



House of Commons  
CANADA

# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

---

PROC • NUMBER 060 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

---

EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, June 19, 2007**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Gary Goodyear**

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

**<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC)):** Colleagues, let's begin our meeting today.

First of all, I want to thank everyone for coming.

I particularly want to thank the members of the committee, if I don't have the opportunity later today, for the hard work they've done over the past year. I had the honour this morning of tabling our 56th report. I certainly suspect that this committee is setting an example for other committees, but we won't go too much into that. We might not be, but anyway...

Today, colleagues, we have a couple of pieces of business to deal with, but before we get started, I would like to mention to members that we are in public again today.

Our first order of business this morning is pursuant to the order of reference of Friday, June 1, 2007, Bill C-55, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, expanded voting opportunities, and to make a consequential amendment to the Referendum Act.

We have the honour and privilege again, colleagues, to have the government House leader, the Honourable Peter Van Loan, who is also the Minister for Democratic Reform.

Minister Van Loan, would you kindly introduce your team, and then I will give you the floor to proceed?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would start by asking my officials here, David Anderson and Marc Chénier, to tell you a little bit about themselves and why they came along.

**Mr. David Anderson (Senior Policy Advisor, Legislation and House Planning, Privy Council Office):** My name is David Anderson. I'm a senior policy advisor with the democratic reform secretariat, at legislation and House planning, in the Privy Council Office.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Chénier (Counsel, Legislation and House Planning, Privy Council Office):** My name is Marc Chénier, and I am legal counsel for the Democratic Reform group at the Privy Council Office.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you all for joining us this morning.

Colleagues, the minister has an opening statement and some comments to make regarding the bill, and then we will proceed with the usual round of questioning.

I understand the minister is here for one hour, if we need that kind of time.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Sure, or even longer, if you want.

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

Minister, please.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you. I am pleased to appear before you to discuss Bill C-55, also known as the expanded voting opportunities bill. The purpose of the expanded voting opportunities bill is to strengthen our democracy by making it easier for people to vote.

As I stated when I introduced the bill, the right to vote is our most precious and fundamental right, and citizen participation in the political process through the exercise of that right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy. By making the decision to vote, Canadians do take ownership in their country.

As I mentioned in my previous appearance before this committee, the expanded voting opportunities bill is one part of our plan to strengthen accountability through democratic reform. The plan has three broad themes. First, we are eliminating the influence of big money in the political process by regulating the financing of political parties. Second, we've introduced legislation to modernize the Senate to make it more democratic, more accountable, and more effective. Third, and finally, we're taking steps to strengthen our electoral system, which includes the expanded voting opportunities bill that we're discussing today.

First I want to discuss the trend of declining voter participation.

• (1110)

[Translation]

As we are all aware, there has been a disturbing downward trend in voter participation in general elections. In 1958, 79.4% of Canadians voted in that year's General Election. However, that fell to 69.6% of eligible voters by 1993, and by 2004, only 60.5% of eligible voters cast a ballot.

More troubling than the overall participation rate is the fact that the voter participation rate of young people in general elections has been even lower. A 2002 study by Elections Canada found that only 25% of eligible 18 to 24-year-olds voted in the 2000 General Election.

This is a trend that we cannot allow to continue. The health of our democratic institutions depends on how successful we are at restoring the faith of our youth in the democratic process.

[English]

In terms of facilitating voter participation, I believe it's incumbent on elected representatives to do all they can to encourage Canadians across the country, both young and old, to get involved in the political process to ensure accountable, responsible government. We need to make sure that everyone who wants to vote is able to do so. This is essential to maintaining a healthy, vibrant democracy.

Unfortunately, despite the voting opportunities that currently exist, there are still significant numbers of eligible voters who continue to cite work and family responsibilities as their primary reasons for not voting.

In a 2003 survey conducted on behalf of Elections Canada, the authors found that nearly 40% of non-voters, during the 2000 federal election, indicated that they did not vote because of reasons that could be addressed through advance poll opportunities. Examples included being too busy with work, school, or family activities, transportation issues, or being away from home on voting day.

More importantly, 43% of respondents in the 18- to 24-year-old category stated that factors such as work, family, and school responsibilities, and similar reasons, had prevented them from voting. Similar numbers turned up in a 2001 voter participation study by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada.

We've all heard stories about people who woke up on election day with every intention of voting but because of a variety of reasons—maybe they had to work late, take their kids to hockey, or run errands—they didn't have time to vote. The fact is that the busy lives of Canadians is a serious factor that we must consider when looking for reasons behind declining voter participation.

There is considerable evidence that the existence of advance polling days has a positive impact on voter turnout. The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing made a number of pertinent conclusions. On page 123, it says:

In the specific case of advance voting, it might also be noted that for a variety of reasons, many Canadians do find themselves away from home at any given point in time, including the day on which the election is held. The increase in the incidence of travel, for business and leisure, likely means many would not be able to exercise their franchise without advance voting opportunities.

On page 130, it says:

Generally speaking, the evidence from the four countries and, indeed, Canada itself, suggests that advance voting has become an important mainstay in the repertoire of voting opportunities. There are suggestions that without it, turnout levels would be lower, and extending the point in the other direction, with more opportunities for advance voting, turnout levels might be higher.

In a study commissioned by Elections Canada in 2003 to analyze the impact of expanded voting opportunities on voter turnout, the

empirical analysis found that turnout is some ten points higher in countries where it is possible to vote in advance.

[Translation]

As well, since 1993, the use of advanced polls by voters has nearly doubled in the Canadian elections. In 1994, 5.4% of voters cast a ballot at an advanced poll. This number has risen steadily in each election since, and 10.5% of voters cast their ballots at an advanced poll during the January 2006 General Election.

I believe that this trend will continue and that the public would respond very positively to the increased convenience and opportunity to vote presented by additional advanced polling days.

There is some evidence that countries which offer weekend voting have higher rates of voter participation. A 2002 study by Mark Franklin of the University of Houston found a significant positive effect of Sunday voting. He found that countries with Sunday voting have a voter turnout rate that is about six to seven percentage points higher than countries without Sunday voting.

Of note, the recent French presidential election, where voting is on Sunday, had a voter turnout of 82%. Moreover, advanced polling on Sunday is already available in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec. And, in his April 2004 report, the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec recommended holding elections on a Sunday for a number of reasons, including that it would be easier for workers who normally work Monday to Friday to get out and vote.

●(1115)

After taking into consideration the benefits of Sunday voting on voter turnout, and the increased use of advanced polls in Canadian elections, on May 9, 2007, Canada's New Government, introduced the Expanded Voting Opportunities Bill.

[English]

With respect to the details, the bill proposes to amend the Canada Elections Act to provide Canadians with two additional advance polling days on the two Sundays before election day.

Canadians currently have access to three advance polling days, on the Friday, Saturday, and Monday of the second last weekend before election day. People may vote between 12 noon and 8 p.m., but some people have to travel long distances because maybe only half a dozen polling stations are open in their constituency. The amendments in the expanded voting opportunities bill would add an advance polling day on the second last Sunday and the last Sunday before election day. This means there would be a block of four consecutive days of advance polling on the second last weekend before election day. However, the advance poll on the Sunday before election day would be a special one. All the polling stations used on election day will be opened, thereby maximizing voter opportunities for Canadians at a time when media attention and interest in the election should be at its height.

The hours for all advance polling days would continue to be between noon and 8 p.m., as opposed to the 12-hour periods of staggered voting hours that are available on election day.

In conclusion, our expanded voting opportunities bill will mean that all Canadians will have an opportunity to vote at an advance poll in their own neighbourhood on a Sunday, which for many is a day without work or school commitments. This will make it easier for Canadians to vote.

[Translation]

And with this increased convenience, we hope that families will bring their children with them when they go to vote—helping them appreciate from an early age the civic duty and opportunity to cast a vote, and to understand what it means to be a citizen in a free and democratic country. These are lessons that, if well taught, last a lifetime, build stronger communities and make a brighter future for Canada. And we know that engaging more Canadians in the electoral process through increasing voter turnout is good for our democracy and good for our country.

Thank you.

I would now be happy to take any questions that committee members may have.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Colleagues, I think we've handed out the notes from the minister's opening comments. I hope everybody has a copy of that.

We will begin our usual round of questions. We'll start with seven-minute rounds and then move to five-minute rounds in the usual fashion.

We'll start with Madame Robillard, please.

[Translation]

**Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Chairman, if I do not use my entire seven minutes, I will share my time with my colleague Mauril Bélanger.

Thank you for your comments on Bill C-55, Minister. As politicians representing all political parties, we can only be supportive of this bill's purpose, which in essence is to increase citizens' participation in voting, a democratic process. Obviously, we want voter participation to increase.

I held a position with the provincial government before becoming a federal member of Parliament, and when I first came to Ottawa I remember how impressed I was by the variety of means available to Canadians so that they can vote. In fact, not only can they vote early by mail, but also do that at any time. As soon as the process is initiated, they can go and see the Chief Electoral Officer. I discovered that a wide variety of opportunities to vote was available to Canadians who really wanted to vote. The system has a flexibility that our provincial systems generally do not have. I think that is a very good thing.

You cited a number of studies carried out by a variety of people. But I wonder if you, minister, the Privy Council or the government itself have carried out studies to determine whether increasing the number of early polling days available, as you suggested, would really have an impact on voter participation. In addition, I would like to know whom you consulted before putting forward this proposal.

●(1120)

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** There are a number of studies that deal with that in a couple of different areas, and you're right, there are a lot of ways that people can vote. The 2003 study of the 2000 election by Larry LeDuc and Jon Pammett threw a lot of these things into a category they call "personal administrative". One of the challenges with many of the additional opportunities you talk about—to vote by mail, to go to the returning office, that kind of stuff—is that there's a very high personal cost to voting in that fashion. So somebody has to be quite interested in doing that. Increasing numbers, they are. But overall, the turnout continues to decline.

So when you look at the two significant changes here, perhaps the most significant is the creation of voting opportunities on a Sunday, and the second is that with the Sunday immediately before election day, it's an area that's in very close proximity to where you live—essentially the same location as where you would vote on the regular election day—and that really reduces those personal transaction costs that make it difficult for people to vote, which become a burden.

About the Sunday voting, which is absent right now, I talked about studies where they think, based on evidence elsewhere, that would increase voter participation by 10%. It's interesting to note that just in general, in terms of Sunday voting, we're actually the exception in not having it, and adding it for advance polls won't change the fact that we're still the exception. But of the OECD countries, I think there are maybe half a dozen that do their voting on days other than Sunday, and we fall into that category. There is a consistent trend through a lot of the research and a lot of the studies that says Sunday voting would make a big difference and would have a positive result.

[Translation]

**Hon. Lucienne Robillard:** If I understand correctly, neither you nor the government have carried out studies. You are relying on studies conducted by others.

Second, I asked you whether you had consulted anyone in connection with this bill, and if so, whom. You did not answer that question.

My third question is this: Are you able to tell us the financial impacts this bill will have, among other things on costs relating to employees assigned to polls.

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I'll go with the last one first, because we did actually calculate the costs. There would be a one-time cost of \$6.8 million for information technology, and then of course for every election, in terms of recurring costs for staffing of the additional polling stations, \$30.4 million. So that's the cost.

In terms of consultation, the bulk of it has been obviously of the academic research. The research, I can tell you, has been done by very impressive people. I talked about Pammett and LeDuc's study. Louis Lavoie has done a study that we looked at. André Blais, Louis Massicotte, Agnieszka Dobrzynska.... I think perhaps the most interesting one is the 2001 study that was done by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, which is a very stimulating piece, and I encourage you to go to it anyhow, as people who are obviously interested and involved in politics.

But you look at folks like André Blais; Marc Chénier, a very impressive author and a contributor; John Courtney; Donna Dasko; Agnieszka Dobrzynska; Fred Fletcher from York University, and I think most people know him; Mark Franklin; Jonathan Malloy from over here at Carleton; Louis Massicotte, Université de Montréal; Alain Pelletier, who came from Elections Canada; Jon Pammett; and Lisa Young, out of Calgary, who has done a fair bit of research on voter turnout, and she comes up with all kinds of different conclusions all the time.

There's an abundance of research. I'd go beyond that to say there's a lot of research that's outside of the political realm, and I'll maybe save that speech for answering another question.

But I think one of the mistakes that's often made in looking at this stuff is to limit ourselves only to the political horizon, because we're really looking at an overall decline of community involvement over the past half-century or more in every kind of community organization that exists. I shouldn't say it so sweepingly—"every kind of community organization"—but generally speaking, community involvement has been in decline for a bunch of reasons.

•(1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. The time is up on that round.

Mr. Hill, you have seven minutes, please.

**Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Well, I'm not sure whether I'll use the entire time.

Partly in response to Madame Robillard's questions in connection with Bill C-55, I want to be on the record as representing rural Canada on this particular issue.

I have the good fortune of representing roughly a quarter of the land mass of British Columbia, more than 250,000 square kilometres, almost evenly divided by the Rocky Mountains. That riding certainly would benefit hugely, I believe, from this type of legislation. The rural ridings, in particular....

Madame Robillard made the quite correct statement that any elector can exercise the option of attending the returning office in the riding at any time during the writ period to cast a ballot. Indeed, I think statistics would show that a number of Canadians do exercise that option. But in a rural riding like mine, to do that would still necessitate the vast majority of constituents travelling hundreds of kilometres. And as the minister stated, not only is it inconvenient, it's obviously costly. It's also, I would argue, somewhat dangerous in winter driving conditions, should we happen to have a winter election again, when the roads can be particularly treacherous.

So having the advance polls, not only as we normally operate them in the communities, but even on the Sunday before, and having

all the polls open to give them more opportunity I think would be hugely advantageous to my constituents up in Prince George—Peace River, and, I would argue, to most rural ridings.

I just wanted to be on the record with that.

As well, Mr. Chair, on this whole issue of consulting anyone, I think the minister has addressed that. But I want to say that, again, I've had the privilege and honour of representing my constituency for close to 14 years now. Many times my constituents have suggested to me that if they had greater opportunity, they would certainly take advantage of it. In ridings like mine, where the economy is doing extremely well.... It's an oil and gas economy. It's a big part of the economy of Prince George—Peace River, as is forestry. There is a lot of blue-collar work, with people out in the bush working. The more opportunities they have when they might not be on shift work or might not be out in the bush where they can't readily get to a poll.... This type of legislation would give them greater opportunity to do that.

I wanted to be on the record, I guess, both in that sense and with the feedback I've gotten from my constituents over the years, especially in relation to the oil and gas workers, the forestry workers, and the miners. They are out in the bush—that's what we call it up north—working, perhaps, on election day, and they don't have the same opportunities as other Canadians to just stop by the polling station.

•(1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Just as a comment, I'll take the opportunity to add—because I was running out of time—to my response to Madame Robillard that in terms of consultation, there was consultation with Elections Canada. That's where the costing numbers you saw came from. That's where a lot of the discussions about the technical things we have to do to make this happen came from. So that consultation did occur as well.

**The Chair:** There is time left, so if you'd like to share with Mr. Lukiwski, I'll recognize Mr. Lukiwski. There are four minutes left.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC):** To underscore some of Mr. Hill's comments, Saskatchewan, as you mentioned in your presentation, already has advance polling on Sunday.

I also represent a riding of which about 30% is rural and 70% is urban. The particular point in this legislation that's going to be very popular in our riding is the Sunday immediately prior to election day. Because of the vast distances that have to be covered in most rural ridings to get to an advance poll, many of my constituents have told me that they vote only on Sunday, even at an advance poll, just because it's far more convenient. And when I've had the opportunity to mention to them that we are considering bringing in legislation that would allow them to vote in their own community, at their regular polling station, on the Sunday prior to the election, I've heard nothing but tremendous feedback on that. Particularly in rural ridings, depending on the time of year, if it's a farming community and people are out in the fields and the like, Sunday is the one day they always schedule time to relax a little bit. They've got church, and that makes it a family day. Many of my constituents have told me that in previous years on the Sunday they have gone to church and then, as a family—those who are 18 and above—they have travelled directly from there to the advance poll to cast their ballots so that they didn't have to worry about it on the Monday.

If we can get a Sunday immediately prior to election day with a poll that is in their home community, so they don't even have to travel—in my case, I think the longest distance one of my constituents had to travel was about 130 kilometres, which is a fair haul there and back—it's going to be very popular and very well received.

You can make a comment if you wish, Minister, but it's been proven in Saskatchewan that Sundays are popular. It is not an inconvenience. It doesn't disturb the day that many people use as a church day, and I think it's just going to be a very well-received piece of legislation.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I have just a very brief response on the faith issue, which is an issue of genuine concern for some people. There are a couple of points on that. One, there would be the regular advance polling hours to vote on this day; it's merely another option that should be no more offensive to a person of a Sunday-observant faith than the current arrangement right now would be to someone who's of a Friday- or a Saturday-observant faith, in my view.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Guimond, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to this committee, Minister.

I don't know whether you have ever played baseball, but I'll warn you right now: I'll be throwing you a curve ball on the inside of the plate.

On page 13 of the English version of your presentation, you state:

After taking into consideration the benefits of Sunday voting on voter turnout, and the increased use of advanced polls...

With this bill, you are betting—please tell me whether I understand this correctly—that voter turnout will increase if two Sundays are added. You have not chosen Sunday arbitrarily. You believe that voter turnout is better on Sundays. Is that correct?

● (1135)

[*English*]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Certainly our assumption, based on the evidence from other countries and from the research, is that having it on Sunday does increase turnout, as some studies say, by 10%. Anecdotal, if you connect the complaint people have, the general 35% to 40% of those who didn't vote who say the reason they didn't vote was that they were too busy with work or school or other types of commitments—those commitments, for many, do not exist on a Sunday, so that increases that possibility. And that is the principal objective here, to encourage voter participation, as the name of the bill implies.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** If my memory serves me, when the Conservative government introduced the bill on fixed election dates, why did you not accept the suggestion I made to have the election held on a Sunday? In fact, they will take place on Monday, October 19, 2009. At the time, I said that municipal elections in Quebec were held on Sunday. I said that Quebec's provincial elections were held on Sunday. I said that Quebec's school board elections were held on Sunday.

If Sunday is the day on which voter turnout is highest... I'll repeat Mr. Hill's comments on people working in the bush Monday to Friday, as well as Mr. Lukiwski's comments about religious people for whom Sunday would be an excellent day to vote: you go to mass, and then you go vote. So if that's the right day, why did you not accept the proposal I made at the time to have the fixed-date elections held on Sunday?

[*English*]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** That obviously is an option. I wasn't the minister at the time so I can't comment on the calculus that occurred at that time. However, I think in our case it's certainly a lot easier to add additional advance polling days and to establish them on a Sunday rather than to have the full voting day on a Sunday. You are correct in that 22 out of 29 OECD countries have their major voting day on a day of rest. With those that do not, you'll find there is something of a common thread there: Canada, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The United States and the United Kingdom, which have obviously a similar political system to Canada, fit into that. Australia, though, also with a British parliamentary tradition, goes with day-of-rest voting.

There are different options there. I think what you can take comfort in is the fact that in addition to simply adding Sunday as the advance polling day, the Sunday immediately before election day does create significant additional opportunities with the additional polling stations.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** But you are here now. You are a government House leader and minister responsible for democratic reform. Can you undertake before this committee that, when the new session begins in the fall, you will amend the fixed-date elections bill and change next election's date to Sunday, October 18, 2009? You are the person now in a position to do that.

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** My intention would be to continue with the bill as we have it, creating the additional opportunities it does on a Sunday and to maintain the traditional federal election voting day on a Monday.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I will once again make a suggestion that would once again increase the voter turnout in general, but thereby also increase advanced polling rates. Can you undertake to give Elections Canada the budget it needs to increase the number of advanced polling stations? In the city, for example for Ms. Robillard in the riding of Westmount-Ville-Marie, the polling station is on a street corner. In my riding—and Mr. Hill could well have said the same—a rural area, there are not enough advanced polling stations. Voters have to travel 70 km to cast a ballot early. So obviously, he'll go on the official voting day because he can cast a ballot on his street corner, but on that day if there's some impediment, like those the minister mentioned, like driving his kids to hockey, having some problem during the day, or having an argument with his boss, he'll forget to vote. I would therefore like to make a suggestion. Give Elections Canada the funding it needs to set up more advanced polling stations and reduce the distance people have to travel to vote. After all, Canada is not just Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Montreal. There are a great many rural ridings that are large, where people have to travel long distances to vote.

I'm in great shape today.

• (1140)

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** A twofold response. First, I think most of us know that within the parameters that currently exist, most returning officers are, in their ridings, expanding the number of advance poll opportunities for the next election. Bill C-31 will give them further ambit to do that.

Now, here, of course, in our proposal under Bill C-55, the Sunday before election day, every polling station that would be open on election day will also be open on an advance polling day, which is the Sunday. So you will have significantly expanded opportunities exactly in the direction you're seeking.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Dewar, please. You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Thank you.

I want to thank our panel and of course the minister for being here today.

I have just a quick question to start things off. Where did this bill come from? Was this your idea, or was it a bill that came forward somewhere else?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Well, I introduced it. There was obviously work that was done among some of the folks in the democratic reform secretariat.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** So it came from them or from you?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I think it would be more on the political side that the initiative occurred.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I ask you that because there are a number of bills that came forward. In fact, we had, and I recall well, the democratic reform week, and this was part of it. I believe it was on the Wednesday of that particular week that this one was announced.

I'm just trying to get a picture of where the government is going in terms of democratic reform. I say that because there are a number of pieces out there on democratic reform. I certainly am trying to figure out what this government's vision is, because it seems to me, and I might be wrong on this—I'm sure you'll suggest that I am—that we're kind of just throwing things out there, and Bill C-56 is an example of that, without really understanding where we're going.

I say that. We're in committee. We're just trying to probe here. We don't have an overall picture. I know the philosophy of the government is trying to get things done, and we'll do a little piece at a time. So fixed-date elections we supported; the loophole funding we supported. Those were initiatives we had claimed as a party. But when you look at this bill, at Bill C-56, and at the Senate bills, which seem to be contradicting each other, the fixed terms and then electing senators, and then not acknowledging that we have to go back to the Quebec Conference of 1865 and take a look at what the debate was, even with true Grits, not the kind like those here but the reformers of the time—Brown, etc.—there was a very definite idea, historically speaking, of the role of the Senate. I'm really concerned that we're on a collision course, not consciously, not intentionally, of course, where we're going to end up with a real mess by way of not having an understanding or vision.

I say that because this bill—and you've somewhat confirmed it for me—was brought up because we needed to be doing something on democratic reform, because there were some concerns about getting some of these bills through.

The bill in the Senate obviously isn't going well. The bill extending the distribution of seats after a census has obviously been pulled—and I can ask you a question about that after.

So we're trying to get these little pieces done to be seen to be doing things. I can say that.

So I'm pleading with you to do more than tell us about studies. I know some of these studies. I know some of these people. They weren't addressing this as being a direct expansion of voter opportunities, as you put it.

When you took social science I'm sure you dealt with statistics. This isn't a dependent variable here that would automatically provide....

Well, this will be my question to you. Do you believe that this expansion of voter opportunity will directly result in higher voter turnout?

•(1145)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** First, I'll go to the big theme. The big theme is a pretty simple one, and it runs across our Senate reform, our election finance reform, and bills like this, and that is strengthening democracy. We want to see our democracy strengthened. Reversing voter turnout declines is part of that.

I believe it will increase voter turnout. If you ask me, will it reverse the decline in voter turnout, my answer would be a little bit different, in the sense that while there will be an initial bump, this goes again to work like my personal favourite, which is Putnam's work on declining community involvement, which shows that there has been in the post-war era, particularly since about 1950, a decline in community involvement of every type. That includes membership in political parties, participation in political parties, voting, and attending political events, as one of those groups, but it also includes involvement in civic organizations, running hockey leagues, and so on. It has been a consistent trend.

But the other thing Putnam identifies, and you can find it in some of this other work, is that this decline has not been one where somebody who used to be involved isn't anymore; it's a decline in successive age cohorts. If you were voting, if you were involved in Kinsmen when you were in your twenties and you're now in your sixties, you're probably still voting and you're probably still involved.

You can see that here in the Pammett and LeDuc study of 2003, where they look at voting and not voting in 2000 by age cohort.

Of those who were over 68—

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I don't mean to interrupt. I have a certain amount of time.

I'm hearing from you that you're not going to put your reputation on the line to say that this bill will directly lead to higher rates of voter participation. It's maybe one of the things—

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I believe it will result in higher voter participation, but after it goes back up, we have this broader problem of generational cohorts going through.

I'll just give you three cohorts as an example. If you were 68 or over, there was 83% participation rate. If you were 38 to 47, that dropped to 66%. If you were 18 to 20, it was 22%. I can go through each cohort; it's successively lower. It's the same thing Putnam's work finds for every kind of community involvement, and he puts it down—

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** But when was his study?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Putnam's work or this one?

This one is 2003. Putnam's is not primary work. It brings together a multitude of other works and synthesizes and analyzes that information.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** When was it?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** About 10 years ago.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Yes, I know, and that's why I'm concerned. I'll get to another document later, where your reference is.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** What we find from that, and I think it's the most significant part of it, is that he puts it down to the atomizing

nature of television. That's why the cohorts after 1950 and subsequently are more and more involved. In 1950, if you wanted a sporting event, you'd go out and watch a baseball game at the local ballpark. Now you turn on the TV. If you wanted what was going on politically, you'd go out to a local meeting, you'd get to know your neighbours, you'd get more involved.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I know, sir. That's insightful prose. You're talking about a study from 10 years ago. It wasn't directly connected to voter participation or an extra day of voting. You're talking about participation in civic society. With respect, this is a great discussion we can have in a salon sometime, but I'm talking about a direct connection between this bill in front of us and what we're hearing the government say it will lead to.

I'll tell you something. I'm looking at a document that I'd like to get back to in a minute—maybe in my second round—that you have right now out there in our communities. It's on consultation, with the Frontier Institute. It talks about this, about volunteer and civic organizations, and it's actually—I'm reading verbatim what you said in your comments:

Paralleling a decline in trust and newspaper reading is a decline in participation in a wide array of voluntary and civic groups.

Now, this is supposedly your consultation on democratic reform. This is what you're putting forward in terms of this bill. I guess my question to you is—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Dewar, I let you go way over there because I thought you were going to wrap it up.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I'll get to it on the second round.

**The Chair:** We'll give you that opportunity on the second round.

Colleagues, we're into our second round now, five-minute questions.

Monsieur Bélanger, you are up for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, I will go back to one of the aspects my colleague Ms. Robillard mentioned. I'm talking about the studies and research on which this bill is based. If she understood correctly—and I understood the same thing—the government and the Secretariat have done no specific research to prepare this bill.

[*English*]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** We're relying on a couple of studies. One of them was—

• (1150)

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** No. I mean was a study carried out by the Secretariat? I understand there was a number of... No?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** They were able to rely on—The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada—I don't know if you'd call that the Government of Canada or not.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** So the answer is no.

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I tend to rely on them more than on having some of these very smart guys in an office doing a study. They have more information and access.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you, minister. Is there an impact study by the government or by Elections Canada on the results of allowing people in urban, rural or mixed ridings to vote at the returning officer's office anywhere? That is a relatively recent possibility. Could we have some statistics on the impact of this measure?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** There have been increasing participation rates at all of the advance polling options. That includes the returning office one over time.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Are there statistics on this new possibility, specifically?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I don't have the numbers in front of me, but it's gone from about 4% to about 10% participation overall at advance polls, but that also includes those elements you've been talking about. Those additional opportunities have resulted in increased participation by people in those options. At the same time, we've had this overall declining trend line, but most of the decline is at the day of voting.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chairman, it might be useful for the committee to have Elections Canada talk about the impact of the measure whereby voters can vote at any time, even before candidates are nominated, at the returning officer's office in their ridings. It would be significant to compare the impact of that measure in urban, rural and mixed ridings.

As for studies, there are none. I understand.

As part of the consultations—

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I could actually add to that, now that I have the numbers in front of me. On overall advance poll voting, it's gone from 5.4% in 1997 up to 10.5% in 2006. Special ballots, which is what you're generally referring to—which can also be by mail, but usually when you go to vote at the returning office you're going

through that special ballot process—were 1% in 1997, 1.5% in 2000, 1.8% in 2004, and 3% in 2006.

There you see that in the space of four elections it tripled; it's still a small percentage overall, but it has tripled as an option.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** We will check if it has really—

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** In fairness, you were already at 2% in the election before that, so it doubled.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** It would be useful to determine whether that measure has encouraged better voter turnout. I think it has. In addition to achieving what Bill C-55 intends, the measure might be made more efficient by opening more than one location per riding during the run up to the election. It's up to the government to consider doing that.

As part of your consultations with Elections Canada, was there any consideration of the impact this measure might have on the demand for volunteers?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I assume you mean for the people to staff the polling stations. That's something that—

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** No, I'm talking about the call for volunteers by political parties.

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** You mean for the political parties.

I don't think Elections Canada will consider it their place to comment on that. I think they would leave it to the political parties to comment on it.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Would it have been useful to—

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I don't know if they did, but I'd be very surprised if they would.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chairman, it might also be useful to speak to the political parties, which have to recruit volunteers for election day and advanced polling, to see what their views are. This is another subject in which committee members might be interested.

If this bill is passed, are you planning to apply it to bi-elections as well?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** That's a very good question. Would the exact same routine apply in byelections? I'm told it's structured so that it does that.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Bélanger, your time is up. We can give you more time in the next round.

I do appreciate your comments, and we're keeping track of the suggestions you made so that we can follow up on them. As well, I'm starting to sense the types of witnesses we're going to need to call, and that's a great purpose for this meeting—to get our list of witnesses initiated.

We're still in the second round. These are five-minute rounds.

Mr. Reid, you're next, and then Mr. Dewar.

• (1155)

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

I wanted to start with a note of frustration at some of the requests that have come down. Why aren't there government studies on this subject? A lot of the material here relates to how this has performed in foreign countries, and you obviously can't have a Canadian government study of that.

I used to be the critic for democratic issues for the Canadian Alliance, and I was asked repeatedly why voter turnout was lower in Canada than elsewhere. The simplest explanation was that in European countries, which we're usually compared to, they vote on weekends, when people have free time. Having gone through three elections now, I must say that I see over and over again lots of anecdotal examples of places where that's an issue.

The comment I wanted to make is with regard to advance polls. The rural versus urban issue is based on a bit of experience I've had myself, having represented at one point a riding that was half urban and half rural, the city of Kanata and the large rural area. Subsequently, it was been redistributed, so it's all rural now.

One of the things I've been aware of is the degree of difference between the number of people using advance polls in my constituency and in the adjoining constituencies, which fall within the boundaries of Ottawa and are urban. What you notice is a very significant difference because of the fact—this is what I've attributed it to—that advance polls, which are not as widely distributed as regular polls, are easier to get to in an urban setting than they are in a rural setting. I think that goes a long way toward explaining why you see higher turnouts at advance polls, in particular in the two ridings to my immediate east. So I think having advance polls at all locations on the day before voting is likely to have a particularly significant impact in rural areas, and as a rural MP I appreciate that.

Just another thought, though, pursuing Mr. Bélanger's observation about voting at the RO's office ahead of time. There's already a provision in the law that permits more than one RO's office to be set up. We took advantage of that in my constituency. We've got a constituency where, essentially, in population, it's like a dumbbell: very few people live in the middle and there are two population centres at each end, about two hours—

**An hon. member:** We're not describing the member, are we?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you for pointing out that that was not a reflection of me personally.

It was two hours' travel time from one end of the riding to the RO's office, which was located 10 minutes from the riding boundary at the other end of the riding. So we requested and the RO complied and set up a second office.

It seems to me that some pressure locally—it certainly worked in our case—can produce a second RO's office. Something of that nature can already be done under current laws. I don't know whether legislative change is required to do that—probably just more active participation by the MPs to identify this and bring it to the attention of their ROs.

It was more in the way of commentary than questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** There are two minutes left in that round, if any of your colleagues want to absorb the two minutes.

Mr. Preston.

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** I'll take a good one.

Mr. Minister, I know you've got a lot of studies in front of you, and I will try to throw in some anecdotes from a straight business point of view of what's happened to Sundays over the last decade or couple of decades.

From a business point of view, Sunday used to be the seventh day of volume, the slowest day of the week, if you will, in most of the restaurant business.

**An hon. member:** Not Boston Pizza.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** I'll tell you where it's gone today. It's now, in most cases, the second or third busiest—from the seventh to the second or third busiest.

This simply shows us that people are now taking your Sundays as a much more common day, whether it's work—and obviously if it's a commercial enterprise they are working—or just a normal day, whether it's shopping or banking or whatever else they can possibly do. So I commend you for putting Sunday back in there, because it didn't make sense that it was left out of the advance poll chain on the Friday, Saturday, Monday. Using that Sunday before and making it more of a community thing I think works far better.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I might add that those of us who have been involved in campaigns—and I've been involved in many, and everybody around the table will relate to this. I always found that Friday, Saturday, Monday thing so awkward to explain to voters. By taking one day out of that chain of four, people tuned out and didn't know what days the advance polls were. By making it four consecutive days, it's easier for the brain to accept.

A large chunk of people say they missed, they didn't know it was voting day, and so on. A significant chunk of people cite that as a reason. So I certainly think it'll make it a lot easier for candidates to communicate when advance polls are and for voters to understand.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

There's not enough time left. I think we'll move to our next questioner.

Mr. Dewar, five minutes, please.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Thank you again, Minister.

Just to pick up where I left off, I'm looking at the documentation from the consultation with the Frontier Institute. Is that consultation done?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I believe the bulk of the work is done. The consultations with the 12 consultation groups across the country have been done. I haven't seen any results from them yet. There was a public opinion component, and I do not know if that is fully completed yet. Their mandate is to finish it and have it deposited with the government by the end of this month.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** This month. That is my understanding.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** That is the expectation. I have not had an update if they're on schedule for that or not, but time is rapidly running out.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Yes.

You contracted these folks to do the work, so maybe there could be a phone call to find out how it's going.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** These folks might know.

**Mr. David Anderson:** They're still working on the survey aspect of it.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Okay.

I think it would be helpful for this committee, because it was fairly extensive. Obviously, it will be tabled.

It's to be tabled in Parliament. Is that the idea?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I think it's to be filed with the Library of Parliament.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** We'll have access to it. It will be helpful for the committee to see the results, because in it there are some of the issues you've referenced on volunteer and civic organizations.

I have to say that I'm not convinced yet on this issue. As I mentioned in my comments and questions—I'm from Missouri, if you will, on this—show me some evidence, notwithstanding that we've mentioned we can look to other countries. In terms of the countries you've mentioned, I could easily put forward, and I will, the study that was done in Canada by the Law Commission on democratic reform. The most extensive overview on democratic reform in this country would suggest that it's not an extra day of voting that will increase voter participation. Making sure every vote counts is what Canadians want. They would be looking at some form of proportionality.

In fact, I could argue in terms of the list of countries—and you mention the OECD—that maybe it's because they have a fairer voting system and not the fact that they vote on Sundays. I think most political scientists might look at that and say, what's in the window, if you will, as opposed to, when do I get to buy it.

I put that forward because if we're going to have serious debate on increasing voter participation, we need to look at the whole picture here. When I was questioning you about your vision of democratic

reform, I have to say I was a little concerned. I'm seeing these piecemeal—I don't think it's intentional. I really don't. But when we see the Senate bills, we see Bill C-56, which popped up and then went away—It didn't go away. Okay. It just went off the order paper radar, just for awhile, until we could talk to Mr. Tory.

Seriously. If we look at it, I'm concerned that there isn't a vision. A vision of democratic reform, for what it's worth, to me, is if you look at institutions like the Senate—Put up the question. It's the elephant in the room. Maybe it's time to phase the Senate out and look at an institution that's more representative, not tinkering with it. Where do we want to be in ten years? In 1865 they were looking at 1841. They were dealing with the Durham report. It's time we looked at our institutions and asked, are they required?

Anyhow, my question to you is regarding Sunday. I go to church. I've mentioned this in passing. Some people think it's okay and others are really not happy with it, I have to tell you that. I think the lack of consultation on this bill might be a problem not just for you but for us if we're supporting it. I would ask that part of our witness list be faith groups. They need to be heard from. They're going to let us know if we don't. I think it would be smart to do that.

I have to say that for some people it seemed like an opportunity to be able to vote on it. For others, you've got politicians in your face for an extra day. That's the other side of the coin.

The other thing I have to ask you is this. Are you aware that in Manitoba they just recently had an election and they actually upped the voter turnout? They did that not with an extra day of voting but through some other innovative things. Has anyone looked at that in your shop, or have you?

What they did, very quickly, is they put voting stations, advance polls, not in churches or schools, like we usually do—you might have a conflict with this plan with churches because not everyone goes to church before noon—but they put them in malls. This is the third consecutive majority government for the Doer government, and voter turnout went up. That's very unusual. They allowed people to vote in unusual places, for many of us, such as in malls. Young people might not go to church as much as they used to, but they sure go to malls. Have you considered that as an idea?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1205)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** There is so much material there and so little time.

**The Chair:** You know what I think I'm going to do? Mr. Dewar has taken his entire five minutes to ask the question.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I can't even say anything about the change from citizen to consumer?

**The Chair:** You know, I don't mind. We have two speakers left on the list. I'm going to automatically put Mr. Dewar back on the list, because I think he has more that he needs to ask.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Can I just answer him when he comes back on the list?

**The Chair:** Minister, I'm going to give you a minute, if you need to respond to that right now while it's fresh in your mind. Please take the extra minute and respond.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I've already forgotten half of what he ran through.

Certainly in terms of the issue of changing where you have your polling stations to a more commercial nature, the joke I was making was about the change from citizen into consumer. And that's one of the things that's been happening here. If you look through some of the research and some of the comments, there is this whole concern that people are changing to be more consumers and less citizens with a duty. Duty and obligation are big parts of voting.

Some people say we need to have better education to get people to vote. Some people point to political efficacy as a reason why people don't vote. They think their vote doesn't matter, and so on. And there are some studies, as Mr. Dewar acknowledged, that indicated that a different voting system results in a higher turnout. There are others who say that it's a competitive election that results in a higher turnout. If they think it's a foregone conclusion, they don't vote. There's cynicism. All these things are different factors, and we can go through them all.

I simply think you can't solve all those problems all at once, and there are all kinds of good debates about why you may or may not want to do that, but the reality is, whether you go with a proportional system or stick with our first-past-the-post system, whether it's a close election or not, the fact that we will be making this change I think will have a positive impact regardless of what other changes you do make.

I don't think it's a sin to look at it in isolation. I think it's fine to look at it, and I don't think it's a sin to give someone the opportunity to vote on Sunday, as long as you're not obliging them to vote on Sunday.

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

Mr. Proulx, please.

This is our third round. I think we'll stay with five minutes, but if you don't need the full five, that's great.

Mr. Proulx, and then Mr. Hill.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Thank you for your generosity, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Good morning, minister. Welcome to the committee.

Minister, I'm surprised you are here this morning, because I don't remember having discussed your appearance before this committee, or the planning committee. In any case, you are here. We welcome you.

Minister, I'm trying to understand every aspect of what you are doing. First, you are adding one advanced polling day. That means there will be a full weekend of advanced polling: the Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday before the election, one week before the election date. This would mean advanced polling as we have known it for several years now.

Second, instead of there being only one voting day, there will be two voting days, since you are decreeing that the Sunday immediately preceding election day Monday will become just like election day itself. Is that correct?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** No, it would not be exactly like a polling day itself. It would have the same attributes—

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Excuse me, Minister. I couldn't hear you because of other conversations. Would you mind starting again, please?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** No problem. It would not be exactly the same as election day. It would have the attributes of an advance polling day. The one way in which it would be the same as the general election day would be that the number and location of advance polling stations would be significantly expanded. However, the hours of operation would be the same hours of operation that would apply to an advance poll, namely, those from 12 until 8 p.m. in that time zone, wherever they were, rather than the staggered hours, for example.

There are also other legal attributes that relate to an advance poll that would apply. So with the exception of the number of locations, it would be an advance poll.

• (1210)

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** The number of locations would be the same as on voting day?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** That's right.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Okay. So it's six of one, half a dozen of the other.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** That's the only thing that makes it the same as a general election day. All the other attributes—

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** It's enough, isn't it? Call it what you want, it's a second election day, a day before.

Okay. So what you're doing in fact is sucking and blowing at the same time, because what you're saying is that if the election is on a Monday, there are a lot of people who cannot vote because they're not available on a Monday, but they'd be available on the Sunday. By adding the Sunday, you're actually tackling the problem of people who say, "Sunday is a religious day. We don't want to vote on Sunday. We still want to vote on the Monday." Now what you're doing is covering both of them, because you're giving the opportunity to the religious people to keep voting on the Monday, and for the ones who want to vote at the same time as they go to church, you give them the opportunity to vote on the Sunday.

Is there anything in your proposal that prevents these polling stations from being in church basements, or is part of the package that it has to be in a church basement?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** There has never been a requirement that it must or must not be in a church basement.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** I know that, but I'm asking if there is now.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Under our legislation, that's a matter that would remain under the jurisdiction of Elections Canada officials.

I have some interesting statistics here. For ordinary polls, in 2004, 13% were in churches. In 2006, that went down to 12.3%. Actually, in advance polls there were 17% in churches in 2004, which went up to almost 19% in 2006. I think it says 18.8%.

So of the bulk of buildings, the main buildings chosen were community centres—

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** You're using my time, Minister.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** —and education facilities.

I'm sorry, I thought I was answering your question.

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

Why do you not have only the Monday or the Sunday as the voting day?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** There will now be four advance—

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** The week-end before is fine. The Sunday and the Monday are a problem.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I'm not sure I understand the problem.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** The problem will be as far as manpower is concerned. I think Elections Canada will have a problem. As it is, for voting days it has to find all the secretaries and the returning officers. The hours are crazy. I'm not saying they should change the hours, but they have a problem finding the manpower.

Now there are going to be two consecutive days. Unless Elections Canada has sufficient funds from your government to increase the rates to these people and pay them very, very inviting salaries, it's simply going to double the problem of manpower. They can hardly cope with it now, to the point where in numerous ridings in Canada they have to run advertising in newspapers and local media to get people to fill these jobs.

So we have a major problem. Either you increase the funding of Elections Canada to just about double the salaries they're paying or you avoid people working in polls from having to declare these revenues as income tax.

There's a major problem that exists there, Minister.

**The Chair:** Again, I apologize. I allowed that to go way over.

We'll get the Chief Electoral Officer in here as a witness. We can pose that question to the Chief Electoral Officer.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** The Chief Electoral Officer won't answer whether the government is going to give them more funding.

**An hon. member:** He already said he would.

**The Chair:** He just said they would give them more funding.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Much more.

**The Chair:** We're well over the time on that round.

Mr. Hill, please.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Well, I can answer right now, Mr. Chairman, because the minister already answered it during that particular question. During an earlier round of questions from Monsieur Guimond, or maybe it was the very first round of questioning from Madame Robillard, he said, and I wrote it down, that there are

upfront costs being calculated at \$6.8 million and \$30.4 million for each election thereafter for ongoing costs.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** That's what Elections Canada identified.

•(1215)

**Hon. Jay Hill:** So that answers the question about the cost of having these extra days.

Mr. Chair, far be it from me to jump in here and defend your decision to have this legislation and the minister before us, but I clearly recall at the last meeting, which was only yesterday—I don't have a long memory, but we had that special meeting yesterday to deal with Bill C-54. At the end of it, I recall you saying something to the effect that tomorrow we would have our regular Tuesday meeting at 11 a.m., and the minister would be appearing to discuss this piece of legislation. You asked if anybody had any concerns, and nobody did. So for Mr. Proulx's benefit, that's how I remember the conversation yesterday. There was notification of the events of today.

Rather than suggesting that the government or the minister is trying to suck and blow at the same time, I look at it a bit more positively—instead of always looking at it in a negative way when it comes to government legislation. I'd like to maybe use a different adage, something like we're offering Canadians the best of both worlds with this legislation.

As Mr. Proulx quite correctly stated, some people might consider it an affront to their religious convictions to vote on a Sunday. But they don't have to. They can still vote on the regular election day on Monday, in one of the other advance polls, or by attending Monday to Saturday at the returning office. So they have a lot of options as well. We're not trying to do anything negative here. I think this offers more choice.

I always believe that politics is the art of the possible, so we have to sometimes do what's doable. I guess I'm referring now to Mr. Dewar's comments about lacking vision. For the 14 years I've had the privilege of being in Parliament I've heard criticism about making any reforms to our democratic institutions because it would be piecemeal. We used to hear that all the time from former Prime Minister Paul Martin. Any time we wanted to see any changes made to either the House of Commons or the Senate of Canada, he would say he didn't want to do it piecemeal. That was an excuse for doing nothing.

Now that we're trying to make some incremental changes we're being accused of not having a vision, or cobbling this together and maybe getting ourselves into a mess that way. If we're ever going to change things around here we have to start somewhere. That's why I refer to my earlier comment about politics being the art of the possible. We want to make some changes, and I think Canadians are expecting us to make some changes. That doesn't preclude us from making more dramatic changes as we go along, and I think that was Mr. Dewar's point. I don't think this is the be-all and end-all. Nobody is saying it is, but it is a step.

I'd like to give whatever time I have left to the minister to respond, instead of using the whole five minutes for myself.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I will respond by picking up the other thing I forgot to answer to Mr. Dewar. He started as a bullfighter at the bullfight, waving the red flag, by asking me about abolishing the Senate.

**An hon. member:** Phasing it out.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Like many other things, that would require a very comprehensive approach to reform. Our approach in this Parliament is to try to seek things we can do that are achievable. We still hope the Senate can be salvaged, and we're doing our best to salvage it.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Am I over my five minutes?

**The Chair:** No, you're 45 seconds under.

Mr. Dewar, you have five minutes. Then we'll start our fourth round.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Thank you, Chair, and thanks again to the minister.

I guess my point on the piecemeal, just to address my friend Mr. Hill, is that when you put all the pieces together, no one is against—I was careful in my comments. I supported, as did my predecessor Mr. Broadbent, electoral reform. The fixed-date election was supported. We supported the loan loophole; in fact, we brought it forward in Bill C-2. I don't want to give people the wrong impression.

But it does beg the question, what is the whole picture here? That's what my point was. We are particularly concerned, not about this bill per se, but when you add it all up, where are we going as a country in our institutions? I guess when we look back to debates around this table, we came up with a process to consult Canadians, and the government said we were against it, so they came up with this public consultation. I won't get into that taffy pull.

It really does beg the question, where are we going? I guess my concern is consulting Canadians.

When I hear from you, Minister, that this really was an idea you had—and that doesn't mean you can't have a good idea—I'm asking for you to perhaps widen the net a bit and consult Canadians on all of these ideas.

On this bill, for instance, I think we are going to hear from certain faith communities—we have to hear from them—that they might have some problems with this. For some families, although they're not being forced to vote, they'll see it as an interference in their day-to-day lives in their communities. I don't know, because we haven't done the consultation.

I guess I would ask, Minister, if you are considering doing—if it's not wider consultation beyond what this committee can do, because we were hoping to travel the country and have a parallel process on democratic reform, and unfortunately it didn't go there—any sort of polling or focus groups on what people think of this bill.

• (1220)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** We're not doing this from a perspective of polling or focus groups. It isn't our intention to do any of that. We think there's adequate study and research out there demonstrating that there are tangible benefits to be had in terms of increasing voter turnout. That's simply our objective, to find a way to increase voter

participation because we think it has a positive ripple-on effect through society, and it increases and enhances the legitimacy of our political institutions, it leads to other forms of civic engagement and involvement, which are good for communities, and if we get people in the habit of voting by making it easier for them, we're more likely to continue to in the future.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** My question is very simple. If we don't consult with Canadians directly on these issues, aren't we leaving them out of the equation? I say that with all sincerity, because that's what I think is missing in both C-56 and C-55. We're getting it from head office, and dare I say it—and my friend Monsieur Belanger would appreciate this—often we hear out in the hinterland that that's coming from Ottawa, and that's a concern. I wouldn't want to have our reputations tainted on this or any other bill, to say that we don't provide people with good ideas in the rest of the country.

In other words, this seems and smells like and looks like coming from Ottawa and sending it out to, well, Mr. Hill's riding, etc., and saying, “We know what's good for you. Here, take it, and this will benefit you.” And that's it, as opposed to inverting that equation, going out to people and actually asking them what they think would improve—There is Mr. Reid's point, about more opportunities to vote at different places. I mentioned what they did in Manitoba. Doesn't that process make sense to you?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** What we're doing here is in fact what Mr. Reid suggested, more opportunities to vote. We're doing what Manitoba did in their provincial election, having additional advance polling days. That was one of the methodologies they used for getting voter turnout up.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Not on Sundays, not to the degree of this bill.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** They did have additional advance polling days. That methodology is indeed what we're going through.

This is, in many ways, a kind of an election mechanics bill rather than a deep philosophy bill. If you ask people, should you have more opportunities to vote, that's kind of a convenience opportunity choice, where the answer is, well, yes, why not. The people who actually really know it and understand it are the people, exactly, whom we're consulting right now. I think nobody knows better than parliamentarians the significance of these processes, how they work, how they work in practice, what's meaningful about it.

That's why it's actually a unique situation, where members of Parliament are more qualified to opine and be consulted and offer advice on this kind of issue than almost any other issue we deal with in Parliament. In fact, most of us know more about how to run an election than we know about how to run a bank.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We are on our fourth round, and I understand the minister has given us an additional half-hour this morning and has to leave shortly. However, I have two questions left. If we can agree to go to three minutes, we might get it done.

Madam Redman is next, and then Mr. Lukiwski.

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

Minister, thank you very much for coming today. If I could use an Olympic analogy, I can't resist saying, in connection with what you said about short-term doable issues that this government is focused on, that sometimes I worry that it's just going for the bronze, and I think Canadians deserve better than that. I have some concern over the lack of consultation, and I would be interested to know—and I'm not going to ask you to take up time right now—if you could cite the studies. I know you've talked about the Franklin study in Houston in 2002. There's also a passing reference to the French presidential election. My understanding is that whether or not the voting is on Sunday, it's a historically large voter turnout in any election.

I'd also underscore that you're right in saying the people around this table probably know more about elections and how they work than they do about banking. However, I could also point out that from time to time, when really contentious referendum questions are put on presidential ballots in the United States, the voter turnout spikes, so I think it is a legitimate concern to say that we do need to look at other studies, other jurisdictions, and other extenuating circumstances, and not just presume that Sunday voting is going to be for higher voter turnout.

I don't think there is a member in this House who wouldn't support the idea of more Canadians being involved in the democratic process. I, however, am not persuaded there's a short straight line between Sunday voting, the cost-benefit analysis that needs to be done through this, and whether this bill has received due diligence in order to receive support.

•(1225)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Very quickly, the price of democracy in a cost-benefit analysis is a strictly different kind of value question than a dollar value question, so it's hard to quantify. But in terms of studies, I'd point to the 1991 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing and *Voter Turnout in Canada*, by Herman Bakvis, which said that Sunday voting was a clear factor in increased turnouts in European elections and that ready access to advance polls before election day also increased voter turnout.

Second, the 2003 Pammatt and LeDuc study I've referenced a number of times explained that the turnout decline in federal elections demonstrated that being too busy with work, school, and family was the reason 14.3% of the non-voting respondents gave to indicate why they didn't vote. There were other factors as well that can be covered by an advance poll.

The 1998 article "Voter Turnout at Federal General Elections in Canada", by Louis Lavoie, makes the point that elections held on a day of rest can result in higher turnout.

There's a 2001 article called "Voter Participation in Canada: Is Canadian Democracy in Crisis?" by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada. In that one, they had a survey of the 2000

election; about 34% of respondents said they didn't vote because of work, illness, or travel, again things that can be solved by—

**The Chair:** Minister, thank you very much. I'm wondering if we could just submit the studies. Our researchers can create a summary and get it back to the committee. It'll save a little time.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I could do that. I'd really point you to that last one I referenced. I could keep going, but there's a wide range of them.

**The Chair:** If you could kindly provide the list, then our researchers can get the study, and we'll save a little time here today.

Go ahead, Mr. Lukiwski, please, for three minutes.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of quick comments.

One is in response to some observations raised by Mr. Dewar on having faith-based groups appearing here as witnesses. I've got no problem with that, but I would also point out that over the course of probably the last 30 or 40 years, we've had many debates on Sunday activities, whether they were on shopping on Sunday, sports on Sunday, or serving beer at sporting events on Sunday. Every time we've had those, Sunday activities have been allowed, and I have not seen any studies yet that have indicated—to me, at least—that it has negatively impacted upon the ability of any faith-based group or organization to worship and take Sunday as a religious holiday. I don't see that there's really any difference in the progression that we have been making over the last 30 or 40 years with activities occurring on a Sunday.

The second point I would make is in response to Monsieur Proulx, who was saying that he thinks they've got a real problem with staffing from Elections Canada. I would merely point out that in my riding—and perhaps it's completely different in his riding—the people we have for election officials would gladly welcome a second day, because they get paid for it. We have a budget for it, so I think there's no difficulty whatsoever, because the same individuals—

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Are you kidding?

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Come out to Saskatchewan, Monsieur Proulx, but thank you very much for the interruption.

I don't see that to be a problem whatsoever. There's a budget established for it. I believe we'll find there are plenty of volunteers, and we'll hear from Elections Canada on that.

The last thing is on a comment by Madam Redman. She was saying this bill was poorly thought out and needed more extensive consultation. I don't think the minister has ever said that expanded voting opportunities and voting on Sundays is ever going to be the panacea for all the ills with voter turnout, but I do think it would be almost impossible for any parliamentarian to suggest that giving voters more opportunities to vote is a bad thing. That's the bottom line here, isn't it? I can't see that giving more opportunities to cast your ballot, to exercise your franchise, is a bad thing.

With those comments, I'll cede the rest of my time to my colleague Mr. Preston.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Forty seconds, Mr. Preston.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** That's great. I just have this very small piece to do.

Through you to the minister, I'm beginning to get a complex. At this very committee we put forward a motion about consultation on democratic reform issues, and here we're being told, gee, we haven't done this enough. I seem to remember a lot of people across from me voting it down.

Mr. Minister, this committee has already asked to look at some of the democratic reform issues, and yet we weren't allowed to do so. Do you have any comment on that?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I was going to comment on the fact that I thought you said you were getting complex, and then I heard it was a complex.

No, there's no harm in doing further study and further consultations, if you want, but I do share with you a sentiment that it's difficult to understand, as Mr. Lukiwski was saying, why someone would have a resistance to this. It's good news for everyone. It's good news for dealing with some of the most affected groups.

There's no partisan angle here. One appendix that I like comes from a 2001 study by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada. They list the top ten constituencies in terms of turnout in the 2000 election: eight out of the ten are Liberal, one is NDP, and one is Alliance. They also have a list of the top ten constituencies with the lowest turnout: nine out of the ten are Liberal and one is Alliance.

So at either end of the spectrum you have people distributed. There is no partisan angle, it seems, in this exercise. It's just about making our democracy work better. That's a positive thing for everybody, I think.

**The Chair:** Minister, I hope you don't mind me cutting you off. I certainly am just respecting your time. I know you have other obligations, and I do want to get our last questioner in.

Mr. Dewar, please, for three minutes.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Lukiwski's points are well taken. It's not about being against this proposal; it's about being against the way in which we're getting the agenda from the government and how Canadians are being consulted on it.

I have to say to Mr. Preston that the reason we voted against procedure and House affairs going forward with what we had agreed to is that, at the time, we had a motion in the House to do just that. And that was well known—

**Mr. Joe Preston:** How did it work out for you, Paul?

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Not well, because Canadians now are paying for some—Well, it's something we don't even have yet. We'll see if the Frontier Institute's work is worth it. So I guess it didn't work out well, but we had a motion in the House. Let's be clear about that. You guys know that, so let's not go there.

My question to the minister is on the issue of consultation—or actually, I have a more important question. You associated volunteerism and civic participation—and I mentioned this consultation report with the Frontier Institute—and seemed to say that where there are higher levels of—

You're making a direct connection between participation in civic society in general and having higher voter participation. Is that your assertion?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** There certainly is research—not this research, because as I said, it's kind of blinkered in that it looks only at electoral participation—that shows positive correlation between community involvement and civic engagement of all types. If you are involved in a community ratepayers organization, you are more likely to vote or to belong to a political party. If you are a regular church attender, you're more likely to be involved in some other kind of charitable organization. People who fall into groups that you might call community leadership groups are more actively engaged, and at the other end are those who are detached.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** And you're asserting that in Europe there's a higher voter participation rate because of Sunday voting.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Yes, in some countries.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Do they have a higher level of participation in Europe than we do in Canada?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** It depends on the country.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I would submit to you, Minister, that that isn't the case. And if it is the case, you need to do your homework on this. We're getting threads of studies and we're not getting any kind of coherence vis-à-vis this bill.

As I said, it might be a good idea, but we need more coherence in the studies we're getting from you. I'll leave it at that, and I won't put a question to you on it. But we need something a little more coherent vis-à-vis this bill. There are some interesting points you posit, but we don't have a clear connection—you know, civic participation here versus Europe, Sunday versus Europe, but nothing on democratic reform.

Have you read the Law Commission report on democratic reform? Is that something you have been able to read at this point?

• (1235)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I'll simply say this. It's very difficult for me, in the 30 seconds that are left at the end of each one of Mr. Dewar's interventions, to weave the splendid tapestry that connects all the different elements of all the different studies, all the aspects of civic engagement, all the aspects of democratic participation—

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I would suggest that you have....

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to cut that off.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** —in that little mere time that I have. And I apologize for not rising to the occasion in the fashion you would like.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Colleagues, I want to thank the minister. If there are more questions, we can make arrangements to have the minister back.

I have to note, though, that I noticed that on the last few opportunities for members to speak, we were drifting into debate, which sort of appears to me to mean that we've gotten through our questions, at least for the minister.

I want to thank the minister for being here this morning with his staff. I appreciate your being here to help the committee understand this bill. We certainly appreciate the extra half-hour you were able to give us this morning. We can excuse you now.

Colleagues, I would like to just point out a couple of things. By no means is this a request for a final list. But it seems to me that this is fresh in our minds right now. There have been some good suggestions around the table for reports we've been keeping track of that members wish to see, reports we might wish to summarize, and we'll certainly do that. But while it's still fresh in members' minds, if you would like to submit to our clerk any witnesses that you have in your minds right now, we can revisit this at another time. I'm not suggesting that this would be a final list, but rather than forget —

Here is the second issue I wish the committee to advise me on and help me with. I'm not sure that we can get any of the witnesses here for Thursday. We could probably get some of the research here and continue debate. But I'm going to leave it to the committee that this would be the only thing we would do on Thursday. I'm at the will of the committee. We either schedule a meeting on Thursday and move forward with whatever research we can get and whatever witnesses we can get, or we not have a meeting on Thursday and we conclude today.

Is there a brief discussion by anyone?

We'll have Mr. Preston.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** Mr. Chair, I like your second idea better. We can use the time between now and Friday to submit witness suggestions

to you or the clerk. I think you'd agree that since it's Tuesday, trying to find witnesses for Thursday would be very tough, so let's just do the list.

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments?

Is it agreed by the committee, then, that we adjourn now?

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Elections Canada is in town.

**The Chair:** Do you want to call Elections Canada for Thursday?

**A voice:** No.

**The Chair:** First of all, I'm getting the sense from the committee that we not have a meeting on Thursday.

**A voice:** I would be here, but we're not going to have a quorum.

**The Chair:** Order, please. I know we're all jovial today and having a good time, but I have my business to do.

We are not going to have a meeting on Thursday, then.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, there is nothing further for today, except again, a reminder to get any witness lists or suggestions for further study on Bill C-55 to our clerk as soon as you possibly can.

I wish almost everyone the best of summers. I certainly hope you have a safe and wonderful time. I didn't know it was summer. I'm prepared to be here next week, but in the event that we're moving toward summer, I do sincerely wish everybody that.

And actually, with all sincerity, I thank everybody for this session. I believe that this committee is an example for other committees. I can tell you that I've never seen some members work as hard as you members do and be as prepared as you are. I appreciate it. Our clerks appreciate it. Canadians appreciate it. Have a wonderful summer.

The meeting is adjourned.

---







**Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons**

**Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes**

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:  
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

---

**The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.**

**Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.**