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Chair

The Honourable Don Boudria

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● (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.)): I see another colleague joining us. We have quorum for the purpose of listening to witnesses this morning.

Order, please.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to the Order of Reference of Thursday, November 25, 2004, we will now proceed with the study on electoral reform.

[*English*]

The witnesses we have before us this morning include Mr. David McLaughlin, deputy minister of the Commission on Legislative Democracy.

[*Translation*]

We also have, appearing as an individual, Mr. Claude Béland, from the Mouvement Démocratie et Citoyenneté du Québec.

I'd like to thank our two guests, Mr. McLaughlin from the Government of New Brunswick and Mr. Béland from Quebec, for accepting our invitation.

I would ask you to make your opening statements in turn, after which we'll ask our colleagues to elaborate on various points as they see fit.

Mr. McLaughlin, do you want to start?

[*English*]

Mr. David McLaughlin (Deputy Minister, Commission on Legislative Democracy, Government of New Brunswick): Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I'd like to begin by giving you a quick overview of the structure and mandate of the commission—I have a short statement just to set the stage for you—as well as talking about the process we undertook to complete our work, as this relates more directly to the principal focus of your order of reference. I'd be pleased to answer any questions you might have on any aspect of the commission's final report, recommendations, or anything to do with our work.

The Commission on Legislative Democracy was established in December 2003 by Premier Bernard Lord. It was composed of eight persons—four men and four women, of whom four were anglophones and four francophones. It had two co-chairs. All commissioners were appointed by order in council. Beyond gender and language balance, the commissioners were geographically representative of the province and brought a range of professional, personal, and political experiences to the table. Commissioners were appointed to represent themselves and their own views, rather than any particular group, organization, or political party. The commission formally reported to the premier, but in reality operated independently and considered itself as reporting to all New Brunswickers—which we did.

The commission was given a one-year mandate, to December 31, 2004, to examine and make recommendations in three principal areas: electoral reform, legislative reform, and democratic reform.

Under electoral reform, the commission was required to recommend a model of proportional representation best suited to New Brunswick. Those are the words in the mandate. We were given four basic parameters to consider in recommending a new electoral system: it was to ensure “fairer representation, greater equality of votes, an effective legislature and government, and a continued role for directly-elected MLAs representing specific geographic boundaries”—again, words from the mandate. We were also asked to recommend the next steps in implementing a new proportional representation or PR electoral system.

The commission's mandate under electoral reform also extended to three other areas: recommending a process and statute to draw electoral boundaries on a regular basis as well as propose the number of MLAs to be represented in the House; to propose a fixed election date for the province; and to make recommendations to boost voter turnout and participation in the electoral process, particularly amongst young New Brunswickers.

Under legislative reform, the commission was required to make recommendations in two main areas: first, enhancing the role of MLAs and the legislature to make the House and its members more relevant and accountable; and second, propose a new method of making appointments to government agencies, boards, and commissions to enhance transparency and accountability.

Under democratic reform, the commission was required to develop a New Brunswick referendum act, as well as make recommendations to increase citizen engagement and participation in government and legislative decision-making.

This mandate was the most extensive and comprehensive democratic renewal study ever conducted in New Brunswick. Indeed, it is one of the most extensive ever conducted in Canada. For this reason, a study commission of this structure was chosen.

The commission's final report and recommendations, over 200 pages in length, was delivered to the Premier on time and under budget. He tabled it in the legislature in early January, and it was made public at that time.

That was our mandate; now a quick word on our process.

Given the very broad and deep nature of our mandate, we had to create not one single process but a range of research and consultation processes and opportunities for citizens, organizations, and experts to participate. Not only were we explicitly required under our mandate to seek the views of New Brunswickers; we needed to conduct our own research and learning to assist us in formulating the key issues and questions we wanted to focus on in ultimately arriving at our own conclusions and recommendations.

If the report and recommendations were going to find any favour at the end of our mandate, then the way we fulfilled our mandate was very important. The legitimacy of the process mattered. That is why we first established four key principles to guide our work and involve as many New Brunswickers as possible. These were openness, participation, partnerships, and research-based.

Commission meetings would be as open as possible by putting our agendas and presentations on our website. Specific consultation materials would be developed and disseminated. Participation would be maximized by creating a range of different events through which citizens could give us input. Formal partnerships with outside groups would be sought to extend our reach and bring in their members and expertise. And finally, new independent research would be undertaken to give us a strong analytical base for our recommendations.

The section entitled “How We Did Our Work”, in the preface to the final report, sets out in some detail the processes we followed and the consultation and learning events we held.

The commission's work had three basic phases that may be of some interest to you: first, a research phase that included commissioning 12 independent research papers by leading academics in New Brunswick and across Canada. This will be published in a companion volume some time later this year. We held open learning events with these academics and other experts through a series of conferences and round tables. We had staff presentations and discussions amongst the commissioners in order to help our own learning.

Second was a broad-based consultation process or phase, involving public hearings in the spring and fall, community leader round tables, and targeted forums with youth, students, women, and the Acadian and francophone communities. Consultation papers, fact sheets, and on-line questionnaires were developed and distributed.

Third was a deliberation phase, during which commissioners considered the range of input we had been receiving. To ensure our process was fully transparent and to stimulate more discussion and feedback, we released a progress report entitled “Options” in the fall of last year, setting out some of the specific directions we were contemplating.

● (1110)

The commission's final report is, I believe, a milestone in democratic renewal in New Brunswick. Its comprehensive nature, original research, and forceful recommendations make it a unique and potentially lasting contribution to our province's democratic life.

Let me just conclude by giving you a quick flavour of its scope and breadth.

To make votes count for New Brunswickers, we proposed adopting a new, regional PR electoral system called “New Brunswick mixed member proportional”, with two-thirds of MLAs being elected as now under the current first-past-the-post system, and one-third being elected from party lists in four regions. We also recommended a province-wide referendum to be held no later than the next election, to allow all New Brunswickers the chance to have their say on such a change.

The commission also recommended: that in the future all elections be held on the third Monday in October every four years; a new representation and electoral boundaries act, with boundaries being redrawn after every decennial census; a new independent elections commission called Elections New Brunswick, including online voter registration and other measures to make voting easier for people.

To make the system work better for New Brunswickers, we recommended a rebalancing of authority away from the executive branch, back to the legislature, with significant new measures to make MLAs more independent, free from party discipline, relevant, effective, and accountable. We also recommended a new independent and merit-based process to appoint New Brunswickers to agencies, boards, and commissions, as well as significant new rules governing the financing and conduct of political party nominations and leaderships, together with establishing party policy foundations.

To make the voices of New Brunswickers heard, particularly those of youth and women, we recommended creating a mandatory K-to-12 civics education program promoting political awareness and participation in the schools, including mock elections and that sort of thing. As well, we proposed increasing the number of women elected to the legislature by providing specific financial incentives to parties to nominate more women.

Finally, we proposed a New Brunswick referendum act for holding binding, province-wide referendums on an exceptional basis, and a range of measures to increase the participation of citizens in participatory democracy and decision-making.

In sum, that's the commission and its process. I'd be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McLaughlin, for this introduction.

[*Translation*]

Now over to Mr. Claude Béland, from the Mouvement Démocratie et Citoyenneté du Québec, as I said earlier. Mr. Béland, once again, welcome. Do you have a statement to make to us before we move on to questions?

Mr. Claude Béland (Mouvement Démocratie et Citoyenneté du Québec, As Individual): Yes, I have a brief statement to make.

I believe what has earned me the privilege of appearing before you today is that I previously had another privilege, that of chairing the Estates General on the Reform of Democratic Institutions in Quebec in 2003. That was a unique event. It was in fact the first time that citizens, a group of nine citizens, had had the opportunity to consult the public, with the aid of the government, which funded the entire operation, which is not to be sniffed at. The government wanted...

[*English*]

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): I'm sorry to interrupt. I'm not getting any English interpretation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): I'm listening to the floor in order to improve my language knowledge. When people speak French, I hear French; when they speak English, I hear English. This enables us to improve our knowledge of the other language.

● (1115)

The Chair: Thank you. In my case, I've never used the equipment. So I don't know much about it.

[*English*]

English to French is coming through. French to English is not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chairman, we can continue because we have a text in English.

The Chair: That's contrary to our rules, which are quite clear. For a committee to be duly constituted, there has to be simultaneous interpretation. I'm sorry, but I can't allow such a suggestion. We'll have to wait for the system to operate properly. I'm sure our colleagues want the system to work in both languages. In any case, even after the four- or five-minute statement, we'll have the same problem during the ensuing question period. Either way, we have to wait.

[*English*]

Colleagues, perhaps we could officially suspend to the call of the chair. Many of us may like to have informal conversations with Mr. McLaughlin or Mr. Béland and maybe it's better to suspend, so at least we can do something, because right now we can't. The technician has to—-

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Or we could go with some of the Law Commission first, maybe.

The Chair: We have already heard Mr. McLaughlin.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: We could have questions and answers with Mr. McLaughlin.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: What happens when one of our colleagues asks a question in French? It's the same thing. I wouldn't want anyone to raise a question of privilege 15 minutes from now.

We normally don't sit if the simultaneous interpretation system doesn't work. So we're going to suspend our proceedings for a few minutes, until the recall. I apologize to our two witnesses, and of course to all my colleagues as well.

● (1119)

(Pause)

● (1122)

[*English*]

The Chair: Order please, we will resume.

Apparently our technician informs us that the system is now working. I apologize to colleagues for the time that it wasn't.

[*Translation*]

I apologize especially to Mr. Béland, since we've interrupted his presentation.

You may continue.

Mr. Claude Béland: Mr. Chairman, I believe what has earned me the privilege of appearing before you today is that I previously had another privilege, that of chairing the Estates General on the Reform of Democratic Institutions in Quebec in 2003.

I believe it was a unique event, in that it enabled some citizens to consult all citizens as a whole, or at least those who wanted to be heard. I say that there were “some” citizens who consulted. The minister who had the idea of a consultation named me as chairman and told me to select the members of the steering committee, the nine persons who visited Quebec and heard the public. So I selected Mr. Shapiro, who at the time was the Rector of McGill University for young people and women. We established a committee that represented the population of Quebec as well as possible, in a non-partisan manner.

We visited twenty towns in Quebec and held 27 public hearings, which were convened through the newspapers and the mail. Canada Post helped us by distributing four million invitations to citizens to come and tell us what they thought about Quebec's political democratic institutions. We received 237 briefs from bodies corporate. We obviously didn't request briefs from individuals. One thousand persons attended the Estates General. The whole thing ultimately culminated in a report.

What interested us as citizens and might interest you as well is that we observed, first of all, the frame of mind of voters. I would qualify that. I've made a career in the field of democratically controlled institutions, in the cooperatives, mutual associations and so on. In Quebec, of course, there are a lot of union and cooperative members. People who had had this experience with cooperative or democratic associations and who came to see us always told us that there was an incredible difference between their democratically controlled organizations and political institutions. They said that, where they lived, it was they who adopted the general by-laws. They gave their elected representatives a mandate, whereas they had the impression it didn't work that way when they were dealing with political institutions. They said that, ultimately, every four or five years, they gave elected representatives power—not a mandate, but rather power—and that they couldn't do much in the meantime.

Part of the public had that reaction: they demanded a reform of democratic institutions, not just of the voting method.

The other part of the population had very different reasons, such as globalization. They said that decisions were being made so quickly now that the government couldn't be allowed to make sudden decisions over four or five years without the public having a chance to intervene otherwise than by protesting in the streets or through non-institutional means.

Others told us there was increase in individual awareness, that the community was very much on the losing end of this and that democracy would thus suffer. There was a great disenchantment. The hardest thing for us was to see how little people believed in democracy.

I'll simply describe one incident. I read a little a spiel at the start of the meeting and closed with a statement by Abraham Lincoln, who said that democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people. And in many regions, people in the room laughed. One evening, someone even stood up and said: “Mr. Béland, I didn't think you were a humorist.” That shows you to what extent people misperceive democracy. There's a certain degree of cynicism about democracy.

Others told us nothing should be changed. We didn't set much sotre by that opinion because we understood from people's submissions that they were asking for four things from us, and mainly concerning the voting method, since that's what you're interested in.

First, people said that the distortions had to be corrected, that we had to ensure that every voter's vote counted in the final, overall result, which is not currently the case in Quebec. Second, they said the relationship between voter and member should be maintained. They were emphatic about that. So they didn't want wall-to-wall proportional representation.

Third, they said political pluralism should be fostered and that third parties should be allowed to enter the Quebec National Assembly and the House of Commons of Canada.

Lastly, they said that fair and equitable representation should be guaranteed for women, young people and ethno-cultural communities in Quebec's National Assembly.

● (1125)

We made recommendations to the government and suggested measures. We made 14 recommendations, which did not all concern the voting method, but we proposed a form of regional proportional representation as the voting method.

The Government of Quebec did not act on that recommendation. I believe you know what the Quebec government proposed, but it's not up to me to explain it to you, since I'm not a representative of the government. We had also proposed, as a second option, a majority system like the one we have now, with compensatory measures, which the Government of Quebec is currently proposing.

That's what I wanted to tell you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Béland.

We'll now move on to questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Reid, you're first.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

I'm going to direct my first questions to Mr. McLaughlin.

Unfortunately, I only have your summary of recommendations here. Perhaps the answers that you'd be able to give me would have been available to me if I had the full document. I'm not blaming you for that; I'm blaming myself for not having gone to your website first.

Having said that, in recommendation 3, you recommend—and I'm quoting: That voters in each of the four multi-member regionaldistricts elect five MLAs from closed party lists on the basisof the party vote received within the region.

And recommendation 7 says: That the list PR seats be allocated on a regional basis,based on the D'Hondt electoral formula, so as to partiallycorrect for disproportionality in the single memberconstituency elections.

Could you just elucidate what you mean by that?

● (1130)

Mr. David McLaughlin: The basic model of mixed-member proportional has two-thirds of the members elected under the current first-past-the-post. If you take our House, it currently has 55 members. For the sake of argument and modelling, we increase it to 56 just to make the numbers work. With 56 members, two-thirds are elected under first-past-the-post, so 55 ridings become 36, geographically covering the whole province.

There are four regions: one north, one central, one southeast, and one south. Those four regions would each have five list MLAs. They would be chosen by parties, which would bring them forward through their party lists through various nomination processes. Proportionality would be calculated in the region.

For the sake of argument—and we have various models here in the report, just to take a look at them—let's say a party was eligible for eight seats in a particular region. If they had won those eight seats already through the single-member ridings, then they wouldn't be eligible for any list MLA seats to hence correct for disproportionality. There's no disproportionality to correct in that circumstance. However, if they were eligible for six seats but had elected three through the single-member ridings in that particular region, then they would receive three MLAs in that region, using the top three names off their particular party list.

So again, the purpose is to correct for disproportionality, but it's calculated on a regional basis.

Mr. Scott Reid: Only within that region.

Mr. David McLaughlin: Within that region, that's correct.

Mr. Scott Reid: And a region is basically going to be the boundaries of nine seats; essentially, it would be drawn on the same boundaries.

Mr. David McLaughlin: Yes. Again, for the sake of modelling and explaining how the system would work, we put nine single-member ridings and five list PR MLAs in each region.

Mr. Scott Reid: You said it's a closed list. That essentially means it's a list that the party provides, we'd like these persons to be our first, second, and third candidates.

Mr. David McLaughlin: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: There's no provision, I'm gathering, for you to say that person would have had to have been a candidate. In fact, it's just the opposite. They could not have been a candidate in one of the individual seats.

Mr. David McLaughlin: No, we recommended a prohibition on dual candidacies.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's interesting, because I've been struggling with how you get around increasing party discipline when you have some kind of list system. The thought that had occurred to me—of course, I'm translating this at the federal level—is to try to ensure that you had to be a candidate in an individual riding. That would, of course, get around the danger that the party bosses choose the seats for those who are the most obedient or whatever, or come from their faction of the party. There must be a reason why you chose to not consider that and actually prohibit that. Could you tell me what the reason would be?

Mr. David McLaughlin: The values set that the commissioners went from in that instance was a very straightforward principle: that there should be no back door to the legislature. It should be very transparent, very clear. You run under a single-member riding or you run under the PR list. You take your chances. It's very fair and very transparent.

It is sometimes pejoratively the opposite. One person being allowed to do dual candidacies is sometimes referred to as a “zombie politician”, because you can rise from the dead. You lost under the single-member riding format, but guess what, you still make it across the finish line through the list. That struck us as being an unfair way to go in our particular values set.

Mr. Scott Reid: I see what you're getting at.

Just as a commentary—and I know I'm almost out of time here, Mr. Chairman—the obvious thought that I have is that if you look at the 2000 election, it can be taken as an example. In Ontario, I was elected with 38% of the vote in a single-member, first-past-the-post system. There were other candidates who got a higher percentage of the vote than I did, but they didn't win because of the unusual vote split in my riding versus theirs.

What I'm getting at is that you actually could compensate for that and say that those who did well but were excluded because of peculiarities of their own riding could nevertheless get in. I don't know if that's so much a back door as it is just a correction for the failures of first-past-the-post.

Mr. David McLaughlin: That's correct, and you can find a particular formula or model that will address that kind of concern. It really stems from the particular democratic values that you think are important. The Quebec draft bill that's before the National Assembly has a one-vote system. Our system is a two-vote system, with one ballot for the local candidate and one ballot for the party. From that basis, you're really giving voters a choice to possibly to split their ticket if they wish. On that basis, it would probably make sense to prohibit the dual candidacies, because you're really trying to create this clear democratic values set of choices for people. The party matters, and that's one way to go. The local candidate matters, and that's another way to go.

You can put on rules to prevent parties from stacking the deck and doing the kinds of things that parties sometimes do that turn people off and bring disrepute to the system. This isn't a guarantee that you won't have strict party discipline and that they'll set the list and it's top-down, but you put those rules in place. Once they're in place, grassroots members of the party will make certain the rules are basically enforced as best they can.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Boivin, it's your turn.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Good morning.

My question is for Mr. Béland because I found his two reports very interesting since they concern my favourite subject: how to ensure that we make the intention of people, of citizens, clear. Our mandate is to try to contact them to get the best suggestions to make to Parliament.

I find it fascinating to see that you say in your conclusions that there is a difference of opinion depending whether you talk to citizens who work in democratically controlled organizations or to those who have no experience with democratic organizations.

At the federal level, a large percentage of people don't vote and seem completely uninterested. It remains to be seen why. Do they feel completely apart and excluded because of the electoral system? I'm not yet certain. Among those you met, because you say you met more than 2,000 participants, what percentage of people were not used to working in democratically controlled organizations? How did you reach those people?

Mr. Claude Béland: From what I could see, in Quebec, a larger percentage of people are familiar with the basis of democracy because they're members of a union or members of a condominium corporation where people decide together whether or not they're going buy flowers. They understand that, when you work together, you're entitled to debate and that power comes from users. They understand that. More of them told us that we were talking about democracy in political institutions, but that that was not what they were experiencing in their organizations.

That leads me to tell you that those who came were already more interested in the subject. The others, who were in the minority, gave broader reasons, such as globalization, and said that everything had changed. They said there were trends toward participatory democracy virtually everywhere around the world and that we should therefore do the same thing. They often cited the example of British Columbia, where there are procedures for popular initiatives and a right to recall members, and people said that was more like what they were familiar with in their democratic organizations.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: How can you reach those people?

Mr. Claude Béland: That's the big problem.

I don't know whether you're familiar with Professor Milner's study on civic competence. He conducted this very broad study in all democratic countries. I don't want to make a big speech about it, but I would say that he comes to the conclusion that Canada, and Quebec in particular, ranks poorly in the area of civic competence. There are many reasons for this phenomenon, including press concentration, limited access to libraries, and so on.

Thus, a forum on the voting method would attract few people because it's considered something complicated. You have to convene people and ask them whether they think the system is working well and why they're not voting. That's what we did. We had a long questionnaire. In response to the question whether they voted, most respondents told us they no longer voted. When they were asked why, they answered that their vote didn't count. Some people, who came from a riding that had voted the same way since Confederation, said that 2,000 or 3,000 votes won by their party carried no weight in the balance. They didn't like that situation.

In listening to these kinds of comments, we told the government that, instead of adopting a given voting method, we should instead correct the distortions because people didn't like that. In Quebec, it's happened four times since 1960 that the government taking power has been a party that had beaten the others by winning a lower percentage of the vote but a larger number of seats. People felt that made no sense and that that situation should be corrected. That feeling was very strong.

People also wondered why there was still a two-party system. We answered that the system promotes that. Then they said they wanted there to be third parties, or that women were not being heard, and so on. It was suggested that the government should correct this state of affairs and allow third parties to enter the National Assembly and the House of Commons. People said they nevertheless wanted to keep their members and to maintain ties with them. We then proposed an arrangement that would provide for both the majority system and compensatory measures.

● (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Guimond.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Messrs. McLaughlin and Béland. My question is for Mr. Béland.

First of all, I want to congratulate you for your work as a whole, which is not over. You're still very alert and clear-sighted. You may be at an age when people normally retire, but you clearly haven't retired. I want to thank you. As a Quebecker, I'm lucky to know who you are. West of the Ottawa River, you may be known from the cooperative movement, but I'm convinced that most people here don't know what you've done. They probably don't know about the Béland Commission either. So we invited you to talk about it.

As my colleague Ms. Boivin mentioned, our committee is instructed under the Order of Reference it received from the House to determine the best process for consulting Canadians and Quebeckers on a potential reform of the voting method.

Do you think the option selected, that is to say regional consultations and the Estates General, is really the miracle cure? If you were asked to chair across-Canada consultations, would you favour the same approach?

Mr. Claude Béland: I think we could have done better if we had had more time at our disposal. At first, when we arrived in a town, people were mistrustful. They thought we represented a government organization. However, when they realized we were citizens like them, they started to tell us very frequently, and with considerable emphasis, that, after those four hours passed together, they thought we should absolutely go back and see them again. Then we told them we couldn't do that, that we had a report to write.

Consequently, in our report, we recommended that non-partisan public areas be created to enable citizens, each in their own region, to carry on a public debate. That recommendation was not accepted by the present government. I had to transmit that decision to the people who had attended the Estates General. To my great surprise, they reacted by saying that, if the government didn't want to help them, they'd do it themselves.

Today there are 11 regional citizenship and democracy councils in 11 regions in Quebec. They aren't big organizations, but they're on the move. People are now saying they want to know the issues. I was lucky to be named chairman in order to spearhead the movement. The Quebec Democracy and Citizenship Movement is now in existence.

To answer your question, I'd say I think one of the reasons why we can't get people interested in the question is that they don't really know the issues. However, they know what they want. So to get results, you first have to ask them what they think isn't working and what they don't like in the present system. Solutions can be developed based on their answers.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Did your commission's researchers have an opportunity to take note of similar or virtually similar consultation experiments elsewhere in the world? We know Quebec really likes to innovate. Are we the only state in the world doing that?

● (1145)

Mr. Claude Béland: I couldn't answer you. First, we didn't have any researchers, and our budget was quite limited. We knew what was going on in British Columbia. We know what was going on in Canada. There was a roughly similar approach in New Zealand, which Professor Henry Milner reported to us, but we knew little about it.

There's this will in Canada. From the first line of its report, the Law Commission of Canada in Ottawa says there's a democratic deficit in Canada. That's something. That enables us to tell people that there are authorities saying it and that this question should be looked into because democracy is important. It's important to us, and if we don't take care of it, we're going to realize it's fragile. Four million...

The Chair: Mr. Silva, over to you.

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you.

My question is to Mr. McLaughlin. Obviously, there have been so many systems that have been studied out there, and British Columbia just chose a different system, the single transferable vote system, which is, by far, one of the most complicated systems there is. So I'm fascinated to know, and want to know, why this particular system was chosen and also what issues you grapple with, including issues like language and gender, whether that was at all part of the equation.

Mr. David McLaughlin: Language and gender were very central. They were central to the structure of the commission with the eight people that we had, so we couldn't get away from it even if we wanted to. One of our co-chairs was a former president of the Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick. It put a very high standard on us to make certain that these kinds of representational issues and how New Brunswick society might see itself in a particular electoral system would be very central to our discussions, and it helped drive us into a particular model, particularly the regional model.

We went with four regions because in part, through our simulations, this produced a similar representation of francophone MLAs. There are just certain political realities. Any new electoral system that would have resulted, even in a perceived way, in a reduction of representation for any particular part of society, in an officially bilingual province like New Brunswick, was of some consequence. So the way we did our models, the structure of the four regions helped reassure us that it would still produce relatively the same proportion of francophone MLAs to anglophone MLAs, and that sort of thing.

When it came to mixed-member proportional versus single transferable vote, we did look at STV, but we discarded it pretty quickly and for the basic reason that you said. We found it too complex. It didn't find any traction with commissioners. Staff presented it, and we had a director of research who's a very well-known and respected academic, Dr. Bill Cross, from Mount Allison University. We had a whole research team bringing us information from across the country. So we had access to looking at these various systems and did the comparisons, and it was just not going to fly with commissioners. It was too complex, and basically, I guess the main thing beyond that was that it would have eliminated the direct linkage between the elected official and the voter.

Again, remember, part of our mandate was to maintain the elected MLAs representing specific geographic territories. New Brunswickers, like most Canadians, I suspect, want to have access to their member. It's a key accountability rule. It's something you live through every day, and it's a pretty important democratic value. So straying from that principle, in our judgment, would have been a hard sell.

On the gender side, in any system that allows for creating multi-member districts, that allows for creating party lists with three, four, five, or six people, you're probably going to get the gender representation. The parties will nominate the appropriate numbers to get the kind of representation.

STV, I suspect, under the B.C. model, from what I've read and studied on it, could produce appropriate gender representation as well, but we think in our model, with five list MLAs from each region, five is almost the right number to give you the proportionality. If you start going below that, the numbers don't work to give you proportionality, really, and with five list MLAs the parties have just more room to nominate women and other representative groups of society.

● (1150)

Mr. Mario Silva: On the list system, under the European system you could have 10 or 20 people on the list. I don't know if it's in the legislation or not, but it's not necessarily the first person who will go to the legislature. Under the European system, it might be the fifth, sixth, or seventh person. The first five may not want to go, even though they are on the list. Now you're proposing that the top one will have to go.

Mr. David McLaughlin: Yes. Of the five names, if you're entitled to one person off the list, person number one gets across the finish line. If you're allowed two or three, then it's one, two, three.

Mr. Mario Silva: Does that person have the option to bow out?

Mr. David McLaughlin: I don't think so. I think it's one, two, three; it's in the order in which they appear on the list.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, as a Canadian living outside Quebec, I want to emphasize that I have a great deal of respect for the work Mr. Béland has done in Quebec in the past and for the work he is still doing. However, for other reasons, my many questions are for Mr. McLaughlin.

[*English*]

First of all, we heard from Monsieur Béland that in a survey that was done in the province of Quebec, some 92% of Quebeckers believed parties should be elected proportional to the vote they get in the House of Commons—not exactly what happens today. Do you have comparable data for New Brunswick on that question?

Mr. David McLaughlin: We didn't do any particular survey data from the commission. I've seen published polls through the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, CRIC, through recent data from October-November, which shows an Atlantic breakdown of 70%, 80%, or 90%, depending on the specific question, in favour of proportionality. It has been my experience that those kinds of values, those kinds of principles, typically find strong favour among Canadians.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Secondly, of all the systems that I have looked at and the work that has been done provincially, in many ways New Brunswick can serve as a microcosm for Canada, as a province with a distribution of majority English, minority francophone, and for other reasons. Your recommendations, as you've just explained, seem to have taken that reality into account as well.

I'd like you to speculate for us, if you would, and I especially liked and appreciated your decision in recognizing the proportionality principle to regionalize it, which seems to me to be one of the glaring—"evils" is perhaps too strong—one of the glaring inadequacies of our Canadian system where the Liberal Party will get 25% of the vote in western Canada and get 2% or 3% of the seats, for example. I won't go into that, but I think it has been very divisive in the history of our country.

Given your model—if I could ask you, and I'm sure you've done some thinking about this—how well do you think it would apply to Canada as a whole?

Mr. David McLaughlin: I don't think you could evade a regional-based model if you were looking at applying a PR system across the country. If you can't evade it in New Brunswick, I suspect you can't evade it in Canada. You have to come up and structure it in the way that works best for the country, but even in New Brunswick there are strong regional viewpoints, strong regional tendencies. It has a particular impact because of where the Acadian francophone population lives, geographically concentrated in a particular part of the province, which gives rise to electing MLAs, geographically rooted MLAs, to represent their territory.

You couldn't change that, and people have that regional perspective. The danger is that you can exacerbate regionalism, and we talked about that. We tried to find a way to do that, and the way we ended up with was to go with four regions as opposed to ten or eleven.

You may recall, Mr. Broadbent, that when you actually attended our round table on proportional representation at the University of Moncton, one of the options was a model or a map of the ten or eleven regions. We thought that was too much. In the end, four regions seemed better suited. It would not have overly exacerbated regionalism, but it still would have helped.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: How about ten provinces as the regions?

Mr. David McLaughlin: I couldn't tell you. I must say, I haven't—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: The Law Commission dealt with that issue. Did you have a chance to look at that?

Mr. David McLaughlin: Yes, I read the report. You'd have to determine the number of seats for each—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: No, it would be keeping the same number of seats that are in each province now, so there'd be no change. There'd be sort of representation by population in that sense. So keep the same distribution of seats that we have now, but use the New Brunswick formula, if I may put it that way, on a regional basis, but pick the provinces as the regions.

● (1155)

Mr. David McLaughlin: On that basis, if you're going to look to correct this proportionality in the province, that would have to be where you're doing your calculation. Thinking out loud and speculating, as you asked me to do, it would be probably more familiar to people, hence more comfortable.

We do talk about Atlantic Canada in a homogenous way, but Newfoundland and Labrador are somewhat distinct, different from the Maritimes, and Quebec obviously as a province and region, and in certain amending formula contexts, Ontario. In the west, you'd either have to have the three prairie provinces and then B.C., and then you get into certain issues—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Why couldn't each province have...?

The Chair: We have to end on that. Time is up.

Madame Picard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Béland, welcome to this committee. Like my colleague, I want to thank you and congratulate you for your involvement in Quebec society over the years.

If you were a member of this committee, what recommendation would you make so that we can adequately consult the Canadian and Quebec public in order to achieve an effective system without a democratic deficit?

Mr. Claude Béland: I'm convinced it can't be done from above, but must come from the population. First you have to consult people after clearly explaining the issues to them. But you have to go to the people. You can't ask them to come here, to Ottawa, to explain to you what they think. If you want to proceed that way, you have to do it in each of the provinces and each of the regions of the provinces.

They speak very highly of the Citizens' Assembly in British Columbia, but it's a limited group of persons proposing a complicated voting method. British Columbia hasn't yet adopted it; it's not done. There has to be a referendum, and there's no one to defend it. The government doesn't want to deal with it, arguing that it's a citizens' decision. Who among citizens will explain it to the public? We know how strong resistance to change is, especially if the proposed voting method is hard to explain. So it can't be said yet that British Columbia has adopted the system. We shouldn't do the same in Canada, saying in committee and in the House of Commons that we've found a new system, without knowing whether the public really understands it or whether it's ready to vote that way.

There is an enormous amount of mistrust. That's the case in Quebec as well. I'm doing the tour right now and, because the Liberal Party has tabled a bill—which I think is acceptable with certain amendments—people are mistrustful because they feel it must work to the Liberal Party's advantage. We're working in a mine field where people are mistrustful. First you have to ensure there's the strongest possible popular will; otherwise it's very hard to move forward.

Ms. Pauline Picard: When you were given this mandate, you occupied the chair of the steering committee. What were your first thoughts? How did you prepare to reach the public as you did?

Mr. Claude Béland: In accordance with the Desjardins model, which I know well, we formed a lot of subcommittees. I conducted the tour, but the members weren't required to follow me everywhere. We established a schedule; we announced ourselves in advance; we gave a lot of press conferences; we used the media as much as possible; we used the chambers of commerce to say that we were arriving and that we would be discussing an important subject. You have to put it on the agenda. It has to become a concern for people; otherwise decisions will be made by part of the population, and that's not desirable. You know, changing democratic institutions is a major undertaking.

● (1200)

Ms. Pauline Picard: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Picard.

Mr. Johnston.

[*English*]

Mr. Dale Johnston: Thank you for your presentations, gentlemen. I apologize for interrupting Mr. Béland's presentation, but I guess the gremlins were at work here with our system.

I think my question has partially been answered in Mr. Béland's most recent comments. I wonder, though, if either of you would like to speak to the cynicism that was referred to in your earlier comments about the general public. Maybe we would make better use of our time if we concentrated on giving the electorate more reason to have less cynicism and spent less time coming up with a convoluted system that the electorate may not understand. I think it's going to be a tremendously difficult sell to get the electorate to understand just how this system works.

On top of all of that, perhaps you could comment on the number of spoiled ballots under the system that you propose, as opposed to the number under the system that we have now.

Mr. Claude Béland: I'll answer in French, if you don't mind.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Béland, the choice is up to you, and you don't have to explain yourself.

Mr. Claude Béland: I want to be clear for myself.

I don't think we should try to sell or explain a system to the public. We should ask the public what they want to change. First we could establish the values of the process we want to carry out. Citizens understand that. They're very qualified to tell us what they want.

In strategic planning, in the triangle, there is, first of all, what you want, then what you see you can do and what you can do. When you talk to citizens, you have to ask them what they want and what they don't like. Do they like the present system, existing democratic institutions? If not, what don't they like? Once that's done, elected representatives can decide to propose solutions. If you simply start by proposing a new voting method, it will be extremely hard to explain.

When we conducted meetings on values, on the objective, we had 350 or 400 persons every evening. When we started asking what people thought about a particular voting method, we had 10, 12 or 15, half of whom were professors of political science.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. McLaughlin.

Mr. David McLaughlin: I would agree with what Monsieur Béland said. You have to start from the premise of democratic values. The first chapter of our report really deals with democratic values. Those values are the rallying point for citizens and they're the only common ground you can really have. The basis of any electoral system should be to reflect the contemporary democratic values of your society. Values change, society changes, and electoral systems, as well as other institutions of democracy—Parliament, legislatures, MLAs, MPs, political parties, etc.—have to change too. They have to find ways to respond to these changing democratic values. I believe it's that disconnect that we found in our conversations, in our research. It's a disconnect between where people are, what they have in their values, and where all of these institutions are, including electoral systems. They weren't connecting. They were not reflecting these kinds of current democratic values.

Take the representation of women. In New Brunswick, 51% of the population are women, but 12% of MLAs are women. And that number has declined. You will not elect more women to any great degree under single-member plurality systems. I'm absolutely convinced. I didn't start out that way. In your electoral system in that case, if an important democratic value was for you to elect more women, have more representation of women as a reflection of your society, you would then have to look at your electoral system as an instrument to help make that happen.

But there is no ideal electoral system. It's not a silver bullet for the cynicism that you mention and which is real, for the disconnect, the disillusionment, for those kinds of things. It's a buffet of things that you have to choose from, and it was for that reason that we were given a mandate that was much more comprehensive than just an electoral system. We didn't just look at electoral reform, and I think that was the right decision. You cannot look at electoral reform in isolation from this broader set of issues. That's what we concluded, and I think it was the right starting point.

You just asked about spoiled ballots. Any time you have more than one vote, you're probably going to have an increase, to a degree, in spoiled ballots. We propose a two-vote system, with one for the local candidate and one for the party. We looked at similar models in New Zealand, Scotland, and Wales. Spoiled ballots were in the range of 1% to 1.5%, but the numbers weren't extreme. To be fair, there would be a slight increase, but there is no evidence that this is something that would really continue. Through education campaigns, etc., people will get used to it.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have a question maybe to both of you.

Mr. McLaughlin, I think you told us that your recommendation is that there be a referendum to approve this. Do you know if the government is going to do this?

Mr. David McLaughlin: I don't know for certain. The premier has made two public statements, one at a speech here in Ottawa and one in main estimates in the legislature, that if there was going to be a change to the electoral system, the people in New Brunswick had to have a vote on it through some kind of referendum. We proposed a referendum act and a model and a way of doing that, but I don't know for certain.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Béland, in your report, did you recommend that the public be consulted by means of a referendum before adopting anything similar? If so, do you know whether the government will adopt that procedure?

Mr. Claude Béland: We recommended in our report that a referendum be held. The government decided not to hold a referendum, saying that the consultation done at the time of the Estates General was sufficient. The government decided not to hold a referendum.

The Chair: I think I understand your reaction that you would still like one.

Mr. Claude Béland: Personally, yes. However, there's a compromise, that is to say that the minister has nevertheless announced a travelling parliamentary committee. To facilitate citizens' access to that committee, the rules have been changed a bit. First, it's the commission that will travel in each of the regions of Quebec. There's no requirement that briefs be submitted in advance; costs are being eliminated, and so on. In short, the process has been facilitated in order to gather the new opinions of citizens. But it's still a compromise, rather than a proper referendum.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now over to you, Mr. Guimond.

Mr. Michel Guimond: I'm going to ask you two consecutive questions so that you have the time to answer the second. I warn my colleagues and the Chair: the second question is not necessarily within the field of our study. I wouldn't want it to be deemed irrelevant.

Mr. Béland, you say that four million invitations were distributed. Are you satisfied with the public's response rate or degree of interest? If two million persons had wanted to meet the commission, you'd still be there. There were four million invitations, and you met with 2,000 people. Do you think that's a good ratio? You also asked for briefs, and you received 237. Is that a sufficient sample, in your opinion?

● (1210)

Mr. Claude Béland: We would have like more, and we expected more. Obviously, it was on weekday evenings, and it wasn't always easy for citizens to travel. But we would have hoped for more.

We received 237 briefs, but we were aiming solely at bodies corporate, not individuals.

I'd like to make a brief remark. I was a bit disappointed that the chambers of commerce, business people, those who already have a form of power, didn't show much interest. I even went to the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal to tell people I was disappointed that they hadn't shown any interest in such an important project.

One of the findings we made is that people who have a certain amount of power, capital power, network power, such as the union associations, for example, didn't express an interest. Management associations didn't show an interest. When I called them to ask them why they weren't coming, they told me they didn't go in for politics. I was a bit disappointed to see that individuals appeared, but associations a bit less so.

Mr. Michel Guimond: My second question concerns a matter of current interest in the House of Commons, since a Liberal member has tabled what's called a private members' bill concerning the question of the right to vote at the age of 16. It must be understood that, in the case of private members' bills, the vote is a free one. Voting isn't done along party lines. This member obtained the support of one representative per party at a press conference. There was some media coverage of this around Christmas.

I'd like to hear what you have to say on the subject because we'll have to vote on this bill by Mark Holland, the Member for Ajax—Pickering. I refer you particularly to finding 9 in your report: “Quebeckers want the voting age to stay at 18.” That's what 74 percent of the 2,000 participants answered. I believe the figure of 58 percent in parentheses is the one obtained at the Estates General.

What do you think of that?

Mr. Claude Béland: We didn't recommend it.

We were influenced by the parents who came and told us that their daughters or sons were intelligent enough to vote at 16. However, 16-year-olds came and told us they weren't ready. We were very surprised by that. The people themselves said they weren't ready, that they hadn't learned that at school, that they weren't taught it in elementary school or high school or college... [*Technical difficulties —Editor*]

The Chair: We'll resume. Mr. Broadbent, over to you.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Béland, you mentioned that there's a difference between the federal government and the Government of Quebec with regard to the electoral process. You made certain suggestions on content, but there was a change of government. Can you explain the differences between the two?

Mr. Claude Béland: The difference stems from the fact that there was a change of government. When we prepared our report, the Parti québécois government was in power. Most of the recommendations we submitted were favourably received.

One month later, there was an election. A new government came to power, and the new minister let me know that his government would follow none of our recommendations.

However, I realize in reading the bill tabled today that it's based on them. I realize that especially in the other bill, which concerns parliamentary reform. We suggested that the member's role be reviewed and, in particular, that the party line be eliminated, or that the party line not be mandatory on certain issues. I see that these points appear in the bill tabled by the minister designated for the reform of Quebec's democratic institutions. So I feel our report has nevertheless had a certain influence.

● (1215)

Hon. Ed Broadbent: All right. In your original report, you suggested that a mixed system, like that in effect in New Brunswick, be applied in Quebec. Can you explain the details of that system, then draw a comparison between your proposal and the decision by the Liberal government?

Mr. Claude Béland: First, we suggested real regional proportional representation, not a majority system. We suggested a proportional election by region. However, we pointed out to the members of the Quebec government that people wanted to maintain ties with a member they knew, and we therefore proposed a model virtually identical to that presented by Mr. McLaughlin. I see few differences between that and our proposal.

However, the present government hasn't adopted the two vote system in its draft bill. In the government's mind, when you vote for a Liberal Party candidate, you're also voting for the Liberal Party. They add the two together. The bill's a bit complicated. Experts could explain it better.

In Quebec, we're proposing that the number of members be increased from 125 to 127. Seventy-seven members would be elected under the plurality system, and 50 under the regional proportional system. It takes three or four electoral districts to constitute a region. So you can imagine a plurality system with districts that resemble the federal government's electoral districts.

In Quebec, there are 77 federal ridings, so 77 expanded ridings. To offset that, to correct the distortions, you would have to create 26 districts comprising three or four ridings, where there would be a proportional vote. This would be presented in each of the districts, and voters would make a choice, as Mr. McLaughlin explained. It's the same system.

Most party organizations will dispute this arrangement and request the two-vote system so that people can vote both for the member of their choice and for a party that may be different, but whose program they prefer. Those are the only distinctions.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I have a final question. Would you advocate the same model for Canada as a whole?

Mr. Claude Béland: I think so. You could do that by province, a province being a region. As a Canadian, I would see no objection to that.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: As regards the distribution among members elected in a riding and those on a proportional basis, would that be a 50-50 or one-third/two-thirds distribution?

Mr. Claude Béland: The distribution must at least be 60-40: 60 percent of members elected by a plurality ballot and 40 percent on a proportional basis. That's the minimum. I prefer the system proposed in Quebec: it's 65-35. You need a majority of members elected under a plurality system. We don't need such a high figure for compensatory measures. Across Canada, in a region the size of a province, political pluralism may play much better. The fewer electors there are, the narrower political pluralism is, no? I think we understand that.

That's the problem with the present draft bill, in my view. We're talking about political pluralism, but for a third party to be entitled to a seat, it must have at least 13 to 15 percent of votes in a single region, which is a lot.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Béland, earlier you told Mr. Guimond that not many leaders, union associations, management associations and so on expressed interest. What about members? Did they take part in the process? Should they take part in it? Last week, we heard from witnesses who told us that we were often catalysts, that we would often bring people together in our ridings, get out the ordinary people.

I'm coming back to by hobby horse again. I want to know people's opinions; I want them to tell me what's wrong. We're often criticized for being cut off from reality, for not being close to the electoral grassroots. Shouldn't we get more involved? Did you experience that in the context of your commission?

I'd be interested in hearing you talk more about citizen education and what it would include.

Mr. Claude Béland: We wanted no politicians on the steering committee, which conducted a consultation. Otherwise people would have thought we were defending the interests of a party. However, a number of members, both federal and provincial came to our meetings as citizens to describe their experience and say how they experienced their role as members and the results of elections. I think it's desirable, obviously. Those who experienced all that most profoundly are no doubt elected members, or former elected members. I encourage their participation.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: What about citizen education?

Mr. Claude Béland: Citizen education was our first recommendation. That's no longer being taught in the elementary or secondary schools in Quebec. I'm a professor at UQAM, and I ask my students at the university to define democracy for me. You'd be surprised at the answers I get. A frequent answer I get is that democracy means doing whatever you want. I figure we may have to explain things a little more.

It seemed clear to us that improvements had to be made to the teaching of civic skills here in the country. This goes beyond partisanship. The idea is to teach citizenship. To know how to live together in the twenty-first century in peace and harmony and to give everyone a chance, citizens have to understand the issues and take part in them.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Absolutely.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Béland, I want to know one thing. In the regional proportional system, is it fixed for a period of time, for 10 years, for example?

Second, there are always population changes in most major cities. How can we offset that for the rural regions?

Mr. Claude Béland: The changes are made by an amendment to the Elections Act. Of course, the regions and procedures remain the same until the Elections Act is amended. It can't be otherwise. It's a decision that's set down in the law. The districts that would be created in Quebec, which are the equivalent of what's called a region, will be set out in the act.

Mr. Mario Silva: I asked the question because nearly 80 percent of the population lives in major cities. I don't know how we can create regions...

Mr. Claude Béland: In Quebec, the Commission de la représentation électorale has authority to recommend changing the boundaries of the regions if there are any major population changes. Of course, it's always approved by the National Assembly.

The Chair: I have a question to ask you, if you have a minute to answer it. How would you consult the public nationally, Mr. Béland?

Mr. Claude Béland: By listening to it.

The Chair: But what process would you use? Would it be a commission?

Mr. Claude Béland: It might be a steering committee or a commission. If it weren't possible for it to be an entirely citizen-based organization, I would like it to be at least a commission that is expanded to include people who are not elected representatives. There's a great amount of mistrust. When we arrived in the regions, for the first five or 10 minutes, people asked us whether we were government representatives. There was mistrust. I think you have to ensure that the consultation is as non-partisan as possible.

● (1225)

The Chair: Would you propose that it also be ratified by referendum?

Mr. Claude Béland: Yes, absolutely.

[*English*]

The Chair: And yourself, sir?

Mr. David McLaughlin: I think it depends on what your objectives are. If your objectives are—

The Chair: Our mandate's quite clear. I believe it was sent to you. We're to recommend a process to engage citizens and parliamentarians in an examination of our electoral system. How would you do it?

Mr. David McLaughlin: If it's a straight examination, which is in essence a study process in some way, then I think you can do either an eminent persons commission, if you will, of some outside people or you could do a parliamentary committee in some fashion. However, if it starts to get into some decision-making, then I think people's expectations change, and I think that's the nature of the citizens assembly. It worked in large part, as I followed it, because it had some real authority at the end of it.

That's why I say it depends on what your ultimate objections are. For a straight examination, I think you could do, as I say, an outside group of people, some eminent persons, or you could do a parliamentary committee in some fashion, both House and Senate perhaps, however you decide.

I think it is important, though, that members are implicated. I feel very strongly about that, because ultimately you are affected by this and you bring a particular perspective to the table. Whether you should be the decision-makers is an open question and again depends on what your ultimate objectives are.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Picard, do you want to ask a question?

There will be one question and one answer, then it'll be over.

Mr. Broadbent.

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I'm trying to see how I want to ask this question, exactly.

I am someone who has a prejudice on this subject. It goes back to fifty years ago, when I was a student and advocating some system of proportional representation. I understand it's not only the general population, but many members in the House of Commons who are unfamiliar with the arguments, and we've grown up believing the existing system is pretty democratic. I personally don't think that. I think there are serious flaws.

It's interesting that two of you, from two quite different provinces in many ways, have come up with a recommendation of a mixed system. In your looking at the existing system, first past the post, that we still have in Canada, if I were to ask each of you what are the three most serious deficiencies of the first-past-the-post system, keeping in mind there are real values in the existing system, what would each of you say?

The Chair: We'll have to do that rapidly, if you don't mind.

Mr. David McLaughlin: I would say disproportionality in terms of results, so you have the regionalism that we have in the country and the behaviour of political parties in response to that regionalism in order to get seats, in order to win a particular voting favour.

Lack of representation of women and other groups I think is a flaw in the current system.

Third, I think, is voter turnout. I don't want to draw an overly strong link, but we've looked at PR systems across the world, and the evidence is that voter turnout is slightly higher under PR systems than it is under first-past-the-post systems.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Béland: People told me—and I let myself be readily convinced—that the distortions had to be corrected. They also told me they wanted to retain ties with their members. They can't grasp the idea of a member selected from a list. They also talked to me about political pluralism, about third parties and the representation of women, cultural communities and native people.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank the witnesses who have appeared this morning, Messrs. McLaughlin and Béland. Your presentations were very interesting.

Before closing, I have a question for my colleagues. Professor Peter Aucoin, who is responsible for the staff of the Lortie Commission, is prepared to come and testify. We had already discussed this eventuality. However, he can't come on Tuesdays or Thursdays, when he teaches. Would you like us to schedule a meeting for Monday evening or late in the day, or Wednesday?

Of course, an available room has to be found. Does anyone have an opinion on the subject?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Perhaps it would be easier on Wednesday. My colleague Ms. Picard is in Ottawa from Tuesday to Friday.

● (1230)

The Chair: We're going to try to organize that taking her schedule into consideration. So, if I understand correctly, the preference would be for Wednesday.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Indeed, but what can't be helped must be endured.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Johnston prefers Monday. All right. I guess we have some of each and we'll get them when we can get them, but I wanted to at least test the idea on my colleagues.

Thank you very much.

With that, the committee is adjourned.

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