, in taking an approach that... We thought it was necessary to conduct new research on this issue.

This isn't the first time Canada has examined its electoral system, but we thought it was essential to conduct new research that would effectively respond to the pronounced new trends in society and, among other things, to Canadians' evolving ideas and concerns about the issue.

Since I conducted most of the consultations, I'll be pleased to give you more details on what we heard from, among others, women's groups and other groups in society. I'm prepared to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Des Rosiers.

I remind the committee that we must make recommendations in accordance with the House's order of reference, on how to consult Canadians. So information on that subject would be very useful to us as well, of course. Colleagues are free to ask what they want, but we will have to report on this. That's why I emphasize it.

[*English*]

First on my list of questioners is Mr. Nicholson. Questions are five minutes overall, as you probably know, Mr. Nicholson. I know you're our new colleague here. I take this opportunity to congratulate you as well for your new position.

The floor is yours.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

As a substitute and someone new to the committee here, I don't know exactly where in your procedure this falls, but I do have some questions about this whole subject.

First of all, thank you very much for your testimony and all the work that you've done in this area. Let me put to you one of the problems that may arise with a system wherein one-third of the members of the legislature or the House of Commons would be prepared by party list.

I put to you the criticism that I've heard from the European experience on this. A couple of European countries have one variation of this or another. One of the criticisms that I remember hearing years ago was that if you have a system in which a party puts out a list and elects the members on the basis of its percentage of the national vote, there are some who say there is a problem for democracy inasmuch as the people don't get an opportunity to say yea or nay on particular candidates.

I'll give you an example. If you are in the top five, I would suppose, of any of the major political parties of this country, it means the Canadian electorate can never get at you, because no matter how poorly your party does, if it comes up with 5% of the vote, you get the top.... Presumably, if there were a hundred members, for instance, your party would always get 5% of those. There are those in Europe who say this is undemocratic, that we cannot get at some of these old party hacks who have no connection to the electorate other than that they are in solid with their political party and they just stay on forever. That would be one of the criticisms, it seems to me, and one of the challenges that we would have to answer for Canadians. Could you address that?

● (1125)

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: The concern with the list was expressed often during the consultations we had. If you read the proposals carefully, there is a possibility of.... In fact we adopted one of the Jenkins proposals in this concern, so that eventually the citizens could oust one person on the list. That's one issue.

The second issue—and I think that's where I want to be clear—is that you have two-thirds of the seats that continue to be exactly in the same way as we're talking about, and one-third that come from the list, and parties are in fact accountable for the way in which their list is framed. That's what we see evolving in Europe: parties have to account for how they proceed in making up their list and their representation of their list. You'll see in our recommendations as well that we make recommendations for parties to be more accountable for the way in which women and other groups have access to list positions.

The way in which we proceed is to identify the fears about changing the electoral system, try to see whether or not we could alleviate these fears in different ways, and acknowledge them. Most of the report is about responding to the different fears that were expressed about changing the electoral system.

The Chair: Perhaps Mr. Colas wanted to add something, unless you want to ask another question now. Your time is going to run out either way in a minute.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Okay, I'll get this one in quickly.

There are those who would argue that the three major democracies in the world that have the first-past-the-post system, with some variations, are Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. There are also those who can make a pretty strong argument that those have been the most successful, or among the most successful, democracies in the world. As a matter of fact, I think I would be hard pressed to come up with any other countries outside of those three that have a longer democratic tradition than Britain and Canada and the United States.

There are those who would say that if you alter the system, you would be building instability, and that instability has been a great problem in the world in terms of the economy and a host of other problems, and that if we traded our particular system for some other system, we will have unstable government and we will be buying into a different type of system that doesn't have a record as successful as the one that we have. I ask for your comment on that.

Give me the question as well: Whose system of government—Germany's, Italy's—do you think works better than the one that we share with Britain and the United States? Whose model might we somewhat similarly adopt that would be working better?

The Chair: A brief reply, perhaps, because we're way over time.

Mr. Bernard Colas: There are two elements. To answer your first question, in some places it is possible for people to choose on the list, but studies show that citizens usually vote for the list as it is.

With regard to other issues you raised, I think they are being contradicted by serious reports and studies, and I would like to turn to my colleague Steven Bittle, who is more aware of this research and will provide information.

● (1130)

The Chair: Briefly, because we have to go to the other questions; otherwise, we'll only get three or four questioners all day.

Mr. Steven Bittle (Senior Research Officer, Law Commission of Canada): Thank you.

Briefly, the fact that you would introduce a new electoral system that adds an element of proportionality to the current system does not necessarily equal a less stable system. That's not to say that the system we have in place hasn't served us well over the years, but what we heard increasingly from Canadians is that it no longer corresponds well to the democratic aspirations that they have. So if you look at countries that have adopted a mixed-member proportional system—such as Germany, Scotland, New Zealand—these are very stable systems, and the argument to be made is that they are as stable as Canada's system. The difficulty to get past is that reforming the electoral system doesn't necessarily mean instability.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): First of all, I would like to welcome you and congratulate Ms. Des Rosiers, who's now the new Dean of my alma mater. I hadn't had the opportunity to do so in person.

I'm very interested in two points, but, in order to please our Chairman, I'll ask you what would be the best way for us to consult Canadians within the terms of the committee's mandate.

I also have two sub-questions. Electoral reform is an issue of great interest to me, but I'm not sure that simply reforming our electoral system will be a panacea. You often say so.

I was very pleased to read your report over the holidays. Sometimes I get the impression it's just a kind of cosmetic treatment. Are we sure that, in opting for the solution you recommend, we won't hear any more comments like: "My vote isn't important anymore," or "We feel disconnected from politicians." The reality goes far beyond that. What I hear in my riding doesn't concern so much the electoral arrangement as such as the fact that people have the impression that, for a long time now, when they speak out, their opinion hasn't reached Parliament. They have the impression they're not being listened to.

So how can we reconcile all that? My impression is that time is flying by. You conducted a consultation, and various provinces did the same. Sometimes I feel we're not going to resolve very much.

The under-representation question is a fundamental issue for me. In your consultations, were you able to determine how we can reach them? How can we improve that situation? I know that we women in the Liberal Party have serious representation in that respect. Do we have to impose representation by force?

Whatever the case may be, I'd be curious to hear your opinion on those three points.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: First, what impressed me most in our consultations was when someone told me that electoral reform was obviously not a panacea, was not an adequate condition to address the democratic deficit, but that it might be a necessary condition. It obviously won't resolve all the problems. However, wouldn't not conducting such a reform be a further indicator of failure or of the impossibility of avoiding certain irritants in our system? The irritants often come back. The question of votes that aren't counted is one that constantly came up again and again.

We have to take into account the fact that people move much more often than they used to. So being totally defined as a citizen or an elector based on place of residence, regardless of the fact that people can't speak out, since, in any case, there's no point in voting when you know who's going to be elected, becomes a major irritant when, in actual fact, people move often and so have affinities that go beyond their home town. So people say that, if they're identified as citizens of, for example, Ottawa West, that's a fluke. The situation is no longer what it was in the nineteenth century. What we heard was that a system that definitely worked well in the nineteenth century may no longer work in this context.

So how do you engage Canadians? How do get Canadians to think about this issue? It's not easy to answer those questions because it may become very complex. If there are three political scientists in the room, obviously each one will have his own favourite system.

In spite of it all, based on our experience, I think we can definitely open a significant dialogue, one that's worth the effort, on people's aspirations, on what they want, on what they fear. That's what we did. What scares you about electoral reform? What do you want to do? Then we can engage them on the values they want to see represented.

So the idea of having a series of 10 criteria really came out of the consultations. Then—and that's somewhat what we did—the idea is to have experts who can design a system that meets the 10 criteria as far as possible. There are always choices to be made, but we generally consult on principles, on values, on something concrete.

For example, people need to know. This two-thirds/one-third system is quite easy to explain. You can redo past elections to provide an idea of this. Of course it's not complete, but it gives you an idea of what the situation could look like. People in general say both what they think is good about it and what troubles them.

As regards women...

● (1135)

The Chair: Pardon me, madame, but we'll have to continue later. We have to move on to the next questions. Otherwise members won't have the opportunity to speak.

Ms. Picard.

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You mentioned that you had analyzed a number of models around the world. Which models are most similar to your proposal?

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: Those of Scotland, New Zealand and Germany. We selected the Scottish model; that's the closest.

We obviously relied a lot on the Jenkins Report. That's a report on the reform of one of the world great democracies, England, which is also trying to see how to remedy these democratic problems.

We also drew on work previously done in Canada and around the world on the issue of women. In New Zealand, there is considerable interest in the issue of women. How to respond effectively to women in conducting an electoral reform, but in also making changes to political parties, while supporting their access to democratic culture? Very concrete things can be done to improve the situation. Of course party financing reform is one of the reforms designed to ensure a better place for women. We evaluated the French proposals, for example, which require parties to alternate: a man, a woman, a woman, a man.

Our position is that Canada is probably more at the financial incentives stage than the obligations stage—in France, in any case, that doesn't work very well—that there's something to be done and that people are prepared to acknowledge...

I'll close by saying that the indicator of Canadian values shows that Canadians are almost number one in the world when it comes to the question of gender equality. When you ask the average Canadian what he thinks about the fact that a woman is Chief Justice, he agrees with it. What concerns him is that we're thirty-sixth in the world—perhaps thirty-first now—with regard to the representation of women. That's not right. There's a gap between Canadian values and results, and that troubles a lot of Canadians.

The Chair: Mr. Colas, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Bernard Colas: Yes, briefly. What often concerns people is the idea that that can lead to minority governments. In countries that have begun these reforms, they've seen there was another form of thinking among politicians: they tend more toward coalition government than minority government. It's the responsibility of the parliamentarians here to make a minority government work.

The big issue with regard to women concerns the open list or closed list. If you have a closed list, you can put in a woman, a man, an alternate or have incentives. However, if you have an open list and the public can choose the first, last or fifth person on the list, even if you suggest an order, it can be taken to pieces by voters who select other candidates.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Longfield.

[*English*]

Hon. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Oshawa, Lib.): Thank you.

I appreciate your presentation today.

Obviously, our system isn't perfect. I certainly heard during the campaign that we needed to do something and that it was time to look at this. While I agree, I'm concerned about a system that would have one-third of its members come from a party list and two-thirds directly elected. I think we are creating two classes of members of Parliament, as it were. I'm very concerned. I've always believed we have a system that's essentially representation by population and that I am elected as a representative of a community, to whom I am directly accountable. I also run on a party platform, and I appreciate that as well. But ultimately I'm responsible to the folks in the riding I represent. They have the opportunity to reward or punish, depending on the kind of representation they think they're getting.

From my perspective, those who are on the list have to keep only one person happy, and that would be the party leader. In order to get on the list, you would not be a maverick or someone who took a different perspective or who felt the necessity from time to time to vote against their party on issues that were extremely important to them.

I'm trying to reconcile how you can say that these two members would be equal, and yet they're not at all, because one has incredibly more freedom than the other. Having been a member of a party for a long time, I think the jockeying and internal politics involved in trying to get your name on the list are very problematic. I do not believe we somehow have to structure it so that there are more minorities or women on the list. I think the whole system needs to be looked at in order to enable women and minorities to appropriately represent the community they come from. So I have some problems with this.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Des Rosiers.

[*English*]

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: Winning the nomination is identified as the number one difficulty for women because they have to oust an incumbent, who is often a man. It's possible. After all, you're here. The experience has been that if you are on a list, you get well known, and eventually you get a constituency seat. So there was a process and the list served as grooming or exposure, and it was an education for the public about women's contribution. One of the elements of the list was this possibility for people to come in by a different route, and that would enhance representation.

We have big chapters on the relationship between the types of MPs. It is an issue that arose in Scotland. They came up with a series of positions where they say the system has to adapt to recognize the equality between the two. It's possible. They've done it. They made some really helpful suggestions to us as to how to ensure that there is coordination between the members. Even though they are on a list, they certainly have some representation duties toward people in their large constituency, which is the province.

The issue of symbolic equality between the two has to be resolved. It has to be that both are equal. In fact, it just creates diversity of happening, diversity of contribution, and diversity of people coming into this, and this is a value. What was interesting for us to hear is that people valued the idea that there was going to be more diversity of patterns to get into office.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Johnston.

[*English*]

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, folks, for your presentation.

Nathalie, I heard you say something to the effect that having a woman as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was a good step, and I agree. But I also think that she's there not because of some sort of quota system, but because of her ability. I certainly wouldn't want to be the person to suggest to her that—-

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: I certainly wouldn't either.

Mr. Dale Johnston: I heard a lot of talk about equality all the way through this presentation. All the way through this Parliament for the last eleven years, I've heard "equality" mentioned in this House probably hundreds of thousands of times. I'm just wondering how equality fits into some kind of a quota system. You say it's going to help representational issues regarding women, certain minority groups, and aboriginal peoples. Are those people I just enumerated going to see this as tokenism, or are they going to see it as equality?

Mr. Bernard Colas: They've been very supportive of these various recommendations. In some cases, they said we should have gone beyond what we expressed in saying "incentives". Therefore, in any reform, we will have to take into account especially women's groups that are well organized and understand the nature of democracy, and other people as well who want to take part in our Canadian democracy.

I remember a visit to New Zealand. The New Zealand Minister of Justice was an MP elected from a list. She was a law professor and a well-respected politician. She had a problem with her leg. I don't think she would have been able to have the strength to go around the county and constituency and get support from everyone.

So it brings diversity and sometimes some very valuable people to the houses of Parliament.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: I just want to point out that it's not a quota that is recommended here.

Mr. Dale Johnston: I guess that's something we could debate, because it looks like a quota.

I echo some of the things Madam Longfield has said. Maybe our system isn't perfect, but one thing that really concerns me is that when we campaign, we campaign on the party mandate: if elected, we're going to do this or that. Every party does that. But I think this sort of system encourages even more of a multi-party system than we have, because if you get 2% of the vote you can have 2% of the representation in Parliament and all the things that go with that.

In my opinion, that would severely dilute your ability to carry out a mandate. Once you get to Parliament, you then have to go back to the voters and say that because you didn't get the mandate you had hoped for, you don't have a majority and are therefore going to have to change a lot of the things you told the voters you were going to do. You're not going to be able to do those things now because you have to bend to the group that you have to coalesce with.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: There are two things. Number one, the issue you're raising about the multiplicity of parties also is one that is raised often, and I think that is addressed here. In many systems, they have decided to have a floor; that is, you need to have a minimum of 5% of the population, for example, to get some representation in the House. Most countries have addressed this issue. Here, because the lists are provincial, mathematically you need to have a significant amount of public support to get some representation.

I think the second point you raise is whether or not, in general, people saw it as an enrichment. In a way, people saw the fact that you would have to bring a large consensus to accomplish something as positive, in fact, as opposed to a negative. There was a way in which, for example.... Our system brings that. You can get elected with an inflated majority, but you can also get defeated with some sort of....

Our current system almost re-emphasizes or creates some additional ways in which the voters' preferences are exaggerated. It's this premium exaggeration that we're trying to correct, so as to avoid what happens in some provinces, where one election it's this party that is elected with a large majority, and the next time it's a different party. That's not stability either.

So the idea to get some greater contact within the population was good.

● (1150)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Broadbent, I'm sorry, I should have given you the floor in the previous round, but I didn't notice you wanted to speak. So, go ahead.

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to begin by complimenting the commission on its report. As someone who, exactly fifty years ago, was a first-year undergraduate of the University of Toronto, I wrote a paper advocating a mixed system for Canada. That shows how little or how slowly countries change—and maybe democratic countries in particular.

Some of my colleagues have been raising problems about your proposal. I want to very briefly get into some of the problems with the existing system. I have taken the liberty—and I would welcome my colleagues on this committee to do the same thing—of circulating a paper I prepared over Christmas to deal with a number of these issues, and I would welcome what they have to say.

Very briefly, I want to make a comment about the representational problem, which I think is profoundly anti-democratic in our system. It's not marginally anti-democratic, but profoundly anti-democratic.

If you look at the Liberal Party of Canada, which has persistently and consistently gotten about 25% of the vote from western Canada, it has persistently and consistently gotten about 5% of the seats. I think that's unfair to the Liberal Party of Canada, and I think it distorts debates and discussions that go on in caucus when they are that unrepresentative.

Similarly, the Conservative Party of Canada, in recent elections, under the Reform or Alliance label, got as much as 20% of the vote in Ontario, but zip-all in terms of seats. That's not just marginally bad, it's anti-democratic.

In the last federal election, to put my party on the agenda, if we had seats proportionate to our votes, we would have 48 seats in the House of Commons today, not 19.

In the recent election to elect people to the House of Commons in 2004, for every Liberal to get elected, a Liberal required 36,700 votes; for a Conservative, it was 40,300; and for a member of the Bloc, 31,000. For a New Democrat to get elected in Canada, he or she had to get 111,468. That's totally outrageous from any equitable point of view in any modern electoral system.

It has been said that we are one of three countries that has a system that in fact predates democracy. Our whole suffrage was based on an anti-democratic premise originally, and it was to hold the people in check. Only property owners had the right to vote. That has evolved over time. Most democracies, I repeat, including the stable ones in northern Europe, have either pure PR or a mixed system.

I just wanted to get some of that out there about the problems of our own system. I'd like to ask the representatives, in the remaining time, if they could say what the two or three worst aspects are. We've talked about the issue of women. I find that particularly pernicious. Compared to other modern democracies, we're near the bottom of the list in terms of representation of women, and there are corrective ways, thoroughly democratic ways. Competitive parties put lists out there to compete, and they end up putting out half their candidates as women, strange as it may or may not seem. Therefore, their women get elected.

But apart from the women's issue or gender concerns, what would you say are the main two flaws in our system that need correcting?

● (1155)

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: I think you've alluded to them. The one we've heard is certainly the translation from votes to seats. I think that shocks people. They look at the proportionality of votes and they don't understand how that's the Parliament they end up with.

There's the question of wasted votes or votes that are not counted. If you live in a particular place, it doesn't matter because your vote will not be counted if you vote for a minority party in that area. That irks people.

The argument that Alan Cairns made in 1968, at the beginning, said our system does emphasize the regionalism of our Parliament and prevents national issues. I think that comes up in different ways. The fact is that people have trouble with how it creates a distorted view. It does create stereotypes: all Alberta votes in a certain way; all of the Maritimes votes a certain way. That's not good for Canada. That's not good for the emergence of national agendas and for the ability of people to see that they have people who think like they do elsewhere.

Those are, I would say, the three issues that came up over and over again in our discussions and consultations.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Redman.

[*English*]

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really appreciate both of you coming as witnesses and the background material you've given us.

I want to take a bit of a different tack. There are problems with women having minority representation in all parts of society, not just in the political system. I for years was a member of a task force looking at women entrepreneurs, and we came away with the knowledge that lending institutions treated men and women fairly, in that if you were a man with no assets and no credit history, they treated you equally as badly as they did women; it's just that there were more women who fell into this category. So I think there are systemic problems, and people have referenced some of the foibles that exist and could exist under the party system.

I really wanted to focus on youth, because it's one of the areas you touched on in your research, and ask if you have any advice to give us when we look at that particular segment as to how we engage them in this process of looking at the political system.

I think back to past elections, and it's always a concern for every representative that we get young people out, because they truly are our future. They're not participating in the vote despite the fact that there are initiatives like “Get out the vote”. How do we actually engage them in this process so the system doesn't contribute to their sense of...I don't know if we'd say “disenfranchisement” or just their apathy towards not only taking part in the actual system but taking part in how we look at this?

Mr. Bernard Colas: We have organized various events with young people, conferences and in a way competitions as well as mock elections and parliaments, and this is a way to connect with them.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: I think they are. We spent a whole day organized by youth on this issue. The same issues about the discrepancies between the number of seats and the number of votes affect them as well. That there is not much room for a diversity of ideas is one thing that came out. If you are an environmentalist, then you have to decide early on whether you will express yourself through traditional political parties or will have to go outside. That was a concern for us, that in fact their political acumen was being moved outside of the traditional ways in which people express themselves; that's a real concern.

In part the impetus for this project was that it's not appropriate if people say the only way I can express myself is outside the traditional forum. We have to look at and reform the system itself so there's room for new ideas and for new people to access representation.

The Chair: Madam Redman, there's time for a short question.

Hon. Karen Redman: There is a private member's bill coming before the House from one of our Liberal colleagues, and it's looking at lowering the voting age. I wonder if in your ruminations you could give us feedback on what the response was for that proposal.

● (1200)

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: I think there are two pieces of information. Certainly it came up in many aspects, and we have a great poster sent to us from a student saying "I can't vote, but I can drive. Which is more dangerous?" The Béland commission in Quebec looked at this issue as well and did not recommend lowering the age, but certainly I think that's an issue. We're looking at another project, and I think it's worth looking into. It came up over and over again.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bernard Colas: This other project dealt with is "Does Age Matter?" And we have another project on globalization, in which we see that Canadians are becoming citizens of the world; they're not tied to a territory but are in this movement phase as opposed to a sedentary one.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Guimond, you're just in time: it's your turn.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madame, gentlemen, thank you for your testimony. I'm going to try to discipline myself and ask brief questions. I'll ask you to give me brief answers. But take your time in answering. I want to address two quite separate subjects.

Ms. Des Rosiers, you referred earlier to spoiled ballots. I'd like you or Mr. Colas to tell me whether your March 2004 study examined the coming into effect of Bill C-24 on political party financing. One element has changed with regard to spoiled ballots. Parliament has democratized electoral habits and financing to a greater degree. It opted for a system that Quebec adopted in 1977. In that perspective, do you maintain the expression "spoiled ballot"?

I now have a second question, which will lead to a longer answer.

The Chair: Why not go ahead right away?

Mr. Michel Guimond: I'll ask it right away; they may take 15 minutes to answer it.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Here's my second question. Is there a link between electoral reform and the voter turnout rate? At least, should we establish one?

I know you don't have a crystal ball and you can't know whether that will result in a higher voter turnout rate in our elections, but let's be a little more precise. In your view, is there a link with a class that has a turnout problem, the youth fringe, voters 18 to 29 years of age? You may answer that there isn't, or that you haven't studied the matter, or that you can't form an opinion on the phenomenon.

I'd like to hear what you have to say. Canada prides itself and gives lessons in democracy around the world, announces that it's going to show people how to organize democratic elections in the Ukraine, Haiti and certain African countries. That doesn't prevent the fact that there's a voter turnout problem. Canadians and Quebeckers are disaffected with the electoral process. Perhaps it might be in our interest to look at what's going on in our own backyard before giving lessons around the world.

The Chair: Mr. Guimond, there won't be any time for the answer.

Madame, over to you.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: I'll answer both your questions. Let's talk about Bill C-24. The expression "spoiled ballot" in fact comes from the people. The reforms introduced so that every vote counts in establishing party financing don't appear to be sufficient, from what people say, because they don't lead to a higher correlation between their votes and the number of seats. Based on our consultations, that's where the problem lies.

Let's talk about our second point, the voter turnout rate. A study by André Blais and Louis Massicotte contends that, having regard to all factors, countries with a first-past-the-post electoral system such as ours have lower voter turnout than that of countries with proportional systems. This is not clear, however. A change in electoral system is not an instant guarantee of maintained voter turnout. The answer depends on a set of factors, such as election organization, when elections are called, and so on. Far too many factors are involved for us to be able to say that it's a guarantee of greater turnout. It would be dishonest to say that's clear.

Blais writes that a system in which all votes are counted, in which all citizens feel that all votes count, is encouraging for the public. Voters who live in ridings where a party as a lock on the seat can vote for another party. In the system we propose, people have two votes. That's very attractive for people. They vote for the riding member and for candidates from various lists. This principle brings the system closer to voters, enables them to say what they really want in a more subtle way. Perhaps we've gotten to that stage. People are more mature and they may want a more subtle system.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame, perhaps we should put this question to the researcher, but I'm going to ask it anyway. The English version of the report states, at page 96:

[*English*]

"Because the number of single-member ridings in our model is reduced by one-third, their average size will automatically grow by a similar figure...". I can't figure that out mathematically. If you reduce by one-third, to achieve the same thing you have to increase by 50% in the other directions.

[*Translation*]

That's called the rule of three.

[*English*]

How do you arrive at that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Colas: I'm going to answer your question and Mr. Guimond's question at the same time.

If we decide that one-third of members will be elected from lists, we'll be obliged to expand the ridings.

The Chair: They'll be expanded by 50 percent.

Mr. Bernard Colas: No, they'll be expanded by one-third.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, listen. There are 300 ridings mathematically—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Colas: In New Zealand, they opted for equal shares.

The Chair: Look, if the number of ridings is reduced, from 300 to 200, every riding will be 50 percent larger, not one-third.

[*English*]

That's mathematics. If you reduce by one-third, the other size has to increase by 50%.

[*Translation*]

It's the rule of three.

[*English*]

It's like exchanging money in U.S. rates back and forth. It's not the same proportion when you go in the other direction, or have I got it wrong? So you have to increase the riding size by 50%. If you reduce the number of riding MPs by one-third, you don't increase it by one-third, or you would end up short by a whole bunch of members.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Colas: That's right.

The Chair: What's that mean in mathematical terms? Perhaps I don't understand.

Mr. Bernard Colas: You've drawn an interesting distinction.

The Chair: It's a distinction equivalent to roughly 40 members!

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: In Canada, the distribution of urban and rural ridings is a very major concern, as you are no doubt aware. It often came up in the consultations. With the lists, it's not as though we abandoned the idea that they would be represented. On the contrary, people like the idea of having two votes and being able to turn to another party at the same time. In terms of representation, they had the impression that this wasn't a loss but rather a gain, since there are representatives of their party and other parties at the provincial level.

The Chair: I represent a rural riding, and I can tell you that expanding a riding with an area of thousands of square kilometers represents a very big increase.

I'll move on to the next question.

[*English*]

Mr. Reid, you're a rural member. Anyway, it's your turn.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Yes, I'm actually very glad, Mr. Chairman, that you raised this. I represent a rural constituency as well. It's about one and a half times, geographically, the size of P.E.I. and has 113,000 people in it, according to the last election.

Before that, in 2000, I was elected in the riding that had the largest number of votes cast in the entire country, and it was also a large riding geographically speaking. It would, however, at approximately 140,000 people, be some 20,000 below the average Ontario riding under the model you're proposing. Based on my personal experience, I will say that you cannot provide effective representation with a riding that is both geographically that large and that has that many people. For one thing, what you tend to get is ridings—this is just a geographical fact—that are going to be partly rural and partly urban. I had both an urban area, Kanata, and some of the poorest rural townships in Ontario. I can tell you that it was impossible to provide effective representation to both at the same time.

I'll just finish my thought here before you comment. That is a problem that has to be dealt with. One could deal with it by increasing the total number of MPs, but if you don't do that—and you can propose what you've got down there—that is a problem you should be aware of.

Now, I had two very brief questions, and then a longer one. My brief questions really are very brief.

One: Would the two-thirds of seats that you're not talking about being proportional have the first-past-the-post system we use now, or some other form, such as the Australian lower house? That's the first one.

● (1210)

Mr. Bernard Colas: First-past-the-post.

Mr. Scott Reid: It would be first-past-the-post. Okay, thank you.

The second thing I wanted to ask is again very brief. Recognizing that your complaints or observations with first-past-the-post are largely, I think, accepted as being legitimate, would you be willing, if Canada went through something like a B.C.-style citizens' assembly process and wound up proposing something that's not first-past-the-post, but something that is not what you proposed—if, for example, they proposed, as they've done in B.C., multi-member districts—would you be willing to live with that, or would you prefer to go back to...? You can sort of follow where I'm going with this.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: I will speak as a citizen. On the first issue, the concepts of representation, what does representation mean? That's what was interesting as well, that people certainly want to have a little access to the ombudsman service that an MP does. And I hear your worry about an increased size, but the function of ombudsman is divided among different MPs at that stage. You're not alone representing a larger riding, because you have list members you can call upon. That's one of the proposals from Scotland—

Mr. Scott Reid: Thanks. I'm going to stop you there. I don't think that has been found to be the case in the countries that have this system.

I actually want to get to the substantive question that I have here, which is this: There are other systems out there that do allow for some form of proportionality without going to a list. Just as an example of one that has been in operation for a long period of time I would cite the system that is used in Tasmania, where you have five members per riding, each one is elected when they have over 20% of the votes cast, and of course each voter has five votes to cast. That tends to produce multiple members from multiple parties in the same constituency and therefore introduces a level of proportionality. Something like that, it seems to me, would to some degree reduce the problem that I was addressing at the beginning, while at the same time addressing the kind of problem that Mr. Broadbent addressed so eloquently when he talked about the lack of members.

And as one of the two Canadian Alliance MPs elected in Ontario in an election where we got 25% of the vote and there are 100 members in the province, I accept the legitimacy of what he's saying. So the question is: Don't you think there would be some potential merit to that as an alternative to the current system that doesn't necessarily have a national list?

The Chair: A short answer please.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: On the first issue, people actually think representation is more than an ombudsman function. They also want diverse ideas when people discuss problems. So you have to be careful not to limit all concepts of representation. This we heard over and over again, that the function of ombudsman is not central to what the citizen expects from his or her MP and from the political system.

On the second one, we looked at this proposal and certainly I think there are some big issues when you're trying to do it at the federal level. The experts at this stage thought that in fact an MP was the easiest way of resolving the irritants in the current system in a way that was progressive, that allowed for people to have a better system, and that corrected the current irritants without completely changing the culture of the way in which people are elected.

● (1215)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Picard.

Ms. Pauline Picard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First I'd like to emphasize that your approach enabled people to really express what they wanted in terms of representation. They want their vote to accurately reflect their concerns. For that, I congratulate you for conducting those consultations.

I would like to come back to them. We could talk about the mixed system, the reform and so on, but the fact remains that our present mandate really concerns the consultation process. What would you recommend to the committee for it to be as effective as possible and for it not to spend too much time conducting the consultations that will ultimately lead to a reform?

Mr. Bernard Colas: Today's discussion shows that the way in which proposals regarding the present system are understood varies from individual to individual and based on political origins. One of the missions is to address your audience. We can see that, in other countries, it's possible to discuss all existing electoral systems around a table because people have been trained, educated on the subject.

Then, to answer Mr. Reid, who asked whether we could live with another system proposed to us, I'd say that, to reach that conclusion, we'd have to take another look at the 10 criteria on which we evaluated and developed this proposal. If the 10 criteria, or one of the 10, was added or altered, and that resulted in another proposal that might prove significant, we could indeed live very well with the proposed system. The fact remains that we have here the 10 criteria that we established after consulting the public. So, after educating your audience, you should consider what democratic principles should form the basis of the proposal.

Lastly, we're not talking about a bill or a debate intended solely for the elite. In fact, this concerns every citizen. So the question should be whether a parliamentary committee is the best way to listen to young people who belong to other associations and rarely set foot here. You should make sure, in the consultation process, that you reach those people and draw on the views of the various Canadians who live in our country.

The Chair: Ms. Picard.

Ms. Pauline Picard: That's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Casey.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'm sitting here listening to this and wondering where I'm going wrong or you're going wrong. It sounds like we're from two different countries.

I represent a riding in Nova Scotia. First, we'll discuss the size issue. My riding represents the same area served by five and a half provincial members of the legislature. I can't even do it right. I was first elected in 1988, and I was thrown out once. I've been back three other times. So I've been at this for a while now.

There's one aspect you may not have considered. In the last few years, the Government of Canada has closed offices in my riding, including Industry Canada, Fisheries, Agriculture, Veterans Affairs, RCMP, Customs, Immigration, Revenue Canada, and employment insurance. The only place people have to go to in my riding is my two offices, and we are really busy.

You say that people don't want an ombudsman. I don't know where you're getting that, because you certainly didn't come to my riding. People look at me as an ombudsman and the first line of contact with the federal government in a whole lot of offices. That's just on the ombudsman side. You're wrong on that. People do look at our offices in rural Canada as the only connection to people in the government. They just expanded my riding a lot, and I can't handle any more. My riding goes from the New Brunswick border into Halifax.

You say that women have a hard time getting nominated. In the last election there were five of us in the contest, and I was the only man. There were four nominated women. I won, but I'm not gloating because one of those women beat me before and will probably beat me again sometime in the future. In every race I've been in, there have been nominated women. On the Liberal side, it was all women for the nomination.

I just find that the things you're talking about don't apply in my riding. I don't know if you've gone to Nova Scotia and done any research there, but I find that what you're saying does not apply to my area at all.

Under the concept of one-third appointed, how is that going to increase the number of women in Parliament?

● (1220)

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: On the role of ombudsman, people want an ombudsman, but it's not clear that they want their MP to be an ombudsman.

Mr. Bill Casey: Who else would it be?

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: People want contact with the government. They want things to work. They want to get their cheques.

The question we're discussing here is what is the best way of ensuring representation. Is the ombudsman role the only criterion we should look at? If so, then you would decrease the size. You would only work on territory and so on and so forth.

But that's not what we've heard. People appreciate the ombudsman role. It could come from many quarters. They appreciate it particularly when there has been a decrease in services. They certainly are concerned about it. But they want more. They want a Parliament where there are a diversity of ideas and new people. All the ideas are represented there, not in the streets—

Mr. Bill Casey: I have to interrupt you. I'm the longest-serving member of Parliament in my province, and I believe I am because I am an ombudsman. I help people, and I love doing it. But I wouldn't stay there if I just came to Ottawa and discussed philosophy and government policy. I would not be here if it weren't for the ombudsman part of my job.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: The point is that you have more ombudsmen. You have more people representing the area.

Mr. Bill Casey: Then that should be in your program.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: It is in there. When you have people on the list, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about the coordination of effort—

Mr. Bill Casey: No, I don't agree with that.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: —between the MPs who represent the constituencies and the people who represent the province. That's the story in the countries where that exists, and that functions well. There needs to be some coordination. So we responded to—

Mr. Bill Casey: I invite you to come to Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley and sit in my office and listen to eight or ten people a day.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Casey, but time's up.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Boivin, it will be your turn, then Mr. Broadbent's. Then we should adjourn the meeting because time will be up.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: In the wake of what I said earlier, I'd like to come back to the 40 percent of people who didn't vote. Under the system in effect, we have to make recommendations to Parliament on the best way to consult Canadians.

Have you found a way of reaching these people so that they can give us their opinions? Among other things, you referred to the Béland Commission, as regards Quebec. In reading the report, I noticed that the groups that expressed their views were either people already very informed on these matters or people who either had firm views or were disappointed, such as environmentalists, who feel they are poorly represented. It seems to me this state of affairs may distort the picture somewhat. How can we reach this 40 percent of people who don't vote, whereas this withdrawal is being felt at all levels of society? That's the case in the parishes, schools, parent meetings and so on. So what will we do to get the opinions of these people?

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: We were very concerned not to hear just from people with firm views. That's our mandate and that's consistent with the ethics of law reform. We also conducted consultations. When we show up at a Rotary Club at 8:00 a.m. and say: “Surprise, we're going to talk about electoral reform,” people aren't convinced. They come to the debate cold. We made efforts in that respect. For example, we went to see a nurses association, and so on.

Since we don't have a lot of resources, we use existing networks to stimulate discussion. We invented the Electoral Tupperware Party to stimulate certain small discussions. There's no magic to it; you have to make a lot of effort.

If you had a concrete proposal—regardless of whether it was ours or another one—it would be easier to get broadcast time, to create discussion groups. We can't take it for granted that people are interested at the outset, but, when we ask them for their opinion, from our experience, they generally participate quite well. People want to talk about this issue.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Broadbent.

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I have one question at this stage, and it's on process.

Having looked at your process and having looked at the B.C. process, I've come up with a proposal that I think might work. I'd be very much interested in getting your reaction. That is to say, as you know, one of our prime responsibilities is to recommend to the government what to do about all of this.

My proposal has the following components. It would be that we have a committee of MPs that does consultations across the country, listening, as one says, to the usual suspects—that is to say, experts, business groups, union groups, academics, and so on, and to ordinary citizens who may come out. They would be traditional consultations. Running parallel to that committee would be a focus group organization along the lines of what was done for the Romanow commission, wherein Canadian values are being assessed, values on the electoral system.

When the latter finishes its report on the values, that report would go to the MPs' committee that was also doing its consulting with experts and so on. The MPs' committee would reach a final recommendation, based on a values report on what ordinary Canadians are thinking and based on their own consultations.

I'd like your reaction to that as a process. Do you think that makes sense? Secondly, on the assumption that this may not even get under way until possibly next September at the earliest, how many months do you think it could take to accomplish that?

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: Our recommendation was certainly that the process on which you decide—and I think there's some.... To talk about particularly the question of values, there's no doubt in my mind—and I think all theories of consultation say this—that it's much better to engage citizens on values as opposed to asking experts to discuss values. That's the mistake we often make.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Or the other way around.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: Yes.

So there is a way. I think the CPRN experiment on getting people to discuss the Canada they want...the process that they've used and that we've looked at is a very interesting process and would be appropriate. We recommend that there be sufficient funds to do a good job. It's important that the committee be sufficiently abilitated both in time and money.

We have other projects, and this was one of them. We did it over a year and a half, but I think you could do it in far less time than that, like six months, so as to maintain the momentum.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Bittle, do you want to add anything?

[*English*]

Mr. Steven Bittle: One of the important points that has been touched upon, to speak in research terms, is that if you were going to go out and look at a particular phenomenon and research it, you wouldn't just use one method. You would use multiple methods, because citizens are going to respond differently to different engagement strategies. The idea is to incorporate a plurality of opportunities for people to give their opinions and feedback on the democratic process.

Second to that, one of the valuable lessons that we learned through our engagement process was to allow citizens and community groups and community members to feel like partners in the process, to feel that they have an equal voice and an equal opportunity at the table to take ownership of the issue, because as we all know, democracy is owned by everybody.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

There is time for one last question.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Very briefly, whatever system is developed for consulting with Canadians, you'll almost certainly be back as witnesses before it, so I thought I just might make a suggestion to you.

I have the impression that you would get a more favourable response to what you're proposing if you took into account the fact that you're still leaving the first-past-the-post system in place for two-thirds of MPs. If you consider some alternative to that, you might get a better response.

Just as a statement of fact, as someone who was elected in 2000 with 38% of the vote, as you can imagine, 40,000 people in my riding voted against me. It was the largest number ever to vote against someone who successfully got to office. What you're doing is setting up the groundwork for people to get elected with 50,000 and 60,000 voting against them, and you can see why that is problematic. So that's one thing I'd like you to look at.

The second thing is that I'd suggest something that deals with the geographic size of ridings and the populations of ridings, including considering potentially a larger number of MPs in the House of Commons, because I can just tell you that really is a problem that will cause people in rural areas to have very serious concerns about what you're proposing.

● (1230)

The Chair: The last word goes to Mr. Colas.

Mr. Bernard Colas: This is based on our same criteria. I understand that for rural communities, they're larger, but we balanced and we said that having just representation related to the votes is more important than many other factors. In our hierarchy of the ten criteria, that was one. You might take another one. This is why you come with another proposal based on values. Mr. Broadbent's proposal is interesting in saying that we have to make a special effort to define what our proposals for democracy are.

Therefore, just as concluding remarks, I thank you very much for allowing us to be here today. This is just a reflection of a year and a half to two years of work. We have research reports. We have all sorts of things we can provide you. We have lists of contacts, people who are interested. However, our work stops there, because we're not a lobby group; we're here just to provide you with the voices of the Canadians we've heard. It is left to you now to take up the ball and to create our democracy, improve it.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Colas, Mr. Bittle and Professor Des Rosiers for being here this morning. We've had a very stimulating discussion. This is a good way to start the work we'll soon have to do.

[*English*]

I will now ask everyone who is not supposed to be at an in camera meeting to promptly allow us to proceed with the second part. It is in camera because it's agenda-setting. If you people could make that happen quickly as opposed to slowly, it would help us, because we do have to proceed with that immediately.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

● (1232)

(Pause)

● (1255)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

[*Translation*]

The Chair: So I set that aside.

[*English*]

We're no longer in camera as of now.

[*Translation*]

It is moved that, in its study on electoral reform, seven members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be authorized to travel to Wellington, New Zealand, and Canberra, Australia, from March 24 to April 3, 2005, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

[*English*]

It is further proposed that, in relation to its study on electoral reform, seven members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be authorized to travel to Edinburgh, U.K., London, U.K., and Berlin, Germany, from—same dates—March 24 to April 3, 2005, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

Is there someone to propose this motion? Monsieur LeBlanc, seconded by Mr. Johnston.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Second, it is moved that a travel budget of $289,695 be approved by the committee for travel to the United Kingdom, Germany, New Zealand and Australia, and that the Chair be instructed to submit the travel budget to the Liaison Committee as soon as possible.

Is there anyone to move this motion?

[*English*]

Mr. Broadbent, seconded by Mr. Johnston.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your patience.

Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Dale Johnston: I had another motion there regarding committee structure, that is, for members on the committee.

The Chair: That's a striking committee. It doesn't need to be approved here.

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, I just have a brief point on the motion to travel. I think all of us in this committee should bear in mind that if we're recommending this travel now—how do I put this—we obviously have to conscientiously do our own duty, but it would probably not make much sense for us to recommend, if there's another committee process we're going to recommend that the government act upon, that they duplicate the travels we undertake—if you follow me.

It seems to me that either the group who is maybe going to continue it down the road should do the travelling or, if we're going to be doing it now en route of making preparations, we should keep in mind that we're doing the groundwork maybe for a subsequent committee. That's all.

The Chair: That's a very good point, Mr. Broadbent, and I think there's a logical follow-up to that as well, and there are whips and House leaders and such on this committee. We would hope the people who will be doing the travelling will be the same people who are listening to the witnesses here so this exercise will be a logical follow-up and not something less wholesome.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: But even on a subsequent committee the government may need—

The Chair: Yes, that too, but I meant in addition to what you said, Mr. Broadbent. I'm thinking of the second proposition, which is that members who do take the trip will be, hopefully, as much as possible the exact same people who have listened to witnesses here. Otherwise, there will be very little benefit even though there might be an excellent travel opportunity—to put it mildly.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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