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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, November 28, 2006**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Gary Goodyear**

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Tuesday, November 28, 2006

•(1110)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC)):** Ladies and gentlemen, we'll begin the meeting this morning. I apologize for the delay. Obviously, we have to have this room this morning because of our teleconferencing, which will start at the noon hour. I thank you for your diligence and your patience.

I want to advise members that this meeting is being held in public. Again, we are dealing with our continuation of Bill C-31.

I also want to remind members that at 12 o'clock today we will start our video conferencing. So we have one hour for our first witness.

I would like to welcome the director general of Élections Québec, Monsieur Marcel Blanchet.

Thank you very much for being with us this morning, Marcel. Normally what we do is offer you a few minutes for an opening statement.

Then we would start, colleagues, with our usual round of questions, the first round being seven minutes. I want to just remind members that we have one hour, and if we could keep our questions short and to the point, we'll probably get through more questions than we normally do.

Monsieur Blanchet, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet (Chief Electoral Officer & President of the Commission for Electoral Representation, Élections Québec):** Thank, Mr. Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I was very pleased to accept your invitation to come and talk about Quebec's experience with compiling data on electors who voted at polling stations.

To begin with, I would just like to say that important changes in that regard were introduced in Quebec in 2001.

Indeed, in March of 2001, legislation was passed in Quebec to create the position of electoral list clerk as part of elections staff. These changes had previously been discussed at the Advisory Committee on the Elections Act.

Just for the benefit of Committee members, I want to point out that these legislative amendments came about as a result of a ruling by the Quebec Superior Court in the Hébert case, in 1999. This

particular ruling overturned sub-section 137, as it was worded at the time, dealing with compensation for political party representatives in polling divisions.

The applicant, Jacques Hébert, who, at the time, was the Executive Director of Action démocratique du Québec, had challenged the constitutionality of a provision under which the representatives of parties that ranked first and second in the riding in the previous election were paid to collate data on electors who had voted, and the fact that these individuals did not provide access to that data to other parties — in other words, to third parties and independent candidates.

Consequently, since 2001, party representatives at polling stations are no longer paid by the Chief Electoral Officer. The duties of these “checkers” — pardon the expression — are now carried out by electoral list officers. As election workers recommended by the political parties that ranked first and second in the previous election, they are now paid by the Chief Electoral Officer. The Elections Act states that they must make information regarding electors who have voted available to poll runners working for all authorized political parties and independent candidates.

Like other election workers, electoral list officers act under the authority of the returning officer. During the election period, they are trained by the returning officer. That training is based on guidelines developed for them by my office.

When training the electoral list officers, the returning officer is required to emphasize the fact that they must be both neutral and impartial, even though they have been hired as a result of recommendations made by the political parties. They are not to engage in any type of partisan activity on voting day. Like other members of elections staff, they take an oath and swear to carry out their duties in accordance with the Act.

At the polling station, two electoral list officers work as a team at each table, under the responsibility of the deputy returning officer. The guidelines provided to electoral list officers lay out the information they need to perform their duties. They explain how to use the material made available to them. Specifically, electoral list officers are required to compile the line numbers of electors who have voted at the polling station, and to record that information on the forms provided for that purpose. So, every time a ballot is placed in the ballot box, the two electoral list officers black out, on the form, the line number of the elector who has just voted. That line number is provided to them by the poll clerk. At regular intervals — approximately every half hour — electoral list officers provide copies of these forms to the officer in charge of information and order at each polling station, or to one of his or her assistants, who then passes them on to the political parties and independent candidates' poll runners.

I just want to briefly digress to say that I have provided the Clerk of the Standing Committee with copies of the instructions given to electoral list officers. Those instructions include an appendix with copies of the compilation statements of electors who have voted.

The legislative changes that resulted in the creation of the position of electoral list officer have had no financial impact in Quebec. The fact is the compensation previously paid to senior representatives of the political parties is now paid to electoral list officers. They receive the same compensation as poll clerks.

In the 2003 General Election, the 38,000 electoral list officers assigned to 19,364 polling stations received total compensation of \$3,541,597. In the 1998 election, compensation paid to 43,891 senior political party representatives was \$3,848,087.

As you can see, there is a difference between 1998 and 2001. There were fewer in 2003 than in 1998 because there are no electoral list officers on site for advance polls, inmate voting or at mobile voting stations, which was the case for political representatives in 1998. So, there were some slight savings realized in that area.

In the next general election, overall compensation for electoral list officers is expected to exceed \$5 million. That increase in relation to 2003 can be attributed to a higher number of polling stations and higher compensation. The hourly rate set under the new regulations on compensation, which came into effect on August 30, rises to \$11.79 from \$7.85.

As the institution responsible for safeguarding the principles that underlie the electoral system in Quebec, the Chief Electoral Officer responded positively to these legislative amendments creating the position of electoral list officer. In my opinion, these provisions represent a considerable improvement as regards equity and equality for the political parties. The principles of equity and equality are among the most fundamental principles of our democratic system.

Although I am in favour of the principle for the reasons I have just given, our experience in the 2003 General Election showed that improvements could be made in terms of the duties of the electoral list officer.

Indeed, we noted that there is not enough work to occupy two people in every polling station.

As well, the political parties are having a great deal of difficulty recommending enough people to act as electoral list officers in every single polling station. When the political parties do not make recommendations, it falls to the Chief Electoral Officer to recruit staff to fill those positions, which is no small task.

When the returning officer is not able to fill all the positions, I am authorized under the Elections Act to make special arrangements to appoint a single officer for each polling station. If it proves impossible to appoint an officer to perform these duties at each polling station, the returning officer has to ask the deputy returning officer or a poll clerk to perform these duties, although that happens in only very exceptional cases.

Recruitment issues are so serious that in every general election and by-election held since 2001, I have had to make special arrangements. In my 2003-2004 Annual Report, I recommended to the National Assembly that there be only one electoral list officer per polling station, rather than two.

Thank you for your kind attention. I am now ready to take your questions.

• (1120)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We are going to start our round now.

Monsieur Proulx, you have seven minutes. Enjoy yourself.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Mr. Blanchet. Thank you for accepting the Committee's invitation to come to Ottawa.

I am very interested in the actual mechanics of the job, as well as the specific duties performed by these officers. There are a number of details that you did not touch on in your presentation. That is not a criticism, but I would like to clarify a couple of points.

First of all, when we — and here I refer to the Committee — made a similar suggestion to the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, his response was that the costs would be prohibitive and that we would need to have a photocopier in every single polling station. I have the feeling that the people we talked to did not clearly understand what we were talking about, and that perhaps we did not provide an adequate explanation.

You mentioned that the lists are turned over to the officer in charge of information and order approximately every half hour. How exactly are those lists handed out?

First of all, what do electoral list officers at the table use to record that information?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Mr. Proulx and Mr. Chairman, in the documentation I provided to the Clerk, there is a copy of the forms that are used, that are referred to as bingo cards. Several copies of these cards are given to the electoral list officers. They can be given up to three of these forms, which include carbon copies. In other words, whenever you fill in a space, the information is automatically recorded on the three or four copies that are underneath.

This is what our electoral list officers do. When someone comes in to vote, there is a number on the electoral list that corresponds to that elector. So, the poll clerk tells the electoral list officer what that person's number is and the electoral list officer simply blacks out the number corresponding to that voter on the form.

At regular intervals, approximately every half hour — once again, it ultimately depends on what the political parties want — the people responsible for collecting this information on behalf of the political parties or independent candidates come and collect it, and then everything is handed over to the officer in charge of information and order in each polling station. He hands that information over to the party representatives, who then use it for the purposes that you are already aware of.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** So, it's recorded on forms with multiple copies that you provide in sufficient amounts to your officers, who then record the polling division number, based on what I see here. It's no more complicated than that; it actually is very simple.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Setting aside the costs associated with compensation, do you have any idea of how much it costs to put that system in place and administer it, Mr. Blanchet?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** It's part of the whole mechanics of preparing an election. The additional costs relate to the training that has to be provided to these individuals — the training lasts one or two hours, or the time it takes to explain to them what they have to do. It really isn't complicated.

So, from that point on, there are costs associated with training the officers. Other than that, we simply have to put two more chairs at the table where people actually vote. It's no more complicated than that. Rather than having just a poll clerk and a deputy returning officer, we have two electoral list officers as well. As I said earlier, as far as we are concerned, there is work for only one person.

• (1125)

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Yes, let's come back to that now. Under the current system, you have two officers who are recommended by the two parties that got the most votes in the last election. Now, once these people are seated at the table, they are supposed to be neutral. Everything they do is monitored, and there are no problems; that's the way it works.

Why did you start with two officers?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Perhaps I should again give you some background as to how all of this began. Initially, these individuals were designated by the two political parties that had received the most votes in the previous election. So, there have always been two people. They were paid by the Chief Electoral Officer, but worked only for their own party. So, the cards they would fill in could be used only by their own party.

That is what led to the infamous Hébert case. This was deemed to be unfair, but that is how things had worked—

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** So, you were used to having and paying for two representatives; you simply transferred the titles and responsibilities, but you still have two.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes, exactly. Those individuals were made employees of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, reporting directly to the CEO.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** As you say, nothing would prevent you from having only one such officer at each voting table. It would not cause additional problems. The only one that I can think of is this: how do you go about choosing or assigning these people? Do you continue to receive recommendations from the political parties or do you go and find them yourselves?

At the present time, the political parties make recommendations to you for the staffing of poll clerk and DRO positions based on the results they received in the last election in that riding. Right? If you had to recruit these officers yourselves, would that be a major problem for you?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** I would say no, simply because, as I was mentioning earlier, the political parties have to recommend people to us. They have up to 14 days before election day to make those recommendations. However, every time there has been an election, either the 2003 General Election or the by-elections that have been held since, I have had to make special arrangements, because we didn't have enough people to fill the positions. The political parties were unable to provide us with all the staff we needed to fill the positions of poll clerk, deputy returning officer, and electoral list officer, of which there are two.

So, once again, the institution has to use all the means at its disposal and do whatever it can think of to find people, including placing ads in the newspapers.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** In actual fact, this didn't cost you any more than what you were paying previously, because you had two before, and you still have two. You would actually be able to save money in Quebec if you only had one.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** We are already saving money because, at the time, these officers, who represented the different political parties, were also in attendance for the advance polls, the inmate voting and at the mobile polling stations. Now, however, they are used only when the regular voting process is underway.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We went over the time a little bit, but I felt that answer was very important to get.

Mr. Reid, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Blanchet. I have a great deal of respect for the electoral system in Quebec which, in a sense, has been a model for the rest of the country for the last 20 or 25 years. I found your presentation very interesting.

I have a few questions relating to things that you did not address in your presentation, and particularly people who may be forgotten or fall through the cracks as a result of the system we are considering putting in place through this legislation. I am referring to the homeless and Aboriginal Canadians.

[English]

Perhaps I'll switch to English at this point.

Those who might be neglected or might not be able to exercise their franchise.... You've had a similar system to the one we're looking at adopting; indeed, to a large degree, the Quebec system is the model we're looking at adopting, in terms of requirements for identification when one votes. And you've dealt, I believe, with the problem of those who might potentially be left off the voters list, who might be unable to exercise their franchise.

I'm wondering if you can tell us what we ought to do, and what you have found it useful to do, to ensure that those who are homeless and aboriginal, in particular, are able to exercise their vote—especially those in the *Grand Nord*, or areas where they are very far removed from easy access to polls.

• (1130)

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** It's important to realize that the Quebec system is not perfect. Last year, as a result of recommendations I made following the 2003 General Election, a package of measures was passed by the National Assembly in Quebec which substantially amended the Quebec Elections Act, in order to make it easier for people in difficult circumstances to exercise their right to vote.

In that respect, we also took some inspiration from provisions in the Canada Elections Act, and particularly the one that allows an elector to vote at the office of the Returning Officer. That particular option was not available in Quebec. In fact, we are seeking to broaden it to allow any citizen to vote anywhere in Quebec, at the office of any returning officer. Those votes would be counted in the riding where they have their residence. To that end, we have established a proper procedure, including the development of computer systems. We are also planning to allow people who are unable to get around to vote at home.

With respect to the Aboriginal population, we are facing the same problems as we are everywhere else. Last week, I attended a meeting with my fellow Chief Electoral Officers from the other provinces and territories of Canada. As you know, Aboriginal Canadians are not always particularly interested in voting. Consequently, we have to advertise to encourage them to take part in our democratic system, because the problem there is not one of access. We do everything that is required to ensure that they have all the information and everything they need on site to exercise their voting rights.

As for the homeless, they generally do not have an address. That is their situation, by definition. We encourage them to register in places where they generally go to have a meal, get washed or sleep. In fact, shelters for the homeless in Montreal and Quebec City can serve as a residence for the purposes of the Elections Act, so that these individuals are able to exercise their right to vote.

That is basically what we do. Once again, we do not have any more effective or innovative measures in place to accommodate these people. Our system works well. We do not receive complaints from them to the effect that we are not providing them with what they need to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** You have three minutes left.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** All right. In that case, I'll ask...and maybe it is more a question for the clerk than for our witness, but perhaps he could arrange to obtain and distribute a copy of his recommendations so we can take a look at what had been suggested. I think that would be very helpful.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Guimond.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** I'm glad to see that my Conservative colleagues from provinces other than Quebec all have an understanding of the bingo card system, because that is the reason why I asked that Mr. Blanchet be invited to appear.

Mr. Blanchet, how long have you been Chief Electoral Officer?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Since May 2000.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** If memory serves me well, you were acting in the position following the departure of Mr. Côté, were you not?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** No. I was actually appointed on April 19, 2000 and took up my new duties in May 2000. I was from the outside.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** And who was your predecessor?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** I was preceded by a number of individuals who held the position on an acting basis, including Jacques Girard. Four or five people held the position on an acting basis between the time Mr. Côté left, in 1997, and 2000. One of those individuals has been given a seven-year mandate. I refer to Jacques Girard, who died of cancer eight months later.

• (1135)

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Yes, I had forgotten that.

Mr. Blanchet, just so that every one clearly understands, we need to agree on our terminology. When an election is held in Quebec, I walk up to what is called the voting table. On that table is the ballot box. In Quebec, what is the person immediately beside the ballot box called?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** The deputy returning officer.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** The deputy returning officer.

And what is the title of the person seated at the immediate right of the deputy returning officer?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** That is the poll clerk.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** There are also one or two electoral list officers. Is that correct?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** The law provides for there to be two such officers. I have an obligation to ensure that there are two. If that is not possible, I have to make a special arrangement for there to be less than two.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** And there is no one else at that table?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** No.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Are there no other representatives? The parties don't need to have representatives there, which allows them to save some money. With the bingo cards, the different political parties have fresh information every half hour about electors who have voted and who have not voted. Is that correct?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** And are you familiar with the terminology used at the federal level?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** At the federal level, the person guarding the ballot box is also called the deputy returning officer, and the person we call the "secrétaire" in the Quebec system is called the "greffier" at the federal level.

In addition to that, each of the parties has its own representative at the table. When there are six or seven political parties, the deputy returning officers are tearing their hair out. They may decide that they want only two people to be at the table. If that is the case, the others are behind crossing the names off their lists. That is the way the system works.

As Mr. Proulx mentioned, the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Kingsley, and the members of his team, some of whom are here today, told us that there would need to be a photocopier in every polling station. Now, either they did not realize that we use NCR forms in Quebec, or they want to make things as complicated as possible. As the saying goes, give a dog a bad name and hang him. So, you don't have photocopiers in polling stations.

Mr. Kingsley argued that this will cost money, and the Government Leader repeated that. The two objectives are: not to increase costs, and to ensure that the voting process runs smoothly. If we decide at the federal level not to go with a system of electoral list officers because of the costs and we ask the poll clerk, who is already responsible for striking the names off the list, to fill in the bingo card at the same time that he strikes off the name of Michel Guimond, elector 122 in polling station 126, would that slow down the process?

That can be done while the elector is in the polling booth voting. That is not necessarily something that is done in front of him. While the elector is voting over there, does the clerk have anything else to do while waiting for the next elector to show up? Does such a system make for a less fluid voting process, in your opinion?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** We have never experimented with that in Quebec. As we said previously, we have two electoral list officers and we already find that two is too many. We believe that one such officer would be adequate. On the other hand, you are asking whether it would be possible to do away with them altogether. I think you would have to try it out to see. So, I really can't give you a precise answer to that question.

As you expressed it so well a moment ago, we certainly should not do anything that could result in a less fluid voting process. Would it be an inconvenience, given that every half hour, that information has to be turned over to the political parties that ask for it? Well, you know what it's like on election day: there is a lot going on. So, if the poll clerk has to do that as well as carry out the normal duties of a clerk, there could be a problem. So, I'm afraid I can't give you a specific answer to that question without having tested it directly.

• (1140)

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** In Quebec, once the elector has identified himself and the DRO has given him his ballot to go and vote in the polling booth, what does the poll clerk do?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** He waits for the next elector, of course.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** That suggests that people are not lining up in front of him.

I'm going to ask my last question now. Ms. Picard will have others later on, Mr. Chairman.

I know that under the Quebec system, the electoral lists that you give to the political parties include the date of birth, is that correct?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Does that cause problems? Have you had complaints about confidentiality or non-compliance with the Privacy Act?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** That is a provision of the Elections Act. There was a change made recently. Previously, the list was sent out once a year in the fall, whereas now, it is sent out four times a year.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Really?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes. In fact, we ask every member of the National Assembly or member of Parliament who receives the list to sign an undertaking that the confidentiality of that list will be maintained and that they will ensure it is used only for the purposes for which it was designed.

People have complained in the past about the fact that their elective representative called them to wish them a happy birthday or had sent them a birthday card after obtaining their personal information through the electoral list. That has happened only a couple of times. When it did, I called the member myself and let him know he could not use the list for that purpose.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** So, it can only be used for election purposes.

[English]

**The Chair:** Excuse me. Thank you. I think our time is up on that. Thank you very much for that questioning.

Monsieur Godin, it's your turn now.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Blanchet, I would like to come back to the way people are selected. If I understood you correctly, the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec previously paid two people to carry out pretty well the exact same task, namely to obtain the names to be passed on to the political parties. One of those individuals was chosen by the political party that had received the most votes; the political party who ranked second would choose the second individual.

If you were to limit yourself to only one such officer, how do you think that person should be selected? You already explained it, but I didn't really understand your explanation.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** The task of recruiting these individuals could be handled most appropriately by the returning officer in each riding. In any case, we already have to do it, because there are not enough people being recommended to us by the political parties.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** And how is the returning officer chosen?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** In Quebec — and since 2000, this also applies to Manitoba — the returning officer is chosen through a very rigorous open competition. That process is based on rules similar to the ones that apply to public service competitions. The returning officer is selected and appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer. He has a ten-year mandate.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** That's why there are two, I believe. Initially there were two, because the candidates were selected by the political parties. After that, one of them was eliminated.

On election day in Quebec, there is one individual who looks after the bingo cards. Since that is pretty straightforward, we won't go into that any further.

Can the political parties assign individuals to monitor the election or are they only able to do that when the votes are counted?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Well, as you say, there is nothing preventing the political parties from sending representatives to the polling stations to monitor what is going on throughout the day.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** What are their specific duties?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** It's up to the political parties to decide what they want them to do. In any case, at no time can they interfere with the voting process. They are there as observers, but they play no role in the electoral process.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Are they seated at the table?

● (1145)

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** They could be seated at the table, except there is a chance there would not be enough room, because there are already four people there. They can sit behind the table or somewhere else in the room.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, because they cannot interfere in the voting process, they are no longer able to receive information at the table as was the case previously, because now there is someone being paid to pass on that information. If they are able to interfere in any way, then we will be back at square one. The person responsible for filling in the bingo cards is now responsible as well for passing on that information to the political parties.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes, absolutely. That is what these individuals are hired for.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** And only for that purpose.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** They pass on the information to all the political parties and all the independent candidates.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Let's get back to the issue of the homeless and Aboriginal Canadians. Do they have to present ID in order to vote?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes. In Quebec, all individuals wishing to vote must identify themselves using forms of identification that are recognized in the legislation or by regulation. The kinds of ID that are recognized in the legislation are the Quebec Health Care card, the Canadian passport and the driver's licence. Last April, the government passed regulations that added two new pieces of ID: the Certificate of Indian Status and the Canadian Forces photo ID. Those two pieces of ID can now be used for voting purposes.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** The New Brunswick Health Care card is different from the Quebec card in that there is no photo.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** That card would probably not be accepted in Quebec. However, there is one exception in Quebec: seniors over the age of 75 are not required to have their photograph on their health care card, although the card may be used as identification.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Let's take an extreme case. If someone is not required to have photo ID because of her age, and that person has health problems and doesn't have a driver's licence either, how can she prove her identity? Is there a mechanism in place for such cases?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** At every polling station, we have a system in place which is called the elector ID verification table. That will allow someone who doesn't have one of the types of ID provided for in the legislation or the regulations to identify himself or herself to the people at that table.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** And how do they go about identifying that individual? We are about to propose to Parliament that only one person be able to sign for such an individual, whereas in the past, a person could sign for several different people. How does it work in Quebec?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** In Quebec, the person accompanying another individual who is unable to provide ID must have a health insurance card, a driver's licence, a Canadian passport, a Certificate of Indian Status or a Canadian Forces ID card. That person can accompany only one other individual, unless it is a family member. In those cases, they can come with their father, mother, brother, sister, son or daughter and, in addition to them, one other person.

In other words, there can't be one person in every single polling station responsible for identifying—

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** What are you proposing by way of a solution? One of the problems we have been made aware of is the high number of homeless in Vancouver East, which causes problems when there are elections. In Montreal, a lot of people are unable to find someone to vouch for them and, there again, we are not necessarily talking about only the very poor people, although I don't want to see the poorest members of our society disenfranchised. I'm afraid that this kind of system could prevent such individuals from voting.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** I told you that another person can identify an elector who has no ID or that this person can provide two documents to prove identity.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** And what documents would those be?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** They can be documents or identification with a photo or two documents with the person's name on them. It could be a hydro bill or a student photo ID. Both of those documents can be used for identification purposes.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** In that case, a photo is still required.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** It could be two documents with no photo but with the person's name and address on them; for example, a Hydro-Quebec bill or phone company bill.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm sorry. We're finished with that questioning. There will be a little bit of time.

Members, we are running out of time here, so I'm going to ask that we go down to three-minute rounds and keep our questions very short and succinct.

Larry, you're up.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Thank you for coming.

Why are the election list clerks appointed by parties? That's partisan, and I know they're signed up to be objective, but why aren't they just hired by Élections Québec as neutral people? Why are the election list clerks not just hired by your office? Why are they partisan?

• (1150)

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Once again, that is the result of the way things have evolved historically. As you may recall, these individuals were initially representing the political parties and, strangely enough, they were paid by the Chief Electoral Officer. That was exactly what was challenged, and rightly so, in my opinion. Only the two major parties had the right to receive that information from these individuals who are being paid by the government.

The new rules stipulate that these officers are employed by the Chief Electoral Officer, and therefore the returning officer in each polling station. They will continue to be paid by the government, but they will have to demonstrate neutrality in carrying out their duties, and the documents they fill out will have to be available to all political parties.

[English]

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** When these electoral list people fill out the bingo cards.... In the federal election we had yesterday there were seven people running, and they have to give it to all parties. So do they have to write it out seven times?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** If I understood you correctly, you are asking whether the information is provided several times? I said earlier that the political parties would generally come every half hour to look at the information.

[English]

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** And the people from the other parties.... As I said, yesterday there were seven and there were two at the table. Are the other people allowed to come in and look around, like scrutineers are in elections?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** They can certainly observe what is going on, but the information is only given to the electoral list officers. Their job and their responsibility is to fill out those documents and hand them to the runner — that's what we call them in Quebec, and you probably do as well.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Preston, please.

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Good morning.

You've discovered that you don't need two list clerks. I think you've said that. You think one could handle it. But Monsieur Guimond asked if you think the secretary could handle the job and not have any list clerks. Otherwise, in the federal system, there would be an additional cost. We'd be putting another person at the table. Do you think that's a possibility?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Well, we would have to see how that would work, but we would not want to do anything that could result in the voting process running less smoothly. Would asking the poll clerk to fill out the cards have that effect? Well, we have no experience with that. We believe that two such officers is too many; a single person appears to us to be an appropriate option. As for the possibility of there being no one to do this, well, we would have to give that some thought.

[English]

**Mr. Joe Preston:** You also stated that in the polling station there's an identification table that those without the required photo identification you require, who are on your list, could go to and be identified as voters.

If they do not have photo ID or two pieces of identification with their addresses on it that satisfies that, are they then not allowed to vote?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** There are a number of ways for these people to be able to vote. Other than the ID, there is the ID verification table that a person can go to with another individual who identifies him or her based on the criteria set out in the legislation; the other possibility is for that person to provide documents other than those required under the legislation and the regulations. The Act is very flexible.

These measures are well accepted by the population. We have tried out that process on a number of occasions since those provisions were added to the Quebec Elections Act in 1999. 97% or 98% of people who turn up to vote have ID. Very few people have to go to the ID verification table, to the point where the people seated at that table get bored.

• (1155)

[English]

**Mr. Joe Preston:** I agree, but I'm trying to satisfy Mr. Godin also that there are homeless in this world, and they may not have ID. How do we satisfy—you said you would try and pre-register them to the address where they may go, and now they're registered, but they still don't have identification. How do they present themselves at the poll?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** The fact is it is still difficult for the homeless to vote. You have to have an address in a particular riding and you have to be attached to a particular polling station. We generally use the shelters where they go to sleep or eat. That is where people can go to register.

The Quebec Act has another particularity which you may know about: you have to have your name on the electoral list in order to vote. In Quebec, you cannot get your name on the electoral list on voting day. It has to be on the voters' list, and the last chance to make changes to that list is when the special review occurs, at the very latest three days before voting day.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Madam Picard.

[Translation]

**Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to talk about upcoming reforms, and specifically fixed election dates in Canada. The date that has been suggested is October 15. As members of the Bloc Québécois, we see that date as problematic with respect to the registry, because we are from Quebec.

On July 1, there are more than 220,000 households moving in Quebec. We asked the Chief Electoral Officers of Canada what would happen to the registry. We know that you send your data to Elections Canada.

Will we have enough time to prepare a list that reflects all the changes that have occurred as a result of all these households having changed addresses?

I know he's been in touch with you and I'd like to know what you said to him. Is it true that we could get an up-to-date list around September 15, even with all these people moving?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** July 1 is indeed a very important date for most people living in Quebec. It's a date when a lot of people move, and people in Quebec move a lot; apparently Montreal is a world champion in that regard.

We receive address changes in the weeks that follow and, by mid-September, we have received most of them. By the third week of September, we are still receiving quite a lot of them, but by the middle of that month, we have received most of the address changes, so that if an election were to be held in mid-September or, preferably, late September, most of those changes would already have been reflected in the list.

Of course, we have an agreement with Elections Canada whereby we can forward on request, the actual day of a federal election, the updated electoral list.

**Ms. Pauline Picard:** But—

[English]

**The Chair:** Keep it very short, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. Pauline Picard:** You say that all the changes, or at least 95% of them, would be made by mid-September?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** I'd say late September is probably a better bet, but by mid-September, we have in fact already received a great many of those address changes. Under the legislation, within 30 days of moving, people are required to advise various organizations of their change of address, and especially so that the new address can be reflected on their driver's licence.

**Ms. Pauline Picard:** Yes, but mid-September is only one month away from the election date. In the weeks that follow, there will be more changes. Would you say you have received 75% of the changes by mid-September?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Yes, between 75% and 80%. Now I'm saying that without having the actual figures in front of me, but I believe, based on information that I request regularly on this, that is about the proportion. So, there would still be quite a few changes to make during the revision period if the election were to be held too early in September.

• (1200)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam Picard.

Monsieur Godin, you can have one final question.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Is it possible that you said earlier that homeless people who don't have ID don't even go because they know they won't be able to vote? Do you have those numbers? Have you studied this?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Unfortunately, we don't have any figures on that. Of course, there are homeless people in Montreal, but probably far fewer than out West, probably because of the weather.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Well, today they may be wondering whether they made the right choice.

My other question has to do with the bingo cards. Supposing Yvon Godin is number 24 at one polling station and that Mr. Guimond is also number 24 at the polling station next door, and even though he has moved, the changes were never made. Where would they put him on the bingo card? Would they both yell "Bingo" at the same time?

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** Well, as I said earlier, people are not allowed to vote anywhere but the place where they're on the list. Every polling station identifies the electors that are on its list and an elector cannot be registered at the next polling station.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** In federal elections, however, it is possible to register on voting day. So, there could be a problem with the bingo cards.

**Mr. Marcel Blanchet:** In that case, you would have to set strict rules to ensure that electors cannot register at two different tables.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Godin, have you finished?

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[English]

I'm sorry, we've completed the round.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I have a point of order.

I can't ask the witness any more questions, as has been signalled by the chair, but I intended to ask the witness what kind of advertising he engages in, for people in disadvantaged positions in the community, to make sure they are aware of how to access their voting rights. Perhaps we could ask our clerk to get any material from our witness on that for distribution to the committee.

**The Chair:** Okay. If there are no objections, we will do that.

Monsieur Blanchet, we appreciate your coming out this morning on such short notice to spend time with us, and we appreciate the information you've given the committee. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you very much for being here.

You are certainly welcome to stay. It's a public meeting, but at this time the committee is pleased with your report and you don't actually have to stay.

Colleagues, we're going to suspend for a few minutes so we can get our conference set up for Vancouver.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- (1205)

**The Chair:** We will resume the meeting. Thank you very much.

This morning we have three witnesses by videoconference from Vancouver. I would like to welcome them. We certainly appreciate the ability for you all to get together in the same place. Hopefully the weather is not as bad out there as we're hearing. Obviously you were successful in getting in this morning.

We have Mr. Murray Mollard from the B.C. Civil Liberties Association. I believe Murray is sitting in the middle. Is that correct?

**Mr. Murray Mollard (Executive Director, British Columbia Civil Liberties Association):** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Jim Quail, British Columbia Public Interest Advocacy Centre, and Ms. Tina Marie Bradford. Thank you very much as well. Tina, we can recognize you here, since you were the last one to shake your head.

Witnesses, I want to let you know you're being fed our voices in English only, but members, you can ask questions in either of the official languages, as you prefer. I would also ask the witnesses, when you are not speaking, to please turn off your microphones, if you're allowed to do that. I'm not seeing that you have individual microphones, but if there is any opportunity for you to turn the mikes off out there, that would help us here.

As well, our experience with video conferencing is that it's most beneficial for us at this end if you speak slowly, as obviously our translators do not have copies of your message.

Witnesses, I know you were instructed that you have five minutes. Certainly I'll respect that instruction, but if you don't need the full five minutes, don't feel obligated to take it. That's all I need to say.

We can start with opening statements and we can start with Tina Marie. We'll have you go first, and then we'll move straight across to our right. Introduce yourself, and then give your opening statement. Thank you.

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford (Lawyer, As an Individual):** Mr. Chair and committee members, my name is Tina Marie Bradford and I am a labour lawyer practising in British Columbia.

Until last year, I was a resident of the riding of Vancouver East. The problems of poverty and various types of substance addictions and mental illness are particularly prevalent in one area of the Vancouver East riding and this area is commonly known as the downtown eastside.

I'm going to speak briefly about my experiences as an organizer of a group of volunteer lawyers who assist marginalized citizens in the downtown eastside during elections—municipal, provincial, and specifically federal—in helping them obtain sufficient identification to allow them to vote in elections.

I have fulfilled this role as an organizer and a volunteer in the last two federal elections and the last provincial and municipal elections.

To give you a bit of background on the downtown eastside, this fairly small area—a few square blocks—is a hub of poverty for Vancouver. Many of the downtown eastside residents are often homeless or transient, and many live in rooming houses or hotels or shelters where crime is prevalent. Due to their circumstances, most of them have quite a bit of difficulty obtaining government identification, and if by chance they do obtain this type of identification, their belongings are regularly stolen, so they don't have them for long.

If anyone here were to pull out their wallet, they would be able to produce a number of pieces of identification quite easily. For people in the downtown eastside, this is quite difficult. They generally don't own a car, they don't have a driver's licence, and because they don't own a car, they don't have access to insurance papers. They don't own property, so they don't have property tax notices or anything to do with owning property. They don't qualify for credit, so they don't have credit cards or debit cards, and they certainly couldn't negotiate the process to obtain a Canadian passport because they don't even have the most basic identification. And even if they did have some of these things at some point, they're quite often lost.

In the past few elections, it became apparent to a number of concerned citizens that people were being turned away regularly at the polls in the downtown eastside. In 2002, a group of lawyers came together in a desire to help these disenfranchised individuals.

A process was developed whereby we would go into the downtown eastside for the advance polls and on election day and we would set up tables on the street in high pedestrian areas. We would swear what's called a statutory declaration for these people, which they could then take to the polling station and it would be accepted as sufficient identification for them to vote.

Just what is this statutory declaration? I don't know if the committee has the statutory declaration in front of them that I forwarded.

•(1210)

**The Chair:** We do have that. In fact, Ms. Bradford, it's being distributed right now. Thank you.

You have not quite two minutes left.

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** I had better speed up then.

The statutory declaration is a form prescribed by the Canada Evidence Act. It is similar in nature to what people know as an affidavit, something that you would submit to court, but because it is not going to court, it is called a statutory declaration.

The statutory declaration contains the person's name, their residence, their signature, the three requirements that are set out by the current act, and then the person swears the statutory declaration in front of the lawyer, because in B.C. lawyers are able to act as commissioners for taking oaths.

In the last two federal elections we have sworn approximately 350 to 400 statutory declarations for each election. So we've allowed approximately 350 to 400 people to vote who might otherwise be turned away from the polls.

Bill C-31 removes the ability to rely on only one piece of identification, such as the statutory declaration, and now creates a requirement that you have two forms of identification. So the work we've been doing helping these people would no longer work. They would be turned away if they showed up to the polling station with only the statutory declaration.

The effect of this is that, of course, a large number of these people would be turned away. When we swear the statutory declarations, we do a precursory investigation to confirm that they are who they say they are. We'll ask them to go through their pockets to see what kind of identification they have, such as a rent receipt, a court document, a promise to appear if they have been released on bail, or a prescription in their pocket with their name on it. So we would confirm their eligibility before we took their oath and swear the statutory declaration for them.

Now, if these people have anything at all, they would take that to the polling station, and it is not likely that this form of identification would be accepted.

**The Chair:** I'm terribly sorry, Ms. Bradford, but you are over your five minutes. Perhaps we can use some of the questioning rounds to

get more of the information that you brought for us this morning. But I'm going to have to move on now.

Please take a moment to introduce yourself to the committee and then begin with your statement.

•(1215)

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Murray Mollard. I am the executive director of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association. I would like to thank the committee for the invitation to speak.

The association, as some of you may know, is over 43 years old and works on a large range of civil liberties issues, but the right to vote and political rights are at the heart, I would suggest, of the work we do. Democracy and making effective people's freedoms within a democracy are core principles and values, which the association strives to protect.

We see this issue with respect to Bill C-31. The impact it will have in terms of preventing eligible voters from exercising their fundamental right to vote is a top priority for the association.

I wanted to do something for the committee besides just sitting here and asserting that there will be people who are disenfranchised. I made an effort to contact a variety of social service agencies within the area that Tina Marie has referred to—the downtown eastside—that provide direct services for clientele and for marginalized people, homeless people, drug-addicted people, transient people, and people with mental health difficulties. I want to read into the record some of those letters. They have been sent to the committee, but I just want to quickly read some of those.

The first letter is from, Ethel Whitty, the director of the Carnegie Community Centre.

Dear Mr. Goodyear,

I am writing to express my concern regarding Bill C-31.

Thousands of individuals in the city of Vancouver are without proper identification due to poverty, illness or disability or having no access to a stable address. Many of them are known to their neighbours and the present system of verification of identity during election registration allows them to exercise their right to vote.

Changes to this system that would demand two pieces of identification for registration to vote would effectively disenfranchise them. I urge you to seriously consider the consequences of enacting Bill C-31.

This is a letter from Karen O' Shannacery, the executive director of the Lookout Emergency Aid Society:

I read with concern that the Act may change to require either proof of identification or require someone to take his or her oath as well as be vouched for by someone with ID. This will place an unreasonable hardship on our residents and clientele, and will almost certainly eliminate the opportunity for the vast majority of them to vote.

I won't read all of this letter, but I'll read the concluding paragraph:

We believe that our residents and clientele should have as much right to vote as anyone else, and that means we have a responsibility to make voting accessible to them. People should be able to attest to their identity and eligibility to vote through a statutory declaration. We urge you to not implement the contemplated amendments, and use this alternative process.

This letter is from the executive director of the Motivation, Power & Achievement Society, Roberta Chapman:

MPA wishes to go on record as opposing Bill C-31.

This bill will make it extremely difficult if not impossible for those who are homeless to vote. The homeless are one of the most vulnerable populations with regards to social service funding reductions and should be able to exhibit that by voting.

MPA believes that "statutory declarations" are the appropriate path for those who are transient or homeless. We need to be encouraging everyone to vote and that includes homeless people. Many of the homeless are stricken with mental illness as a part of their difficult lives. This Bill only serves to remove them even farther from the voting process, giving them less say rather than more. Who is more compromised than the homeless population, and if not them, who will speak on their behalf in the vote?

Again, I won't read from the whole letter. This letter is from Jean Swanson, the co-coordinator of the Carnegie Community Action Project:

I am writing on behalf of the Carnegie Community Action Project to inform you that the requirements of Bill C-31 for 2 pieces of ID for voting eligibility will completely disenfranchise thousands of people in our neighbourhood...

This provision must be stopped if we are to call Canada a democracy.

I think there are considerable concerns by those who actually work directly with and will, as Tina Marie has also attested, know the very significant problems that marginalized people have in obtaining ID and retaining ID.

Our association believes that there should be amendments to the bill. We would urge you to consider carefully and implement provisions. For example, there could be amendment to proposed subsection 43.1(2) of the bill that would allow a sworn statutory declaration to establish the elector's name, eligibility, and residency. The act could also be changed. There would need to be another amendment in paragraph 161(1)(a) that would recognize that the statutory declaration could be used.

● (1220)

We note that the statutory declaration at this moment is reliant upon voluntary lawyers to come forward and provide their services. So it's not necessarily a holistic solution to this problem. We would urge you, for example, to consider permitting your deputy returning officers to take an oath, but not with the vouching system. I know Tina Marie maybe in the questions can speak of her experience of how the vouching system is ineffective because of the problems of these individuals not necessarily knowing others who would have to be on the registered voters list and have the requisite ID as well. Although we understand the reason why you put it in there was as a safeguard, we see the vouching as really a barrier to providing and ensuring people who are eligible to vote actually vote.

**The Chair:** Yes, if it's a short comment, but we're already over by one minute.

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** The final note I'd like to close on is I've read the testimony from Jean-Pierre Kingsley. One has to ask the question, what exactly is the problem that you're trying to fix? According to Mr. Kingsley, there's actually no fraud that he is aware of, according to the testimony, or via complaints. While there might be a potential concern, there doesn't appear to be evidence of fraud at this point. I would suggest in trying to fix a problem you're actually going to disenfranchise not only marginalized people but a whole group of other people.

**The Chair:** I appreciate that very much, but I can't shut one witness off and not the rest. We certainly will deal with that issue during the rounds of questioning.

Mr. Quail, please, you have five minutes as well. I'm sure I'll be easy on you with that, but if you can, please keep it to five minutes. Thank you.

**Mr. Jim Quail (Executive Director, British Columbia Public Interest Advocacy Centre):** Yes, I'll be brief. My name is Jim Quail. I've been practising law in British Columbia for 26 years, and I'm the executive director of the B.C. Public Interest Advocacy Centre.

One of the things we do is represent low-income groups and individuals dealing with test case litigation having to do with infringements of their rights. If this legislation is enacted as it is, I can assure you this will be one of the files that we'll be taking on, and I can assure you that, in our view, it is highly vulnerable as it is now written.

I've also participated personally in the volunteer lawyer squads in the downtown eastside on election days, but I won't spend my time talking about that.

In any event, I would urge Parliament to simply eliminate these amendments from the Canada Elections Act. I would also add that this is not just a poverty issue—I think that point has been made—but it will create a situation where many electors who have come to the polls will be sent home to obtain the requisite identification. So not only people having problems in terms of owning identification, but also people with mobility problems in particular—seniors, people with disabilities—will in many instances be presented with a barrier that will make it impossible to vote, particularly if they decide to go to the polls late on election day.

I will get more into the legal issues, which are the main points I want to make.

Parliament needs to be aware that what it's proposing to do would mean to add further legal requirements for an elector, a Canadian citizen, to be entitled to receive a ballot. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees every citizen the right to vote in parliamentary elections, and I think it would not be a very large leap to find the government having to justify the legislation under section 1 of the charter.

I say that it adds further obstacles or requirements in terms of legal entitlement to receive a ballot in the following sense. A person would be required to own identification, either in the form of government-issued photo identification or as yet unknown scheduled identification that would be listed by the Chief Electoral Officer.

When you look at the realm of government-issued identification that has the bearer's photograph and address on it, we're essentially talking about drivers' licences and passports. Maybe prison guards and other occupations have badges that have their photo and their address, I don't know, but essentially, for all intents and purposes, those are the only two pieces of identification that an elector might have in the ordinary course. If you don't have a card, if you don't have a driver's licence, and if you don't happen to have a passport, you cannot vote under that section. You'd be required to produce the two other pieces of identification yet unknown.

The vouching process is not an adequate remedy because you would have to line up a registered voter who lives in your own poll, which might only be a couple of hundred voters, who has the required identification, who is available to attend at the polling place with you, and who is not vouching for any other voter. It is an absolute certainty that these amendments would result in a substantial number of people who are constitutionally entitled to vote being denied a ballot.

Essentially what it's doing is saying to people, you might be a citizen entitled to vote, but we're not giving you a ballot. This is a measure to prevent someone else, hypothetically, from receiving a ballot fraudulently, which is already an offence under the legislation, which is already subject to penal sanction. The question might be asked, what is it that you're seeking to fix?

We see this as a fairly straightforward matter, where, on the face of it, there's an infringement of a charter right and the government would have to show that it's reasonably justified under section 1. I suggest to you that reliance on anecdotal evidence is not going to convince the court that this passes muster. I'd urge the committee and Parliament to take a very close look at this and seriously contemplate eliminating these amendments altogether from the Canada Elections Act.

Those are my comments.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Quail.

We will begin our first round of questioning. I'm going to indulge members. We normally go with a seven-minute round. If it's okay, I think we can afford five minutes on this first round and hopefully we'll have more time for more questions.

Mr. Bagnell, you're up first.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Thank you. I just primarily have one question. You can all answer, and maybe Tina can get in anything else she didn't finish in her opening remarks.

Basically, you're involved in the poverty area and you have good knowledge in that area. You've identified the problem. We're involved in the political area and we've identified a major problem, and you're going to have to assume that, because it's our area of expertise. We're going to try to fix that problem, so we're not going

to drop this issue. We have to solve this problem of people voting who aren't identified and who are fraudulently in the system, because that's not fair to Canadians.

You identified a very good problem. You identified some problems in the solutions that have been proposed. So what I'm asking is whether any of you have other ways we could ensure that these people are enfranchised, so they can have ID or someone to vouch for them, or some way that they will be able to be fitted in and not be disenfranchised. As we ensure that the vast majority of voters are properly identified, how can we also make sure that these people do not lose their votes?

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** My position is that we're trying to fix something that doesn't appear to be broken. Maybe you've heard other evidence that there is prevalent fraud out there. I haven't experienced it on the ground or at the polls. I've spent numerous hours, all day during election day, moving in between polls trying to help people present their statutory declarations to make sure that they are in fact given a ballot.

We're not just swearing statutory declarations willy-nilly for people. We are doing a screening process before we do this. However, our process is a little bit different from what you're doing in the polling stations. I organize people who work in the community, maybe social workers or welfare workers, to come down to our tables to identify these people for us if they have no identification. They've worked with them for years. They know who they are. They're able to, in effect, vouch to me that this person is who they say they are. If we're not able to find someone to identify them, then I get them to go through their pockets. You can be darned sure if someone is carrying around a bail release from the local courthouse, they are who they say they are. People don't carry around those sorts of things unless they are actually theirs. However, if they were to show up to the polling station now, they would be turned away with something like that. That form of identification just wouldn't pass muster.

A solution to this would be to have someone in the polling station with Elections Canada who has the same authority that I and the other lawyers have to use their discretion to do a bit of an interview with the person. Maybe they've come in with someone from the street who can identify them, or they can produce some form of identification such as a prescription bottle or welfare stub or that sort of thing. They can take the oath themselves.

•(1230)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Tina, I so hate to cut off the witnesses, but we are on a time limit here, and I would like, if it's possible, to hear from the other members as well.

We have two minutes left in this round, and I just want to give everybody an opportunity to express their opinion.

Thank you.

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** Very quickly, the solutions are, number one, a statutory declaration. But more profoundly, as Tina Marie suggests, give the authority to deputy returning officers to take an oath, for someone to swear and take an oath that they are who they say they are and that they're eligible—without the vouching requirement, because the vouching requirement will kill this as an effective solution.

I do want to challenge one statement, though, that the committee member has made. Perhaps you disagree with the Chief Electoral Officer, but in his testimony there is no evidence that there is wide-scale fraud, or any fraud. There are provisions that allow prosecution. My worry is that in seeking to fix this, you're going to actually disenfranchise not just marginalized people, but others who don't have access to the ID that's required. You're going to actually disenfranchise more people and reduce voter turnout at a time when we're very concerned about voter turnout.

I just wanted to make that point.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** I'll be very brief.

First of all, I would suggest to you that a sworn declaration is a pretty good piece of identification compared to other pieces of identification that people can obtain that could potentially be listed by the Chief Electoral Officer. There is a criminal sanction if someone swears a false statutory declaration, so I'd suggest that you take that very seriously as a way for people to identify themselves.

Another aspect that the committee might want to look at would be the restrictions on the vouching process. For example, I refer to the fact that the person doing the vouching has to reside in the poll, which is a rather extreme restriction. The provision that the voucher can only vouch for one elector is a rather extreme restriction as well. For example, a welfare worker or someone of that nature might know a number of people. Someone who works in a community centre in an affected area might know and be perfectly, validly, able to vouch for a number of individuals, but really that resource is eliminated for all practical purposes. They can vouch for one elector, and that's it for that election.

If you're looking at ways to reduce the impact, I'd suggest those would be two ways of doing it: providing in the statute that a sworn declaration in a prescribed form would be acceptable identification, and have a mechanism perhaps for them to be sworn at the polling places; and doing something about the vouching process and what I suggest are unnecessary restrictions on the scope of that remedy.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We did go over on that round. I would just remind members to try to keep it as short as you can on your questions.

Mr. Reid, and then Madam Picard.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question will be to Ms. Bradford.

You've had the experience, having worked on the ground in the East Hastings area, so I want to focus a little bit on your comments on this.

It seems to me that what you're trying to do, in a sense, is engage in a kind of enumeration of voters who have been left off the voters list primarily due to homelessness. This raises a question that hasn't really come up all that much in our discussions around the bill. It certainly hasn't come up in the Chief Electoral Officer's testimony, but I think it is very much an underlying problem, and that is the abandonment of the old enumeration system.

The idea was to do focused enumerations and to require the Chief Electoral Officer in particular to do focused enumerations in areas of high homelessness shortly before the time of the election, in order to ensure that some of this was captured. If that were done, would that ameliorate the situation? Would it make it somewhat better, in your opinion?

I'm asking Ms. Bradford. I have a follow-up question, but I only have three minutes.

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** It would reduce some of the problems we face. The problem is that if you do pre-register someone on the voters list and a voter's card is mailed out to them, most of these people aren't going to get their voter's cards. The cards are simply either going to be lost in the mail or they're not going to get delivered. A lot of these people are living in shelters or in rooming houses, so the cards are not going to get to them.

•(1235)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I apologize. I hate cutting people off, but we have little time and our chairman is strict.

Could we not put some requirements on the manner in which these things are mailed or arrange to make sure a copy is sent to the returning officer at the polling station, so that when they arrive at the polling station, it might be there and serve as one of the means by which they could be recognized?

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** That would be a good idea; however, when people attend at a polling station, they're going to be asked to produce some kind of identification before they're going to be given their voter's card. Unless Parliament is prepared to give people their voter's cards—

**Mr. Scott Reid:** You're required to have it when you vote. You're not required necessarily to have it in your hands. It sounds to me like part of the problem you've been drawing attention to is the fact that people are given stuff and then it's stolen from them or they lose it. I'm just trying to think of practical ways of ensuring that people who are currently unable to vote get the opportunity to vote, without obviating the entire purpose of removing voter fraud, which is the purpose of these sections.

If we were to take Mr. Quail's suggestion, we might as well not have this bill. I'll just say that bluntly. I'm looking for practical ways of ensuring that homeless people are captured to the best of our ability, and that we ameliorate the situation as much as it is within our power to do so. That's why I asked the question that way.

The other thing I wanted to ask, as a possibility.... Just a second. Hang on.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** If I can comment on that, being on the voters list does not eliminate the requirement of identification, so the enumeration doesn't resolve the problem. I just hope there's no misunderstanding.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I just want to go on and ask another question here, and this actually relates to the problem, Mr. Quail, that you had raised with regard to the requirement of residence within the poll. If we were to adjust that somewhat and say, for example, that it was a person working within that poll, I think you'd have to agree that would ameliorate the situation to some degree. You did suggest a version of that yourself. Am I correct in understanding that if we were to extend that definition a little bit, that would also be of assistance?

**Mr. Jim Quail:** That would assist somewhat. I think there's a problem, and that might reduce it somewhat. On why the person would have to work, I just question how that relates to the objective, which is—

**Mr. Scott Reid:** The reason, Mr. Quail, is this. You have to be able to actually know that person and to be able to demonstrate that you know that person in some way. If you live in the poll, there's a reasonable probability that you know that person. If you work in the poll, there's a reasonable probability. If you're someone from across town—with all due respect to Ms. Bradford—I'm actually not sure how you would know the person other than by the fact that they've presented you with a document.

On your statutory declaration, I'm not sure how that actually proves the person is who they say they are, how it proves that they live where they say they live. It's just you saying, or, more correctly, them saying that they went and stood in front of you and said they were who they said they were.

I don't mean to be disrespectful, because I know you're trying to do a good job. I'm just trying to deal with the basic problem here. On the one hand, we want to prevent voter fraud. On the other hand, we want to do what we can to ensure that everybody gets a chance to vote. We don't want to have one goal destroy the other, in either direction.

**The Chair:** I'm terribly sorry, but we don't have time to do that. Perhaps another member, in his or her round, will allow that to happen.

By the way, witnesses, we're on a time schedule. If, following this meeting, there is anything further you wish to say, you can certainly put that in writing, get it to my office, and I will make sure all members have it in both languages.

We will go now to Mr. Godin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

Talking about the statutory declaration that Tina Marie talked about, you said you go onto the street and meet the people; you get them to sign it and you vouch for it. Is that right? When we're looking at identification, would it help if we were to have the election poll where you go to vote directly in the shelter or a place like that?

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** The downtown eastside has so many people in such a small area that there are usually three to four polling stations within a block of each other. I'm not sure I understood the question. They will be placed in things like community centres in areas where the shelters are, so the polling stations are right in the heart of the downtown eastside.

● (1240)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Yes, but Madam Bradford, you said that when you do your own investigation on those people, you go to the shelter and you meet the people who work there, so they know the person. If we were to have those same people to identify them.... For example, if Elections Canada were to hire those same people to identify them, would that help?

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** Absolutely. That's already the process we're utilizing in order for us to be comfortable swearing the statutory declaration for that person.

There are two groups of people. There are people who have some kind of identification, but it wouldn't be sufficient to go to the polls. Then there's another group who have no identification whatsoever. What you're suggesting would be of great assistance to the people who have no identification whatsoever.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Exactly. At the same time, I do agree that each citizen has the right to vote, but the question that is raised here is, what's stopping people from going to two different polls?

I've been told, for example, that you have people going in to vote—they have nothing to do with the homeless there—ordinary people, knowing their neighbours don't vote, simply walking out and walking back in to vote. That's one of the situations they face, and it seems to me that there have been no charges against anybody. You said it yourself. Mr. Kingsley said he has nothing on record that proves that any fraud has been done, but it seems to me that some people think there's fraud all across the country.

I don't know if you could talk to us, for example, about the students in university. We have people who have left their homes to go to university. Close to the election they have not been registered in the poll where they are. They probably have identification, but they have moved just before the election and then they are excluded from voting.

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** I can speak to the first group. When a person takes their statutory declaration into the polling station, it's actually taken away from them; they don't have the ability to take their statutory declaration from poll to poll to poll. It's taken away from them, and it has their address specifically on it. Even if they were to somehow make a copy of it—I don't know how they would because it has our official notary seal on it—it would have their address and they would be turned away from a polling station if they didn't have the correct address for that polling station.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** The address issue is a very serious problem, because people move a lot in this country, and students are an example. A lot of other groups do too—people who are tenants—so even if they have a driver's licence and a passport, it may well not have the correct address. Then they'd have a problem, and I guess they would have to go through the vouching rigamarole. Again, anything that can be done to make that a more flexible option is going to be of assistance. But for groups like students, I think there's potentially a very large-scale problem.

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** One other point. Remember, we all fill in our own address on a passport. As I read the legislation, the passport doesn't have the address actually written into it by the government, per se, so there's a real question mark about whether the passport would in actual fact be an adequate piece of ID.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Going back to the witness at the poll, where you're proposing that one witness is for one voter, how do you feel about it? Personally, I have a problem with that. I think if I know three persons, I should be able to say that I recognize those three persons. If I know five persons, what's taking from me the ability to recognize five persons?

**The Chair:** We need a very short answer to this.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Supposedly, we need a very short answer.

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** I think that's absolutely right. The vouching restriction of one voter, one voucher is just going to cause a really serious problem. So I'd urge the committee to look at that, at expanding that as a solution as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We'll move to round two, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Bagnell, you're up first.

We are going to stay with five minutes because of the three witnesses. But please indulge me a bit. We might go over time a bit, but I think that's acceptable.

Mr. Bagnell, please.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Some of you have been cut off in your responses because of our time, so I'm just going to use my time to let each of you say anything you haven't had a chance to say yet in response to the other inquiries.

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Let's start with Mr. Quail first this time and then move in the opposite direction.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** I think Ms. Bradford has a fair amount, so I'll be brief and give her an opportunity to say a little more.

With regard to the point that's just been made, softening some of the restrictions so you might still achieve some of the objectives you want would I think be a very worthwhile thing to look at. And the issue of the number of voters that someone can vouch for, I suggest, doesn't really make sense in terms of the objectives of the amendments, and it is a very serious obstacle. We could have the option, for example, in the downtown eastside of having—I think I earlier gave the example—someone who works in the local community centre who might know two or three dozen people quite well, who sees them every day. People there use centres like that a lot because they don't have other facilities; they don't have homes that have comfortable facilities. I can't think of any reason why that person wouldn't be able to vouch for three dozen voters, if that's the case. You would still achieve the objectives you're seeking, but it would at least assist significantly in making sure that people who are citizens get to vote on election day.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** I think you need a multi-solution here. One would be a statutory declaration as a primary piece of identification. Another would be providing the authority for election officials within a polling station to take an oath, and indeed take the oath without vouching. But if you're going to insist on vouching, you're going to have to expand the vouching system considerably, as Mr. Quail has referred to.

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** I just have one brief point. We've talked a lot about the downtown eastside and this centre of poverty. But this is of course not limited to that one particular area. As the statutory declaration program has become more well known, I've been contacted by a number of other ridings in Vancouver who have set up their own stations in areas of concern. So I don't want the committee to think that this is just limited to one particular area in Canada. You can take this problem and carry it over quite a number of areas throughout B.C. and in fact all of Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That was quite a short round.

It's unusual for me to do this, but I'm going to ask for clarification on one thing; that is, on this statutory declaration. I'm not a lawyer. My background is not law. But I did hear one of the witnesses—I'm not sure which one—suggest that in the statutory declaration sometimes we ask you to go through your pockets, and you might have a prescription or something like that. I'm confused that this would be a significant or a reliable source of information, given a previous statement by one of the witnesses that oftentimes items are stolen on a regular basis. It makes sense to me that whatever is in that person's pocket would decrease the significance of the reliability of that source of information, making the whole idea of a statutory declaration in question. Did I mishear any of the witnesses on that point?

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** I'll speak first to this and anyone else can jump in.

As a commissioner for taking statutory declarations, I am not required to be a detective, to be 100% sure that this person is who they say they are. However, I have to feel comfortable in taking the oath from that person. When I go through the statutory declaration, I need to have something that makes me feel comfortable that this person is who they say they are. Once I get to that state, then I explain to them the potential repercussions to them for failing to tell the truth to me. I ask them, are they a Canadian citizen, are they over 18 years of age, and is there any reason why they shouldn't be eligible to vote under the Elections Act? Just as if they were in court, swearing to tell the truth, we make them go through that process. So it's not something that people take lightly.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much for clarifying that. It's not usual that the chairman gets a chance to ask a question, so I certainly appreciate that.

Mr. Preston, five minutes, please.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** Oh, good, the chairman's time didn't come off mine.

You've mentioned that some people have no idea whatsoever and some have a partial idea. What percentages are we dealing with here?

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** I would say that probably a third of the individuals, approximately 100 to 125 people, in each of the last two elections have had no identification whatsoever. The remainder, a couple of hundred people, have or can come up with something; it wouldn't be enough to get them through the polling station on its own, but it is enough for us to be comfortable swearing the statutory declaration.

•(1250)

**Mr. Joe Preston:** It's a clue to identity, and with the statutory declaration, we figure we can get far enough.

I admire what you're doing and I understand what you're doing, and it certainly does allow people not to be disenfranchised, but I guess I'm asking you to see it from our side. Does the method you're asking us to adopt have a barrier to stop intentional fraud? I say it does not.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** I'd suggest it would be very difficult to totally eliminate the possibility of fraud in this context without having very draconian measures. I don't think that even the amendments in the legislation, necessarily.... If someone is determined to vote twice, fraudulently, they probably can find a way to do it. But I—

**Mr. Joe Preston:** But then the case of them doing it may stand out more.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** I'd suggest that the issue, given the concern you've got, is what is a sufficient impediment to minimize the amount of fraud that might take place? I think that is probably what the question is going to be. So how onerous do you have to make it in order to discourage fraud to the point where we feel comfortable? In a democratic society, in a free society, you allow people to misbehave to some extent.

I'd suggest this goes much further than would be required. For example, you might contemplate how many people are going to swear a declaration and risk criminal prosecution in order maybe to get away with casting a second ballot. Are we really talking about a substantial number of people? That's a significant change—

**Mr. Joe Preston:** Well, no, but then you need to have ability to have the statutory declaration sworn in front of a commissioner, or a group like yours, at every poll. Now we're adding another element of identification to the election system.

Is your suggestion that we go that far, that because people may be disenfranchised by not carrying their identification, we set this up at every polling station? I don't see that being plausible either.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** No, I think what we've suggested is that along with simply adding to the legislation and the list of acceptable forms of identification, one of them be a statutory declaration on the prescribed form. As I said earlier, no identification is perfect, but because of the criminal sanction that flows from making a false statement, it's actually a much more compelling guarantor than an awful lot of identification that people might otherwise have.

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** I would just add, if I could, that I understand your goal to prevent fraud, but you have to look at the enforcement angle as well, which Jim refers to, that it's very serious, for example, to lie on a statutory declaration or to commit fraud. And there needs to be—

**Mr. Joe Preston:** It's been very serious throughout the whole Elections Act if you do that.

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** If I may just finish, if there's a concern that the enforcement arm of the Chief Electoral Officer and the commissioner under the Elections Act are not doing their job, then I would suggest this committee should be looking at that as well. We've dealt with cases in which people are being prosecuted for eating their ballots as a sign of political protest, so there does seem to be some appetite for prosecution—no pun intended.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I'm just going to finish up Mr. Preston's time. He's been generous enough to give it to me.

I was just looking at the proposed amendments to the act. One of the things that is said, in proposed paragraph 143(2)(b), is that you can have “two pieces of identification establishing the elector's name and address that are authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer”. My understanding is that statutory declaration could actually be one of those pieces; there's nothing to prevent the Chief Electoral Officer from recognizing that.

If I were Chief Electoral Officer, I think I'd want to say that it has to be sworn out in a certain form, and I'd probably want to have that included as a schedule, or something like that. But if you see what I'm getting at, I think that perhaps the idea might actually be partially covered in the act right now.

I think, Mr. Quail, you suggested that.

Am I reading the act incorrectly when I say that?

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** Let me just answer this. My proposal, anyway, is that the act be amended so that there's a paragraph (c) that says that a statutory declaration in the prescribed form would be an adequate piece of ID in and of itself. I think a statutory declaration, as one of two pieces of ID, is not going to solve this problem at all.

•(1255)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** With respect to the prescribed form, very quickly, I think the sanction against a person swearing out the form is less of an impediment than the sanction against someone swearing out the form on behalf of voters. I think that's the real sanction that would prevent voter fraud.

The question I have is this. What kind of prescription could be put into the form that would ensure that as you or someone like Ms. Bradford, who is working on behalf of those who don't have other ways of establishing their identities, do this you can carry out your job while at the same time ensuring that other people can't come along and start doing the same sort of thing in a manner that is designed to allow people to vote multiple times in multiple polls, and that sort of thing? In other words, what would allow you to do your job, which I think is very good for the community, and not allow that process to start being abused?

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to ask for a very short answer on that one. We're well over, but I will allow a very short answer, please.

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** Tina might not quite understand the question.

If I understood it, though, in taking a statutory declaration, there are certain legal obligations that commissioners for taking oaths have, and I think she's described them to some extent. Maybe she'd like to describe them again. You have to make some efforts to identify the person, and I think that's part of the requirement that any commissioner for taking oaths has to undertake.

It's put in the context of dealing with people who don't have a driver's licence. I mean, if I take an affidavit, I must require some ID, and a driver's licence would do it. These are people who don't have that, so you have to adjust that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Again, I'm sorry.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** I have a brief suggestion, if I can.

**The Chair:** I will allow a brief suggestion.

**Mr. Jim Quail:** That would be an endorsement for the person taking the declaration to simply describe the inquiries they undertook.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

If the witnesses have anything further to add to that, we invite you to write it down and send it to the clerk.

Madame Picard, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Voting is a major responsibility. While you were making your opening statements, I was trying to see what the solutions might be. And the form that you have provided is excellent. I'm sure you've heard of the Maison du Père or Accueil Bonneau in Montreal, which are facilities used by the homeless. People who've been working in these places for years can identify them. What do you think of that idea?

On the statutory declaration, there could be one line where someone who works for one of these facilities could sign his or her name to prove that the person is who he says he is. We could also ask the Chief Electoral Officer to set up mobile polling stations in the main centres or facilities that are used by the homeless. Although those terms could be confusing, it seems to me that would be the best way of eliminating any possible doubt, or the possibility of fraud. The homeless would have a place they know and could go to in order to be identified and vote.

[*English*]

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** That's a very good idea, and we have informally adopted that already. What I have my lawyers do is keep a listing of each person they've sworn the statutory declaration for and how they were able to confirm that this person is who they say they are. So they would keep track of what ID they did see from the person, or they would write down who it was that vouched for this person. Then I collect them at the end of the election and I have those available in case someone makes a complaint to the Law Society or in case Elections Canada has questions.

So what you're suggesting is a more formalized process of what we're already doing.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Malo, do you want to add something? We still have time.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ):** Thank you.

You said that in the last two federal elections, you accompanied people without ID who had come to vote.

I'd like to know in what percentage of cases they asked for your help and to what extent you had to encourage people in the street to take part in the electoral process.

•(1300)

[*English*]

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** I would have to say it's about fifty-fifty. We set up tables in high pedestrian areas, put up signs, and sometimes say, "Hey guys, can we give you a hand with voting?" A lot of people are attracted to anything happening on the street, and they will ask us what we're doing. We explain to them that we're helping people with the voting process.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Monsieur Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Going back to what Madame Picard was talking about, they do the declaration sheet and vouch for the person and all that. You have somebody who knows him and vouches for him too, which I think is very interesting, because when he goes to vote they take it away from him and he cannot go to another place.

We want to raise those questions. I don't want it to come out later that we didn't get your reaction. One person asked what's stopping them from being vouched for by another lawyer someplace else, having two pieces of paper, and going to two different places?

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** I guess if someone were really committed to voting twice, they could come to one of our stations and then drive to another riding to try to find someone else to do it for them. To be quite honest, the majority of the people we're helping in the downtown eastside are too busy looking for their next meal and trying to find a place to sleep.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** The problem we have is not with the homeless; it's probably with other people who do it. We're going to punish the homeless by doing it. That's my worry.

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** Other people who have more resources won't have to rely on a statutory declaration. They're going to be able to create identification for themselves that will be acceptable in a poll. They'll have access to utility bills and things like that. The more resources a person has available to them, they're going to be able to commit fraud if they want to. To be quite honest, creating a second identification requirement isn't going to stop those few individuals.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Exactly. If we say they need two identification cards, nothing will stop them from taking them from somebody else and bringing them in. Under what they were proposing, or we were maybe proposing, they will have done it anyway.

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** Exactly. Unless you require everyone to have a driver's licence, which just isn't practical, I don't see how you can fix some of these problems.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** If you look at medicare, for example, in New Brunswick, we don't have our picture on the medicare card. How many people lose their licence at the age of 75 or 80? That's how many people we could eliminate with those. It was a good point about the passport because it's not controlled by the government.

**Ms. Tina Marie Bradford:** Precisely, and how many people don't get a driver's licence at all?

**Mr. Murray Mollard:** I just want to make one point on the suggestion that there be a space on the statutory declaration to have someone vouch for another. You could have that; I just wouldn't want it to be a prerequisite for that piece of identification being valid. If the lawyer makes some other reference, it's fine to include a space in the declaration or the form that allows the person who has taken the oath to provide the information they've gathered. That would suffice.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Monsieur Godin.

Witnesses, on behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for joining us today and for assisting us in our research. In particular, I want to thank you for your dedication to Canadians in your area and

making sure that Canadians all across the country are well served. That has not gone unnoticed.

Mr. Mollard, Mr. Quail, and Ms. Bradford, we very much appreciate your taking the time this morning. I don't like the word "dismiss", but you are in fact dismissed.

Committee members, I want to move very quickly. Very briefly, there are just a couple of issues, and we'll adjourn the meeting. We're still in public, but we're short on time. I remind members, there is no meeting this Thursday. We do have a number of witnesses coming on December 5. Some have not confirmed, but many have.

I was not clear at the last meeting, colleagues. The member from the New Democratic Party requested that representatives from the Canadian Federation of Students appear before the committee as well.

Is it the wish of the committee that we invite them to appear, most likely with the other groups on Tuesday, December 5? Is it the wish of this committee?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We will make that invitation.

Mr. Reid, please.

● (1305)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Would it be with other witnesses?

**The Chair:** Of course.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I appreciate that.

We will be talking about the universities, and that will give us witnesses, which is why I brought the question; that was the reason for it. I didn't see anybody raising the question, and I thought we should hear about it.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I agree with that, and I appreciate that information. We will make that invitation to them.

May I plant the seed right now that I would like the cooperation, as we've always had with this committee, for the possibility of extending the meetings to 2 o'clock. That would give us three hours for each meeting next week to deal properly with witnesses as well as move forward on this bill. I just want to plant that seed.

It's my thought as well that potentially there will be an extra meeting next week. Please, if you have any significant disagreements, obviously I want your opinion and your cooperation. You may speak to me now or afterwards.

I'm thinking we're going to extend Tuesday's meeting and discuss the rest of it on Tuesday.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Can you feed us?

**The Chair:** I will be more than happy to feed the committee. If that's all it's going to take, Monsieur Proulx, I will feed you well.

At this point in time, we will have a meeting on Tuesday. We will extend that meeting, and we will bring in something to eat. I appreciate that from the bottom of my heart. This is important business. If we need to extend the other meetings, we'll talk about that on Tuesday.

Is there any further business?

*Merci beaucoup.*

The meeting is adjourned.

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