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# Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

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**Friday, August 27, 2010**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Michael Chong**



## Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

Friday, August 27, 2010

• (0900)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)):** This is the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. Today is Friday, August 27, 2010.

[English]

Welcome, committee members and witnesses. We're here pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) for a study of the long-form portion of the census.

With us today as part of our first panel is Mr. Cappe, who is the president of the Institute for Research on Public Policy; Mr. McKinnon, who is the chair of the National Statistics Council; Mr. Lam, vice-president of the Canada First Community Organization; Mr. Henderson, as an individual; Mr. Turk and Mr. Ornstein, as representatives of the Canadian Association of University Teachers; and Mr. Chartier, who is the president of the Métis National Council.

Welcome to each and every one of you.

We'll begin with five-minute opening statements from each of the groups represented, beginning with Mr. Cappe.

**Mr. Mel Cappe (President, Institute for Research on Public Policy):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me start by explaining why I'm here. I am indeed the president of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, but I spent over 30 years in the public service of Canada. I served seven prime ministers. I was the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet to Mr. Chrétien, but lest you think that somehow taints me as being a partisan in anyway, the first order in council naming me to the deputy minister ranks was by Brian Mulroney, and I ended my career in the public service loyally serving Prime Minister Harper and my then minister, Peter MacKay. So in the spirit of that non-partisan public service, my objective today is to try to help the committee deal with the government's objectives, as well as the opposition's objectives, and I think both can be met.

I've sent the Prime Minister and Minister Clement four letters. I never received a response from Minister Clement, and the Prime Minister's Office sent me an acknowledgement.

[Translation]

However, I never received a response from the Prime Minister. Even though my last letter was private, I would like to share it with the committee because, clearly, the Prime Minister never saw it.

[English]

I have four points.

The first point is that the long form of the census is a public good. That's a technical term, but it's a good one. It's used by a wide array of real people: banks, charities, and public health authorities.

I'll just use one example that I'm familiar with. My wife is the president of the Canadian Institute of Planners, and whether they're urban or municipal planners, they use this material all the time to plan municipal and rural infrastructure, transportation systems, for development planning, sewers, all of that. This is a public good. It serves the public and can be more efficiently collected by the state than by each individual group undertaking its own survey.

Second, the long form of the census ensures the reliability and robustness of other surveys. The Governor of the Bank of Canada has made it clear that he's going to have to reassess the reliability of the labour force survey now that we will have a voluntary long-form census. The labour force survey, by the way, is a compulsory survey, but we rely on it for measuring employment and unemployment. We need to have the long-form census to target other censuses to have reliability.

Third, I'm going to be presumptuous and suggest that I know what the objectives of this committee are, and I'm going to tell you what they are. I apologize for appearing presumptuous, but I think you should be out there to provide reliable and robust data, and also to minimize coercion. I agree with the government on this; we should be minimizing coercion. We should be minimizing the intrusiveness of the survey and the census, and we should be maximizing the privacy that's attached to it.

I have one more point that I'll come back to, but in my letter to the Prime Minister—and I've asked the clerk to share the letters with the members of the committee—I indicate there are four things you can do to deal with those objectives: You can have a mandatory census; you can remove jail terms, and now I think both sides agree with this; you can review the questionnaire and minimize the intrusiveness of the questions; and I would add to what the National Statistics Council has said, you can increase the penalties for the divulagation of private data. I think anybody who releases census data inappropriately should be seriously fined.

The last issue I want to present to the committee is that there's a higher-level issue here and it is an important principle of governance: to ensure the integrity of the statistical agency. I think the events over the course of this summer have raised questions about this larger significant issue. I think the committee should take its time, notwithstanding the deliberations on the census, to consider the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

To my surprise, there are UN fundamental principles of official statistics. It was brought to my attention by Ivan Fellegi, the former Chief Statistician. This summer we've seen questions raised about who's responsible for methodology in collecting statistics. There are several principles in that UN charter that deal with independence, methodological integrity, and the role of politics, and I think the committee should study it carefully.

You might consider—and I'm not suggesting this is “the” answer, but it's “an” answer—amending the Statistics Act to make clear that the Chief Statistician, who is a statutory officer named in the Statistics Act and appointed by Governor in Council, has the sole responsibility for methodological and technical issues. I think Minister Clement was correct when he told this committee that this is a department of government that reports to the minister and that many questions around the choice of questions are political. But there is no doubt in my mind that the Chief Statistician should be the only person to comment on methodological questions in government and have the obligation to inform the chair of a parliamentary committee, or someone in public, of his views on methodological questions. I would urge the committee not to play partisan games with an important institution of governance.

Thank you.

• (0905)

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

Now we'll have an opening statement from Mr. McKinnon, chair of the National Statistics Council.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Ian McKinnon (Chair, National Statistics Council):** Good morning and thank you.

My name is Ian McKinnon and I chair the National Statistics Council, the body of volunteer external advisers from across Canada appointed to advise on matters affecting Canada's statistical system.

Today I continue the efforts of the statistics council, which has tried to find a resolution to the dispute set off when the government announced that the long-form census was being discontinued and that the voluntary household survey was being put in its place.

We believed the announced changes would harm the integrity and the quality of the Canadian statistical system. At the same time, the council recognized that concerns about intrusiveness and confidentiality should be addressed. As a result, the statistics council set out to find solutions that protected the quality of information Canadians depend upon, while responding to concerns over the way the census is conducted.

I believe we can resolve the issue by listening to what Canadians have said. While the initial decision of the government was made

without public consultation, the debate and discussions since the decision was announced have been illuminating, to say nothing of a little surprising to statisticians who sometimes worry that people don't value their work.

Many groups have explained the importance of the long form for their activities. The public debate and the information released by the government in response to the order of the standing committee have made the situation clearer and have demonstrated that all expert advice, Canadian and international, as well as the results of the recent U.S. survey experiment, concur that a voluntary survey will not be able to fulfill the fundamental needs of our national statistical system.

What is then at risk? First, the proposed voluntary national household survey will suffer from significant selection bias, a fundamental flaw that has been examined in depth technically. The proposed changes will also likely result in Statistics Canada's not being able to publish robust, detailed information for neighbourhoods, towns, or rural areas. Much of the analytic work done by municipalities, police forces, private companies, health agencies, highway and transportation planners, school boards, and a large number of other groups depend upon small-area knowledge, and that data will no longer be available.

Our second concern is the potential loss of vital benchmark information. The mandatory long form means that StatsCan has an accurate benchmark for the demographics of populations that are difficult to reach or are less likely to complete a voluntary survey. This in turn means that sampling and weighting strategies for subsequent voluntary surveys can compensate for the bias from differential response rate and produce reliable and robust information. The importance of having census benchmarks available is readily apparent when one considers some of the populations that we know are more difficult to reach: young people making the school-to-work transition, vital to understanding Canada's economy and questions of efficiency but hard to reach; urban aboriginal populations; the affluent; new immigrants; and the list goes on.

Recognizing that the debate over the future course of the census has become heated without moving towards a resolution that meets both the concerns about privacy and intrusiveness, on one hand, as well as the need to maintain the quality of Canada's statistical system, the National Statistics Council has recommended a number of things.

First, as part of the formal consultation process, beginning with the 2016 census, StatsCan should examine each question to ensure that it meets rigorous tests for inclusion in the census. Each question should satisfy the needs of data users but only as weighed against the cost and intrusiveness of the question.

The census for 2011 needs to include a mandatory equivalent of the long-form census. It is the only way to safeguard the quality of the Canadian statistical system.

StatsCan should also examine respondent burden carefully, particularly that which is placed on Canada's farmers by the census of agriculture and other agricultural surveys from Statistics Canada. We have a precedent in this in the careful examination of the response burden on small business, where 10 to 15 years ago a major effort was made to reduce that burden.

Finally, the opportunity afforded by amending the Statistics Act to remove jail as a penalty should be used to include provisions related to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, a code adopted by the UN to which Canada has already formally adhered.

• (0910)

The National Statistics Council believes these steps, taken together, can respect the valid concerns voiced by Canadians about privacy and intrusiveness while ensuring that the vital information that currently flows from the long-form census can be maintained and continue to serve Canadians' needs.

Further, the council has welcomed the government's acceptance of the council's recommendation, in its announcement that it intends to remove the threat of jail time for persons refusing to fill out the census, and the implicit recognition by the government, through its decision to include the official language questions in the short form, that the voluntary national household survey will not meet the requirements for robust and accurate small-area data.

There remains only one major issue that has been raised. Having removed the threat of jail, is the potential sanction of fines a disproportionate or intolerable burden on Canadians required to fill out the long-form census or its equivalent? My response is a firm "no". The benefits to society and all its members of having a household fill out a 30-minute questionnaire, on average, once every quarter century, a form whose contents are released to no one, not companies, not other agencies, are beneficial for all of us.

In conclusion, we ask that the government carry on consulting and doing technical evaluations but collect the long-form data by making the national household survey mandatory. Canadians need and deserve no less.

Thank you.

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

Now we'll hear from Mr. Lam, who is the vice-president of the Canada First Community Organization.

**Mr. Joseph Lam (Vice-President, Canada First Community Organization):** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I am representing Canada First Community Organization.

I just want to remind you gentlemen on this floor that it is a changing world. We are here to show support for the change.

I will not waste any time. I will just go into the topic.

Here are the reasons.

The adequacy of the long form is in doubt. It is 39 years old and a report that is 40 pages long. Some people may finish it anyway. Some of the answers they may not want to share with the government for privacy reasons and will simply just fill in what

they like. How you are going to verify their information will be difficult.

I'm close to the community, so I'm just speaking on behalf of how they think.

All kinds of data are available, of which the long form is not the only source. It is old. In my opinion, it is inefficient and wastes time and money. I also feel sorry for the old way of getting things done; it is just terrible in terms of method and speed.

I just want to show you some examples of perhaps how to do things quickly as compared to slowly.

I'll give you the example of a subway extension from Yonge Street to Don Mills Road, along Sheppard Avenue. It took them 10 years to finish, as compared to Hong Kong, which built one of the largest airports, on two islands, on reclaimed land, back in the 1990s, which can handle 5,500 passengers an hour. What did they do? It cost \$35 billion Canadian, and there actually were 10 projects along with that. There was the airport itself, a new town for its workers, a railway, two expressways, an underwater rail and road tunnel, and one of the longest suspension bridges in the world, longer than the Golden Gate Bridge, built in only eight years.

What I'm saying here is not to criticize the government; I'm saying that I want to see things get done more quickly and with less study.

I remind you that we have to compete globally. Just like the old Chinese saying, you are rowing your boat upstream, and if you don't row harder and faster, you may fall further and further behind and never be able to catch up.

The change of long form to a short form is a good direction to go in. Why not give it a try?

Some may say it's going to cost a lot of money. Yes. This form was first used in 1971. May I ask you gentlemen, are you still using your 1971 computer, or are you still driving your old car from 1971? So things need to change, and change in the direction of us having to compete globally.

If I may quote an article from *The Economist*, It is a global trend, pioneered, inevitably, in Scandinavia. Denmark has been keeping track of its citizens without a traditional census for decades; Sweden, Norway, Finland... among others....

• (0915)

The article goes on to say, Britain has seen hundreds of thousands of immigrants arrive from new eastern European members of the EU. Local governments complain that out-of-date information ignores these newcomers, leaving schools overcrowded, budgets stretched and houses scarce. At the same time, filling in the forms has become more onerous: what started as a short questionnaire about who lived where has turned into an inquisition about everything from toilet and car ownership to race and religion.

And it is costly. The cost is about \$36 per head in America, versus 20¢ in Finland.

Thank you.

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

We will now hear an opening statement from Mr. Henderson.

• (0920)

**Mr. James P. Henderson (As an Individual):** I have filled out the long-form census. I've filled out many census forms in my lifetime. This long-form census, I felt, was burdensome and really put a cost in terms of expense and time on my farming operation. I can only speak for myself, but I feel that something shorter could be just as efficient.

Also, the consequences we might endure if we don't comply with this are a little harsh. But we'll share our information with the government whenever they need it, provided it's a little bit more on our convenience.

Thank you.

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

We'll now hear from the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

**Mr. James L. Turk (Executive Director, Canadian Association of University Teachers):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm James Turk, the executive director. With me is Michael Ornstein, one of the senior folks in our research advisory committee and director of the Institute for Social Research at York University. We represent 65,000 academic staff at 122 universities and colleges across Canada.

I'd like to begin with a question for the committee. What do the following organizations have in common: the Vancouver Board of Trade; the Canadian Nurses Association; the Canadian Institute of Planners; the Chinese Canadian National Council; the Town of Halton Hills, which is Mr. Chong's town; the Canadian Association for Business Economics; the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants; the Canada West Foundation; the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; the Canadian Labour Congress; Alberta Health Services; the United Way of Canada; the Canadian Jewish Congress; the Canadian Public Health Association; the Chamber of Commerce in Burlington, Ontario, which is Mr. Wallace's town; the Canadian Council on Social Development; the Canadian Economics Association; the Governments of Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island; the Government of Nunavut; the Canadian Medical Association; the Toronto Board of Trade; the Canadian Association of Midwives; the Corporation of the County of Simcoe; the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; the Canadian Chamber

of Commerce; the Royal Society of Canada; the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada; the Ukrainian Canadian Congress; the cities of Edmonton—which is Mr. Lake's town—Fredericton, Ottawa, Toronto, and Victoria?

They, like the Canadian Association of University Teachers, have called on the Government of Canada to reinstate the mandatory long-form census. The decision to end the mandatory long-form census will mean a dramatic decline in the quality of economic and social information for governments, community social service agencies, and businesses. Provincial governments use the census to measure fundamental characteristics of their populations and to plan transportation, policies to cope with population aging, plans for elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, plus a myriad of other things. Local governments and school boards use the long-form census to forecast demand for government services, to know about neighbourhoods so as to know where to locate schools, transportation services, community and social services, day cares, and language programs for new Canadians. Community service agencies use the census to determine the needs of their communities and their social and demographic characteristics. New businesses use the long-form census data to decide where to set up shop, examining measures such as education levels, incomes, and occupations in particular areas. Existing businesses use census data to know where to focus their marketing, where to locate stores, and what products to offer in different stores.

The mandatory long-form census as well is used as a reference point, a benchmark for other very important surveys such as the labour force survey used to measure unemployment and other key aspects of employment used in the national accounts.

Cancelling the mandatory long-form census prevents us from evaluating the quality of, and taking measures to correct, information from Statistics Canada and other sample surveys, thus undermining the entire system of Canadian social and economic statistics. This includes standard surveys needed to compare Canada with the OECD and other countries.

The mandatory long-form census is the primary source of information on equity in Canadian society, including the education, earnings, and occupations of aboriginal people, members of visible minorities, men and women, and persons with disabilities.

The mandatory long-form census has allowed Canadians to know about ourselves as a people. The current census is a series going back to 1871. It is hard to exaggerate the number of ways the census is used to describe our nation and how it has changed and the importance of knowing that history.

I'd like now to turn the remainder of the time over to my colleague, Michael Ornstein, who is going to address the question of why there is a problem with eliminating the mandatory long-form census, if the proposed voluntary survey collects information from as many or more people.

• (0925)

**Mr. Michael Ornstein (Member, Research Advisory Committee, Canadian Association of University Teachers):** Thanks, Jim.

Let me start by asking, what is distinct about the mandatory long-form census?

First, the response rate is very high, so the measure is free from bias to the maximum extent possible. This is just as important as the size of the sample.

Second, the questionnaire includes a great variety of questions. These are important not only because they're important individually, but because of the way they're combined. People have talked about cutting down the length of the survey, but that cuts down the ability to look at a variety of different things. For example, you might be interested in the poverty rates of children, but as a global statistic, that's a lot less interesting, in a way, than knowing how poverty rates of children vary across the country, among ethno-racial groups, for aboriginal communities, and so on.

Third, the long-form sample is very large, so we get accurate statistics from small communities in rural areas for individual racialized groups, and so on. None of Statistics Canada's smaller surveys is a substitute for the census for this reason.

Fourth, because there is a great deal of overlap in the questions from one census to the next, it is possible to measure change over time very accurately. Often the change is as important an indicator as the absolute level. So we talk about the aging of the workforce, not the age of the workforce. The critical thing is the change.

Much of the information obtained from the census is not available from any other survey, particularly questions dealing with racialization and immigration.

Finally, questions asked in the census are decided in a painstakingly careful process. The size of the enterprise and its cost are so large, there's a detailed rationale for the inclusion of every single question.

So the question is, why is there a problem with the proposed voluntary survey? In answer, the critical thing is that the response rate will be between 60% and 75% and the results will be biased by non-response. This is because the people who do not answer the survey are different from those who do. We know the response is lower among young people, more mobile people, poorer people, and so on. The problem is that with the switch from the mandatory census, it's not simply that the content of the survey is changed, but the critical thing is that change from one census to another can't be distinguished from non-response bias when you move from a survey with 4% or 5% non-response to 25% or 30% non-response.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Turk and Mr. Ornstein.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Mr. Chartier, President of the Métis National Council.

[*English*]

**Mr. Clément Chartier (President, Métis National Council):** On behalf of the Métis Nation, I thank you for inviting the Métis National Council to express its views here today on this most critical issue.

The Métis Nation is represented through democratically elected, province-wide governance structures from Ontario westward—namely, the Métis Nation of Ontario, the Manitoba Métis Federation, Métis Nation Saskatchewan, the Métis Nation of Alberta, and Métis Nation British Columbia. The Métis National Council has represented the Métis Nation nationally and internationally since 1983. Based on the citizenship criteria established by the Métis Nation in 2002, the number of Métis Nation citizens in Canada we estimate as approximately 400,000, roughly one-third of the aboriginal population.

Our citizenship criteria are based on self-identification, historic Métis Nation ancestry, and acceptance by the historic Métis Nation community. In the Powley decision in 2003, the Supreme Court of Canada, in addition to upholding the constitutionally protected aboriginal rights of the Métis, also identified criteria for membership in the Métis rights-bearing community, based on ancestral connection to and acceptance by historic Métis communities.

Since the Powley decision, the Métis National Council's five governing members—that is, the provincial governance bodies of the Métis Nation—have established citizenship registries to determine who can vote in their province-wide ballot box elections and receive programs and services delivered to them. These registries are largely built, but even when completed, will not cover the entire Métis population in our historic homeland.

We rely on the census for total population counts, as well as for socio-economic information on persons who identify as Métis or who have Métis ancestry. The census changes proposed by the Government of Canada will have a major impact on all aboriginal data, but in particular, the data on Métis. The federal government has no administrative database for Métis as it does for first nations through the INAC registry.

It did, however, sign a Métis Nation protocol with the Métis National Council in 2008, through which we are pursuing a number of key initiatives to improve the conditions and expand opportunities for our people. Through the protocol, the federal government and the Métis National Council have also engaged the five westernmost provincial governments in joint initiatives on economic development, and we are in the process of exploring how to apply this multilateral approach to other key areas such as education and health.

A critical starting point to these initiatives is developing a reliable database for the Métis population. The government's proposal to eliminate the long-form census questionnaire and have all households get the short form, supplemented by a household survey of one in three households to collect information previously gathered by the long-form census, causes us concern. The household survey, as we understand it, will be voluntary, and of course, people will know that. Lower-income households and households with lower education levels are less likely to respond to a voluntary survey than would middle-class households, increasing the possibility of skewed data from that survey.

Given the standard rule of statistics that the smaller the population the larger the sample size should be to obtain reliable data, any measure that will lower Métis participation will jeopardize the ability to collect accurate and reliable data, especially when the data is broken down by age, sex, income group, and geography.

The proposed changes will jeopardize our ability to conduct post-census surveys of aboriginal people, such as the aboriginal peoples survey. That survey, which we have relied on for much of our data, was based on responses to the long-form questionnaire.

● (0930)

Finally, the changes will certainly make it more difficult, if not impossible, to compare 2011 information with information from previous censuses. Such comparisons are important to establish growth rates and demographic and socio-economic trends. The fact of the matter is that we will not know the full impact of these changes on Métis data until we know how people respond to the voluntary survey. But we believe the federal government is clearly taking a needless risk that has the potential to thwart continued progress for Métis people.

Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

The committee members now have an hour and a half to ask questions and make comments.

Mr. Garneau, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

In this country, we have many political parties and those political parties have different visions of where Canada should be going, and that's fine. However, I think it is crucial that all political parties have as a basic, fundamental principle the urgent need to make available the most accurate data on which to base their decisions and their vision—and when I say “accurate”, I mean accurate information that paints an accurate picture of the Canadian mosaic.

As we have heard from many speakers in the past couple of months, it is a mosaic. We have linguistic minorities; we have ethnic minorities; we have aboriginal peoples; we have rich people and we have poor people. We have a very diverse mosaic, and the policies we implement should make use of the best available information that accurately reflects that mosaic.

Who would have thought the census issue would be one that would appear in the summer of 2011? But it has become apparent to me in the past couple of months that there is a valuable exercise coming out of all of this.

Government has an obligation to explain more clearly to Canadians why we have this census, because I think there is quite a bit of questioning about why it is that people are being asked these questions. I think the government has a responsibility to explain more clearly why we go through this very complex exercise to ask questions of Canadians and why it has been a mandatory exercise. I don't think that's clear, and I regretfully have to say there has been quite a bit of misinformation in the process. That's the first thing.

The second thing the government must do is to explain to Canadians just how much effort is put into maintaining the privacy of that information, because I think that is also a concern that has been expressed.

I thank the speakers who have come here this morning, who have shed light on the process and have expressed their individual opinions, and I'd like to ask them a few questions.

I'll start with Mr. McKinnon.

I think part of the questioning coming from Canadians is based on the fact that many Canadians as individuals do not necessarily recognize why it is important for them to fill out the form and answer these questions. What is it going to change in their life? What is it going to do for Canada? There is perhaps the perception that this is just a bunch of information used by people who they have nothing to do with and that it's not going to affect their life.

I think that's part of the education we need to do, and I'd like to get your comments on that.

● (0935)

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Thank you, Mr. Garneau.

One of the most critical things the long-form census provides is small-area information. It's fine to talk to Canadians about the abstract and the importance of the labour force survey tackling questions such as efficiency in our economy, but the biggest impact on individuals is in terms of the services that are directly provided to them.

We heard, for example, criticism earlier of the question about where do you go to work and when do you leave there. However, it is precisely questions such as this that may have some interest at a national level, but at a neighbourhood level, will allow people to see where we need roads and how we can best plan our transit system. The lists of people you heard about earlier, the different organizations, tend to be the service deliverers who bring home local neighbourhood solutions and answers to people.

The information that gets generated allows for more efficiency, and even accountability. I think those are two benchmarks that are extremely important to the broader Canadian public and should be held up as things that drive government policy: First, they're made vastly more difficult without the precise and detailed information we have; and secondly, the alternative ways of getting this information are usually inadequate and invariably more expensive. So when we're talking about large numbers to conduct a census, in fact the alternatives tend to be vastly more expensive.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you.

Mr. Cappe, another issue that has been brought up on frequent occasions is the fact that the long-form questionnaire serves as an extremely important benchmark against which other surveys that are not mandatory can be weighted. That's a notion that perhaps academics understand but perhaps the average Canadian doesn't, but it is fundamental to understanding how we get quality from voluntary surveys.

Could you explain to us why this is important, to have a benchmark mandatory long-form census in that respect?

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** Sure.

If you consider the ethnic diversity survey, which has been an important element of analyzing who we are and some of the challenges we face, the targeting of that survey requires a keen understanding of where Canadians are, what kind of Canadians they are, how they're engaged in society, and how they're engaged in the economy. Therefore, the robustness and reliability of the data from that survey depend upon the reliability of the census data we use for weighting.

It's the same thing with the labour force survey. The ethnic diversity survey unfortunately may not be conducted in future, but the labour force survey, which is fundamental to understanding how the economy is performing on a regular monthly basis, requires us to understand where to ask the questions. You're sampling and you want the sample to represent all of the economy and all of society. So to find the right sample in order to measure how we're doing in the economy, you need the census as the basis for the reliability of the sample.

● (0940)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Cappe and Mr. Garneau.

Monsieur Bouchard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for appearing before us.

My first question is for Mr. Cappe.

Could you explain to us how the statistics help the decision makers acquire a view of society as a whole and of its needs?

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** You've pinpointed the deep-seated source of concern I have about the decision to not conduct such a census. Politically, we have to understand who we are, what the major challenges we are facing are, and how to meet them. We need a database on which we can rely.

For instance, I would like to draw your attention to the economic decisions made by the Department of Finance. I spent part of my career there, and I used census data on many occasions. In particular, I did so when dealing with issues related to families, agriculture and dairy farmers. During my time as deputy minister of Human Resources Development, the department conducted research on how the unemployed are treated. We had to get an idea of where the seasonal unemployed are located. To do that, we needed a solid Labour Force Survey. However, as I just said to Mr. Garneau, a comprehensive census is necessary for the Labour Force Survey to be reliable.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Thank you.

Mr. Cappe, what makes this mandatory long-form census a tool that facilitates decision-making and the implementation of public policies that allow needs to be met? In what way does it help the government avoid making bad decisions?

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** If you don't mind, I will answer in English.

[*English*]

I'm always struck by the need for evidence-based policy.

[*Translation*]

As the president of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, I would like to point out that many of our researchers base their research on the census and other surveys stemming from it.

[*English*]

If you think we should have policy-based evidence—that is, pick the policy and then go out and prove it—then you don't need a census.

If you want to base your policy on evidence, on the nature of the challenges that the country faces, on the nature of the problems of the performance of the economy, then you need the evidence first.

[*Translation*]

At the Institute for Research on Public Policy, we say that we ask questions before getting answers. I hope that the government does likewise.

● (0945)

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. McKinnon.

Could you explain to us why the voluntary nature of the census could skew the data collected?

[*English*]

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Certainly, Monsieur Bouchard. The fundamental issue is what is called “response bias”. People who respond to voluntary surveys are, by their nature, different from those who do not. Those who do not are often more time pressed. They are people who sometimes feel marginalized within society. If there are linguistic barriers, they are less likely to respond.

Those problems can be compensated for if one has a benchmark that says there are this number of indigenous peoples, for example, in an urban situation; or there are these many people who are unilingual francophones in this area. Then you can look at surveys that are done voluntarily and reweight or change the sampling designs to ensure that you get everyone. Without the benchmarks created by a compulsory format that tests for those very basic issues with simple questions about income, ethnicity, language, and so on, you won't have that benchmark anymore. You may have a voluntary survey, but you can no longer adjust it to a known population.

That means not only are your census results less applicable in small areas, but very importantly, you no longer have the ability to conduct further voluntary surveys, or surveys such as the labour force survey, with confidence that you are accurately reflecting a cross-section of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. McKinnon, as you know, the government now intends to make the mandatory questionnaire voluntary. It also intends to distribute the questionnaire to only a third of Canadians, who would respond on a voluntary basis. I would like to know what you think about those changes. Do you think that the sampling will be as valid as or less valid than it was previously?

[*English*]

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** If one changes to a voluntary form, given the absence of benchmarks, first, you have no way of confirming the accuracy, and one of the real dilemmas is that if you have bias, sample self-selection bias, increasing the number of people you talk to does nothing to solve those bias problems.

I'll give you a trivial example, having run a survey research company. If I did a national survey of 1,500 people and did it in English only, it would mean that in places such as Chicoutimi or Beauce or Lac Saint-Jean the overwhelming majority of potential respondents could not answer and there would be a significant problem. If I doubled the sample size to 3,000, it would in no way change the bias that existed. Those unilingual francophones would not be included among the respondents and the responses would be highly biased.

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

Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

After listening to Mr. Turk and to Mr. Garneau's questions, I'm thinking a little bit about the difference in points of view on this issue and trying to define what differentiates us. I notice that Mr. Garneau was quoted on 630 CHED yesterday, talking about the government having trouble finding groups that support its point of view, so it's down to inviting individuals. I think that highlights a little bit of the difference in approach.

Certainly on this side we know we represent individuals. I think I represent about 120,000 individuals in my riding and it's important that they have their say. I don't think it's something we refer to as the bottom of the barrel that we're down to inviting individuals. I think

they're probably the most important people to have their say on issues such as this. So I guess we would agree to disagree on that.

Mr. Turk, in terms of your list of people who have commented—and you went through quite a list there—I had trouble keeping up because you were talking fairly quickly, but I think one of the reasons you've stated for the census being important was about businesses using education levels and income levels to decide where to set up shop. I would probably agree that it's good information to have. In my previous life, in business, I would have liked that information. So you and I can agree on the value of information when it comes to that.

I think the fundamental question we're trying to answer here is about how a government gathers information. If the question is whether we like information, I think everybody around this table would put up their hand and say, yes, we do. But how does the government gather that information?

When it comes to gathering that information, in terms of the way to gather information to help businesses decide where to set up shop based on income levels and education levels, I would say that while that may be good information, it's inappropriate for a government to threaten its citizens with fines or jail time. I'll even focus on the fines, because it seems there's some agreement on the issue of jail time: It's inappropriate for a government to threaten its citizens with fines to get that information.

Let's just talk about this. So we go to one of our citizens and we tell them that the government wants some information through the census, information about education, income, and how much time they spend with their kids or how much housework or yardwork they do. Let's say, hypothetically, in one of the vulnerable groups that are talked about often because they're the least likely to actually fill out the census and are the most likely to be threatened with these fines, there is a single mother with three kids who doesn't want to tell the government how much time she spends with her kids or how much time she spends doing yardwork. We go to her twice and she respectfully tells us she doesn't want to answer those questions—for whatever reason, it doesn't matter. Then the census official pulls out a total refusal form—I don't know if citizens know this—and fills out a part of the total refusal form where they write down the exact words used by the person who has refused and fill out a section on the description of the person who refused: age, gender, height, weight, other physical details such as facial hair, tattoos, glasses, birthmarks, distinctive clothing, etc.

They fill that out on the total refusal form because someone doesn't want to tell them how much yardwork he or she did last week. Does that seem an acceptable role for government to endorse?

• (0950)

**Mr. James L. Turk:** Thank you, Mr. Lake, for your questions.

First of all, your opening comment is that we all like information. Actually, I think you should amend that. We all like valid and reliable information. The issue at point here is whether the information that will come from a voluntary replacement for the long-form census will be valid and reliable. The answer is that it won't.

Secondly, on the question about how to gather and do you make it mandatory for citizens, as I understand it, the position of the Government of Canada is that it's perfectly okay to make the short form mandatory, but not the long form. So presumably the same things to which you're objecting will continue in place, merely for a shorter version of questions.

As well, we require information from citizens, mandatory information about their income, when they fill out their income tax form, and there are very serious penalties in that regard.

The point is that we have a collective responsibility, as well as an individual one, and in order for the needs of all Canadians to be met, there's a certain level of valid and reliable information required, as my colleagues as witness have been giving you examples of. We can give you examples as long as you have time to listen to them, about how it's essential for the federal government, for provincial governments, for municipal governments, for community organizations, and for businesses to have reliable and valid information in order to plan things as mundane as what bus routes are the most suitable to meet the needs of the population or in what kinds of communities should various social programs be located. In the absence of the long-form census, our governments can't provide that.

That's the key issue. Are we going to serve the people of this country, or are we not? Eliminating the long-form census is a disservice to every single Canadian.

• (0955)

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Okay, I have a couple of thoughts on that.

First of all, in regard to the short form, the government has certainly maintained the mandatory short-form census for all Canadians. I'm glad you made that point, because I think there's some misunderstanding. I've seen headlines about scrapping the census. There has been no scrapping of the census, and it's important that you made that point.

Of course, the government has made a decision that when we're talking about the balance of information and the role of government in collecting information, certainly collecting information about who lives where, which is on the short form, and collecting information about the age distribution of our population, which is on the short form, is important information to gather. In fact, I would argue that most of the examples cited in terms of other levels of government and organizations using census data for their decision-making actually refer to questions that are on the short form and are going to continue to be mandatory for all Canadians to answer.

I want to move, if I could, to Mr. Lam.

You talked a little bit about concerns about the accuracy of the long form. At a previous committee meeting, we had Darrell Bricker here before us, and one of the things he talked about was that when you force people to answer questions they don't want to answer,

there are significant concerns about the accuracy of the information you're getting. Perhaps that's where we get, for example, on the religion question in 2001, 21,000 Canadians who said they were Jedi Knights of the Jedi Knight religion. So there may be questions in terms of the type of information they get.

Certainly in my conversations with the individuals who the Liberal Party doesn't want to talk to but certainly we want to talk to, they express the same thing. In fact, I've had several people say, "You know what? I filled it out because it was mandatory. I didn't want to fill it out, but I certainly didn't feel obligated to get into great detail in terms of the answers that I was giving."

Maybe you could speak to that a little bit, sir, that concern that you brought up.

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

Very briefly, Mr. Lam.

**Mr. Joseph Lam:** Okay.

It's strange, though, that sometimes people, just for the sake of it, fill out the form and put in all kinds of information, but the thing is, how are you going to verify the truthfulness of the information?

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

Mr. Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today.

To start, I think I'd like to follow a little bit along the line of what Mr. Lake was talking about, the veracity of witnesses and their experience.

Mr. Lam, how many times have you actually filled out the census, the long-form census?

**Mr. Joseph Lam:** The long form has 40 pages, right?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** How many times have you actually filled it out? Have you actually?

**Mr. Joseph Lam:** No.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** You've never filled it out.

**Mr. Joseph Lam:** No. Maybe I'm just the lucky one. I didn't receive it.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Okay, so you've never actually gone through the process of filling out a long-form census.

**Mr. Joseph Lam:** No, but I've heard people say that there are 40 pages and they just look through it and feel that....

Sometimes I can see their problem, because they don't want to reveal their personal information. If you put them in jail, maybe.... I don't know.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Well, nobody has actually been put in jail. Do you know anybody who has actually been put in jail for not filling out the census?

**Mr. Joseph Lam:** Have they had to put people in jail?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** No, it has never happened in Canadian history. It has almost become surreal. It's almost like a Salvador Dali painting in the sense that we actually lock people up for not answering the census. I think that has pretty well proven itself to be beyond the ridiculous.

Mr. Henderson, how many times have you filled out the census?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** The long form, once.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** You mentioned in your testimony that it was burdensome and there was a cost. How much do you think it cost you, financially, to fill out the long-form census?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** In dollar value, it would be hard to say, but we had to involve accountants and it did take a considerable amount of my own personal time to do this.

• (1000)

**Mr. Brian Masse:** So you had to engage an accountant.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes, we did, to get accurate figures.

**The Chair:** That was the agricultural census.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Okay. I've done it once before as well, but I didn't need an accountant. Obviously you're doing much better than I am.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Well, you're probably more up to date on it than I am.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** No, I don't think so. But it is important to note, though, that there is that element.

Mr. Henderson, we have a choice to make in this country. We can continue to do the things we're doing now and have this information—and yes, you personally had to go through other means to finish what you're supposed to do as a citizen, and I appreciate that—or alternatively, if we go to what's being proposed, more people will actually get a voluntary census, so more people are actually going to be contacted. There will be TV ads, phone calls, and information put in your letter box and it'll cost you more money.

Is that something you would prefer, that it would actually cost more money and you'd be contacted more, and to have more people contact you?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I've been down that road as well with phone calls, and they're not pleasant either.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** But you're going to get more, though.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I realize that.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** And you'd prefer that.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I think that is easier than the ordeal we went through with this long-form census.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** But this is what we're going to get, though. If you have your choice to make, you would prefer to have more contact and pay more money as a taxpayer.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes, I believe so, rather than what we went through with that long-form census.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** That's fair. It's important to recognize, though, that this is what's going to happen with Canadians. You're also going to get that no matter what.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I'm not sure if this long-form census was the same as everybody else filled out, but with the agriculture form, it's quite extensive.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Yes. That's a different one than the regular census.

**The Chair:** Mr. Masse, I think Mr. Henderson was referring to filling out the agricultural census.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Okay. So you haven't filled out the regular long-form census.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes, I have.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** And the agriculture one.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** The agricultural census, though, is the one for which you required the accountant.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** That's important to clarify.

I'll open this question, then, to the rest of the panel, in terms of the actual process that's going to be involved: Do you think it will be more burdensome or less burdensome for Canadians?

This is one of the things that has been promoted, that things are going to get easier if we actually go to a voluntary census, but the reality is that it's going to cost more money and there's going to be more contact.

We've had the veracity of the data basically contested by many experts, but I think ordinary Canadians who are out there just want to know, are they going to get more contact and more disturbance, or are they going to get less? I think they're actually going to get more, and that's a real issue.

**The Chair:** We'll begin with Mr. Cappe, and then we'll go to Mr. Turk.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** It is very clear that there will be more people contacted. So instead of, as Mr. McKinnon noted, once every quarter century, it'll be more frequently that I will be contacted by government, but it will be less burdensome. Let's accept that it will be less burdensome.

I can choose not to fill out the form and there are no penalties. That's the problem of reliability, as Mr. Turk, Mr. McKinnon, and I raised. You will not have a reliable output, but it will be less burdensome.

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

Mr. Ornstein.

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** Let me first say something about the burden. One-fifth of the population gets the mandatory census every five years, so I would get one every 25 years.

Actually, only one is filled out per household, typically, and one person in the household would do it. So perhaps every 25 years I'd fill out, on average, half a census. So over 50 years, I would fill out a full census, which would take 20 or 30 minutes. It seems to me that the whole issue of the amount of burden is colossally inflated.

Let me make a second point. I'm struck by the notion that the burden isn't balanced by the community benefit. The nature of the way in which this debate is being phrased is that there are only costs. This is, of course, why the government didn't consult with the users before making this decision. This thing is being put forward as having costs but really no benefits.

About one-third of Canadians will get the voluntary proposed form, versus 20%. So there will be about a 30%, 40%, or 50% increase in the burden on the population with this new form.

● (1005)

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

Mr. McKinnon.

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** I look at it in a similar way to Michael. To me, it's what is the cost or burden to the individual and what is the benefit that the individual or his or her family derives. The burden may be a bit less, especially if you're bitterly opposed to answering some questions. On the other hand, the benefits drop dramatically under this circumstance. We go from having good, reliable information from which governments, individuals, and voluntary organizations can make good decisions, to that being thrown seriously in doubt.

I'd say the burden is similar or will maybe drop a bit, but the benefits drop dramatically. The balance swings very disproportionately.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. McKinnon and Mr. Masse.

Monsieur Bélanger.

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

My first question is for Mr. McKinnon.

Sir, in the previous session we had, there was considerable discussion on the confidentiality of the information gathered. Today the concern about confidentiality was brought up. What we heard last time was that there has not been a single incident in the history of Statistics Canada where any information gathered by a census has been revealed. Can you confirm that?

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Although I won't speak specifically on behalf of Statistics Canada, I know of no instance in the last 40 or 50 years in which individual census returns have been revealed either to another agency of government or to a business, a researcher, or the public.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Chartier.

Mr. Chartier, in law there's a concept of honour of the crown, which places a particular obligation on the government to consult with the aboriginal communities in terms of any decisions that might affect them. The last time we met, we had a representative from the Inuit community and I asked her if indeed there had been any consultation from the crown, from the government, vis-à-vis her community. The answer was "No, there has not".

Did the government consult the Métis National Council or any of the Métis community before it made the decision to scrap the mandatory long-form census?

**Mr. Clément Chartier:** The short answer is "no".

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you, sir.

I have some questions for Mr. Cappe.

In your letter to the Prime Minister—well, it's not your letter; it's a letter signed by 30 people, or so—you say this course was tested and tried in the United States: Tests of a move from mandatory to voluntary in the U.S. yielded unsatisfactory results and the process was dropped.

Could you elaborate a bit, please?

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** I don't have the particular details around that. Perhaps Mr. McKinnon does. I know that in the U.S. the attempt proved to be unreliable, and we go to the question again of the benefit.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. McKinnon, can you add to that?

Also, I have one more question for Mr. Cappe.

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** I would add several things to that, but first to compliment the United States on the mechanism. They were looking at the issue of moving away from a mandatory census, or portion of the census, so they tested it. They took several years and got very serious about testing.

Their conclusions were as follows.

They would lose approximately 30%. There were certain groups—ethnic and racial minorities, poor people, and the wealthiest people—who would be heavily under-represented and there would be no way to benchmark the results.

The second finding was that the costs would increase dramatically, and to push response rates beyond the 70% range, which is still unacceptably low, became impossibly expensive.

The third and very interesting finding was counterintuitive. One of the things they tested was a question raised earlier by Mr. Lake, which is whether you get better quality answers item by item by having it voluntary, because people could opt out of questions. They looked very carefully at analyses of item responses and what is called "item non-response". I think it would have been to my surprise—I don't know what their researchers thought going in—that they could find no difference. It was counterintuitive, but that's why we do research, to find out whether the things that seem intuitively appealing or clear in fact are proven out.

● (1010)

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** And this was done during the Bush administration.

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Yes.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you.

My final question is for Mr. Cappe.

You mentioned the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which I have also read and have right in front of me. I don't know if we could say Canada was a signatory, but it is my understanding that it has endorsed these principles. Is that correct?

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** Yes, that's my understanding.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** If you were to look at principles 2 and 3, would you conclude that the decision to abandon the long-form census respects either of those principles?

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** My comment in my opening remarks was to suggest that the committee should look actually at principles 2, 3, and 4, because those principles deal with trust in official statistics, with the correct interpretation of the data, and with the statistical agencies—and this is an important point—entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics.

In the circumstances that arose this summer, Mr. Sheikh, the Chief Statistician, was unable to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics until in his resignation statement he made the point. I think we need to find a vehicle to allow the professional in charge of the statistical agency to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics, as well as correct the interpretation of the data that you've identified in principle 3, and retain the trust in official statistics, in principle 2.

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

Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, everybody, for coming in on a Friday.

I'm going to start with Mr. Henderson and probably go over to Mr. Chartier, and if I have time, I'm going to get back to you, Joseph.

Mr. Henderson, I think a lot of the people around this table don't understand what farmers have to go through with the agricultural census and the long form at the same time.

Of course, that form comes out in May. What are you doing in May?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** That's our calving season and seeding operations.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** So you're busy every day, night and day. You're calving at night and seeding during the day. Basically, you are doing all of that for the month of May. Is that correct?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Of course, if you don't fill it out, when do they call you back to get you to do so? It's in September. What are you doing in September?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** We've harvesting then.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I think I can go right across Canada and look at the census of agriculture and ask, why is this being thrown on their desks during the two busiest seasons of their occupations? It doesn't make sense.

There is a 40-page long form, and then with another 16 pages added on top of that, you actually have to complete 56 pages in the busiest time of the year, either in May or in September. Is that correct?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** And if you don't do it, what's the threat?

• (1015)

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I believe we've all heard it.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** The threat is jail.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** They're easy to threaten. I know I've talked to my neighbours, and they've had the threats. I feel sorry for these guys, because they work like crazy, and then all of a sudden they have to do this.

If you look at September, we have so many warm, good harvesting days, and sure enough, they want this done on that day when you can be combining. So you basically have to shut down your operations.

It depends whether you have one or two combines, but Mr. Masse, if you realized, if you had two combines going in a day, that would probably be two quarters of lentils. The cost of just a loss in production on that day could be \$30,000 or \$40,000, if not more.

Plus, if you have hired an accountant, that's going to take probably 10 hours, so that's probably another \$2,000 or \$3,000.

There is a burden here, a huge burden. Does it make sense? I guess that's the question.

Mr. Chartier, I just want to pass on greetings from Ms. Glover. She said to say hi to you. She is an aboriginal and a Métis in our caucus. We have three Métis and three aboriginals in our caucus.

I must say, it was good to see you in Batoche. It was a great event and your comments there were interesting, if not humorous.

I'm just curious. In your association, where is this on your priority list? You have lots of issues to deal with. Is this in your top 10 or top 20?

**Mr. Clément Chartier:** Actually, I didn't think it would be a major issue when I first heard of it, because I'm not engaged in that particular level. But just two days before Batoche we had a national conference on the post-Powley legacy on Métis nation rights and research. One of the predominant questions was with respect to the long-form census, and direction was given to me to raise it and state that it needs to be retained.

In fact, shortly after that, I went to the Métis Nation of Alberta—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** What was the basis for that? Again, coming back to my question on your priority list of issues with Métis associations, Métis issues are ones that I'm learning a lot about and there's a lot more to learn.

I know this great lady in Prince Albert by the name of Darlene McKay, who has just been wonderful. I tell you, you can give that lady a dollar and she'll make it work like \$10. It's just amazing what she can do. When I asked her about this issue, it wasn't on her radar at all.

So I'm just kind of curious. How big an issue is it in your association?

**Mr. Clément Chartier:** As I was about to say, I went to the Métis Nation of Alberta assembly about three weeks ago, and on the weekend in Ontario, and it was a very hot topic, very much spoken about. People want to have it retained because of, as I mentioned in my opening comments, the significance of it to our people. We rely on that data—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** So that data is there, in the short form. What's in the long form that they want to see retained?

**Mr. Clément Chartier:** I'll leave that for the experts.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Again, I'm talking specifically towards the Métis association, because that is a concern if there's something that the association feels is important in the long form. I guess you should identify what those issues are.

I think you'd have to understand, a lot of people have this conception that the census is gone. There's a lot of confusion out there in all the associations and the general population that they won't even have to do a census. Well, that's not right. They will have to do a census. There's still the basic data that's going to be garnered; it's just that they won't be subjected to what farmers such as Mr. Henderson were: 56 pages of harassment during the busiest time of the year.

I'm going to move on to you, Joseph. I've been in Hong Kong and I know what you mean about the infrastructure and their ability to do the infrastructure.

You touched on the efficiencies. You talked about using technology from 1971. Are there things that Statistics Canada could be doing now that would make it easier to gather this data? Instead of trying to do it all at once, could it be staged in such a way that it could actually be more convenient and accurate? Do you have any opinions on that?

**Mr. Joseph Lam:** Yes. Actually, in a lot of areas you can collect the data—let's say through the financial sector.

Here is a good example. Let's say you want to open a Tim Hortons in any mall or any financial district. Of course, you have to go through the demographic study to find out, if you put the money there, will you make money. So there you go, and you can collect the information from there, and also the credit history. There are lots of areas where you can collect data. It's not only by going through and filling out the form.

They take 20% of the population. Perhaps half of them finish it and it might not really be 100% who put in their own information. So the truth of the matter is that it is in question. Are we going to rely on that?

Europe is changing it. A lot of places are changing it.

Also, since we're talking about costs, I want to know exactly what the costs are—if anyone can answer my question. What does it cost for the 40-page form to be filled out?

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lam and Mr. Hoback.

Monsieur Cardin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, gentlemen, and welcome to this committee meeting.

There has clearly been much talk about the census among Canadians. Some claim that it's too expensive, too long and intrusive. People are talking about its length, which is apparently what some find bothersome. However, the 40 pages could be divided into two. The questions could be divided into at least two parts because, based on the number of individuals, there are more pages to fill out.

People are saying that the census is too expensive, and that made me ask myself some serious questions. Some even believe that education is too costly. However, ignorance is much costlier. We are talking about an important source of information. If I were the prime minister of a large country like Quebec, for instance, my first thought would be that, overall, there are not that many questions. There could be even more of them, in my view. I would not be talking about removing, but rather about adding questions. One could say that the survey is lacking certain information that could help in implementing societal projects and in economic policy making.

There are some special cases. Apparently, farmers will be given a 56-page form to complete. Obviously, a successful farmer makes use of an accountant. That person could do two things at once, including filling out the form. I believe that we need this source of information. The information gathered, of course, must remain confidential, but I would like to know, Messrs. Cappe, McKinnon, Turk and Ornstein, what information you would mind divulging in the questionnaire. Maybe you would not be keen on disclosing your salary, but the department already has that information.

I am asking myself some serious questions. I would like to know why, in your opinion, this debate is going in this direction and why the government would want to deny itself information necessary to the implementation of policies in place. When the government brings into force policies that are not based on relevant information, it often ends up spending money needlessly. Instead of being stubborn and arguing about whether or not to keep the form, we should be looking into ways of getting more out of the census.

• (1020)

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** I was also disappointed to note that the question on the number of bathrooms, which had been asked for decades, was removed. I believe that this question is very important because, among other things, it provides information about the location of wells. Unfortunately, it was removed from the form. There was a process launched to determine which 30, 40 or 60 questions—I'm not sure of the exact number—are essential. In my opinion, that is what we are trying to do.

I agree with the government when it comes to minimizing intrusion and coercion. However, we should also recognize that public interest has something to do with all this. Everyone will want us to select their questions, which they consider necessary, but a process could be implemented to determine which questions are essential.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. McKinnon.

[English]

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Thank you, Monsieur Cardin.

I would like to make several observations. The first is that I agree wholeheartedly that the information that comes from the census underpins and supports fact-based decision-making and discussion. It doesn't guide one towards a particular policy output, but it means that when you make your decisions you analyze the information and you are basing them on fact.

There is a second issue I would raise, and I would respectfully disagree to some degree. Even if questions aren't very invasive or personal, I think it's of fundamental importance that people's privacy and the privacy of their return be protected. I think Statistics Canada and the ISQ, l'Institut de la statistique du Québec, have stellar records, some of the best in the world, in ensuring and protecting privacy. So whether the question is invasive or one that I'm happy to share with the world, it's still extremely important that we live up to the standards that Statistics Canada has set.

I obviously, in the end, come down to this being extremely important to Quebec, to my province of British Columbia, and to Canadians as a whole in trying to improve the situation of every citizen.

• (1025)

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

Lastly, Mr. Ornstein. Very briefly, please.

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** First, the census is extraordinary in that the entire questionnaire is approved by the cabinet. So the notion that these things come out of midair and there's no reason for them is ridiculous. That doesn't mean we shouldn't examine what's there and consider change, but there is a reason for the questions.

Let me just give as an example the question about the number of bedrooms. The reason you ask a question about the number of bedrooms is to find out whether people are crowded in housing. The question is not absolutely about the number of bedrooms, the question is to get at the adequacy of housing in the country. That's what it's there for. You may say this is not a policy priority, you may say it shouldn't be in the census from now on, but the point is that there is a reason for its being there.

Statistics Canada is under enormous pressure always to have more questions, because there are more issues that you want to address. So the idea that there is no reason just makes no sense.

Change is good, but the census does not have questions there for no reason.

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

Mr. Wallace.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests for coming in today.

I have a few comments to make. This is the first meeting that I've had an opportunity to be at to discuss the long form, and I appreciate the date chosen, with three days difference from what we had when we were at the planning meeting a few weeks ago.

I'm going to give you a scenario that's an accurate one, from somebody who has told me about this, somebody who I know and I trust is telling me something accurate, and I would just like a yes or no answer as to whether you think it's appropriate.

The individual was filling out the long form. This person is in his sixties and his parents were born in Canada. His grandparents were born in Canada. Four of his great-grandparents were born in Canada. On the form, this individual marked "native Canadian"—no offence to our native Canadians, but he marked "native Canadian". An individual called from StatsCan to tell him that they wanted his Indian card number.

The spouse told them that the individual was not Indian and didn't have an Indian card number. StatsCan said, "Well, no, he does," because he had marked "native Canadian" on the long form. The spouse said, "Well, I've been married to him for 40 years. I don't think he's native Canadian. I'm absolutely positive he's not aboriginal. You can call back and talk to him".

They did call back and talk to that individual. There was an explanation and a discussion that this individual believed he was native Canadian, but the person from StatsCan said to him, "Well, sir, do you know that it carries a penalty of \$500 or jail time for you providing that misinformation?" So the information was corrected on the long form so that he didn't face a penalty.

We all know that nobody has gone to jail for that, but the fact is that somebody from government called this individual because they didn't like the response on the long form.

My first question is, do you think it's appropriate that the government, StatsCan, called this individual and threatened him with jail time or a fine because they didn't like his answer?

I'm happy if anyone would like to answer that. I'm just looking for a yes or a no.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** I would put the question back to you, sir. Do you

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Yes, I'm sure you would, but you don't have that opportunity. I'm asking you the question.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** You're raising a substantive point.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Right.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** Is the question clear? That's what the point is.

The point is, are the questions on the census clear, and are the answers that are available, to check the box, clear?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Sir, that is correct. That should be changed.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** Well, blame the cabinet. They agreed to that.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I was asking the question whether an individual from government should—

**The Chair:** One moment here. One person at a time will be recognized by the chair.

Mr. Cappe, have you finished your point?

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** Thank you. I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** Are there any other witnesses who wish to respond?

Mr. McKinnon, go ahead.

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Part of the materials that accompany the census and early statements on it ask people for a telephone number, in part to clarify with people answers that are not understood by Statistics Canada. I'm sure that it was in pursuit of clarifying what the person's intent and meaning was that such a call would originate.

Thank you.

• (1030)

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

Mr. Wallace, you have the floor.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Maybe my colleagues from the academic world or the National Statistics Council can answer my next question.

The mandatory piece had a 95% return rate. Of that 95%, how many Canadians do you believe, based on some empirical data you've read, responded only because they were facing a penalty of either a fine or a jail term? Or were they doing it out of duty of being Canadian, that they thought it was good that Canada, the government, had that information so they could plan public social services for those individuals?

**The Chair:** Mr. Wallace, is that directed to Mr. McKinnon?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I would ask Mr. McKinnon to answer, or Mr. Ornstein.

**The Chair:** We'll start with Mr. McKinnon, and then go to Mr. Ornstein and Mr. Cappe.

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Thank you for the question. That's in fact exactly at the heart of the experiment that the United States conducted. We get a given percentage of response—in their case, in the low nineties—from a mandatory census.

What percentage would we get in response to what's called the "American community survey" if it were on a voluntary basis but we explained the purposes and strongly encouraged people to respond?

The answer is that without arduous follow-up the percentage point difference is about 30%. So if you're assuming that the only difference is whether it's mandatory or not, the answer is about 30% of Canadians.

I think, in part, it's not that 30% of Canadians are dragged kicking and screaming, but rather, part of its being a mandatory census tells those respondents that your country really cares and this is very important to do. So I think some proportion of that 30% reflects their response to the government saying this is important, it matters, and you must fill it out.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Briefly, Mr. Ornstein, and then Mr. Cappe.

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** I agree with Mr. McKinnon. This is an empirical question, so there's experience on which to base an answer. The answer is that about 20% or 25% would not answer if the survey were not mandatory.

Let me say one other thing. The key thing is identifying the mandatory census as an aspect of citizenship. Everybody has talked about the cost, but the notion of the mandatory census is that it

involves a commitment to your fellow citizens. You're providing something at your cost, but there is a community benefit.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Cappe.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** Mr. Wallace made the point that some people feel that it's a duty. I think that's important. When it's mandatory, people understand that it's a duty.

The problem with the debate of this summer has been that the public has been told that you don't have to do it. I think the message out there is "Don't bother".

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** We didn't tell them.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Cappe and Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me back up here a bit. The reality of what we have right now is that it is the policy of current Prime Minister and the current cabinet to have a fine and jail time if you don't fill out your census form. If they really wanted something different, they would have actually tabled that legislation, because it requires an amendment to the law over the last number of years. That's the reality we're dealing with right here.

So the nonsense that continues around the threat that you're going to be locked up, put away, incarcerated, because you don't fill out your census form, which is being propagated by the government, is irresponsible on many fronts. The most important one—and I hope the media picks this up at some point in time—is the fact and the reality that it is their policy. The minister has said he will change the legislation, but he could have changed the legislation at any point in time over the last number of years.

That bill will actually have to be tabled in the House of Commons. The House of Commons will have to debate that bill and then move it to committee. It will then have to be studied at committee, if we so choose, and returned to the House for another vote.

So the continuation of the situation about this being Canadians—farmers, new immigrants, and people who don't necessarily understand the census—who are going to actually be locked up, fined, and harassed is an absolute sham to this institution and to our democracy, because the reality is, once again, the minister has to change the legislation through law, which requires procedural elements in the House of Commons that he has chosen not to do, the Prime Minister has chosen not to do, and the cabinet has chosen not to do.

It's a complete distraction from the reality that is taking place here. We are going to lose valuable information necessary for a civil society to actually function and to actually move forward. That's what's really unfortunate and tragic about this, the mere fact that we are not only giving up our current database system that is necessary to make important decisions about taxpayers' money, but we are also going to forgo all the previous information and the comparable data necessary to plan a democratic country properly.

I would invite any comments.

•(1035)

**The Chair:** Mr. Cappe.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** That was a statement and I don't have a comment, but there is an issue here that I want to come back to, something Mr. Lake raised about whether it was appropriate for people from StatsCan to harass.

It is appropriate for Statistics Canada to enforce section 31 of the Statistics Act. Parliament has spoken about this. The law is on the books. The problem I think Mr. Masse is pointing to is that 2011 will be here very soon.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Turk.

**Mr. James L. Turk:** I just want to comment on Mr. Masse's comment. The government is acting as though it's the opposition. It's criticizing the policies of the Government of Canada, which it has the ability to change.

As well, there's a good deal of misinformation that has been identified this morning by members of the government. Information about Métis status is not on the short form.

It was claimed by Mr. Lake that most of the examples that we and various witnesses provided today of the value of the long form are examples from the short form. That's absolutely false. The short form has only eight questions, or is it 10 now?

**A voice:** Yes, with the questions on official languages.

**Mr. James L. Turk:** It's very minimal.

Finally, to be clear on the burden, one out of five Canadians fills it out and it's every five years. You fill it out for your household, and there are 2.5 people in your household. When you do the math, that means the average Canadian would expect to have to fill out a long form once every 67.5 years, and it takes 30 minutes.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. McKinnon.

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Thank you.

One of the elements that this portion of the discussions highlights for me is that it's important to look to solutions. There are very important things at stake in having the information that has been provided by the long-form census, but equally there have been issues raised such as the burden on some farmers—and I would add, not only through the census of agriculture, but farmers often get additional surveys that they need to fill out. We need to examine that.

Everyone seems to be fully in agreement that jail is inappropriate, and I can tell you from an empirical basis that censuses run just fine internationally without it. There are lots of elements that would say to me to protect the vital information that is generated now by having a mandatory alternative to the census and get really serious about examining in detail respondent burden for agriculture, ways of ensuring the ethnic communities are there, and looking at the penalties and processes. That can be done well before the next census.

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

Mr. Lake, please go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Turk, I have a few questions for you.

In 2006, Statistics Canada asked how much a household spent annually on water. Are you aware of that? That was a mandatory question, of course.

•(1040)

**Mr. James L. Turk:** I'm not aware of that.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Okay, but it is one of the mandatory questions. Someone who didn't want to answer that question would be threatened with jail time or a fine.

**Mr. James L. Turk:** No, somebody who didn't want to answer that question wouldn't answer it. That person still might complete the whole form.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** But they would be threatened with a \$500 fine. It's a \$500 fine under the Statistics Act for any question you don't answer, right?

**Mr. James L. Turk:** I'd be surprised if there was a single Canadian who was fined \$500 for not answering a question about how much he or she spent on water.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** I said they would be threatened with a fine. I don't know whether they were fined or not.

Obviously, household spending on water is important information.

**Mr. James L. Turk:** It is, actually.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Annual household spending on shelter obviously is important. Are you aware that was a mandatory question as well?

That's a "yes". Okay.

What about annual household spending on transportation? Would you agree that's also important information?

**Mr. James L. Turk:** Indeed.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Okay.

And annual household information on food is important as well.

**Mr. James L. Turk:** I'd point out that the cabinet of the Government of Canada thought it was important, too, because it was in the questionnaire.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Actually it wasn't.

**Mr. James L. Turk:** It wasn't?

**Mr. Mike Lake:** No, questions on food and transportation weren't actually in the long form.

You seem surprised at that. Then you would probably include those as mandatory questions in the long form.

**Mr. James L. Turk:** Mr. Lake, the problem every census is that there are many more questions we would like to ask and governments and community groups need in order to plan, and there has to be a trade-off as to what can be included to reach a balance in terms of the appropriate length relative to the appropriate information desired. There are many, many questions that many of us would like answered, that governments at the federal, provincial, and local level and community agencies would feel valuable and could use, that aren't included. The problem is not that we ask superfluous questions; the problem is that there are a lot of questions we can't ask.

My colleague, Michael Ornstein, who works with these data all the time, could elaborate if you'd like.

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** Probably you think it's important to study poverty. The census is used to study poverty and to study differentials in poverty between racialized groups. It's used to study poverty of first nations people.

It turns out that one of the reasons people are poor is because their housing is expensive. So one of the reasonable things to do in the census is to ask people about their income and the cost of their housing.

One of the problems with the cost of their housing is that you can't ask a single question and measure it accurately. You need a series of questions, and that's the reason.

So the reason that the question about water is in there is because it's an element of housing cost, housing cost is an important element of poverty, and we use the census to study poverty because it's an important aspect of—

**The Chair:** Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Of course, food is probably an important issue for people dealing with poverty and it's not a mandatory question. I find it kind of interesting that food and transportation are not mandatory questions, but shelter and water are.

I want to continue with you, Mr. Ornstein. You talk about poverty, and I think we're all concerned about poverty. One of the things that has been expressed is that one of the most likely groups not to answer a voluntary survey—and it would extend to a mandatory census—would be poorer Canadians.

Let's take as an example a single mother with three kids who's living around the poverty line or below the poverty line. They have someone knock on their door and ask them how much time they spent doing housework last week. If they don't want to answer that question, for whatever reason, do you think it's appropriate to threaten them with a \$500 fine?

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** No, I don't think it's appropriate to threaten them with a \$500 fine.

I don't think that's what the issue is at all. I think what you're doing is taking absolutely untypical, single complaints and trying to deal with policy in this way. I think your entire approach to this is completely inappropriate.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** So if she says, "You know what? I don't want to tell you how much time I spent with my kids last week," if she just doesn't want to answer for whatever reason, should she be fined \$500?

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** No.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Okay.

If a new Canadian doesn't want to answer a question about his or her religion, doesn't want to answer that question for whatever reason, should that individual be fined \$500?

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** I don't think the issue has to do with fines.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** But that's what the law says. That's what you're here to testify against, the change we're making. So I just want to clarify.

• (1045)

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** So do you think the law should be changed?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** It's their law.

**The Chair:** Order. Mr. Lake has the floor.

Mr. Lake, will you finish your intervention and then we'll hear from the witness? Go ahead, Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** It's your law.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** The changes we're making take away the fines.

So again, do you believe that a new Canadian who doesn't want to tell the government what his or her religion is should be threatened with a fine of \$500?

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

Mr. Ornstein, go ahead. You have the floor.

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** I think the answer is "no".

In Australia, for example, there's a small fine for not voting. Voting is a mandatory thing in Australia. So I think small fines are appropriate. But the thing is that if you're trying to understand the character of the population, if you're trying to have evidence-based policy, you need the information that's in the long-form census, and I sense that you're just not addressing that at all.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lake and Mr. Ornstein.

Mr. McCallum.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair; and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Just to provide a little bit of perspective, I find it quite astounding that, in the year 2010, here we are debating the triumph of ignorance over knowledge, but I guess that's where we are. I'd like to suggest that this is not just an academic, esoteric issue, but an issue affecting real people in real ways. I'd like to give two examples of that and then ask the panel—perhaps Mr. McKinnon and Mr. Turk—whether they have other examples.

The first example is a friend of mine whose name is John Richards. He is a professor at Simon Fraser University who has been studying aboriginal issues, particularly education, for about five years. He told me that, if we didn't have the long-form census, we wouldn't even know how many aboriginals there were, let alone their situation vis-à-vis health and education. Since aboriginals are one of the poorest groups of Canadians, I think that is important for good policy and that's a practical case.

The second example is my riding. Markham is hugely multi-cultural. About 40% of the people are Chinese. Maybe 15% or 20% are South Asian. There are many, many new Canadians. I think the new Canadians would also be under-represented, partly for linguistic reasons, in filling out a voluntary census. So they would be poorly served for the kinds of services, language training and other things, that new Canadians need when they come to Canada.

Those are two concrete examples of how real people, often disadvantaged people, would be negatively impacted.

Perhaps I could start with Mr. Turk. Can you give us other examples of that nature? I think it's important that we bring this down to reality so that people can understand why we're talking about this esoteric issue at such length.

**Mr. James L. Turk:** Thank you for your question.

The question cuts to the heart of the matter. While there is all this rhetoric about fines and everything, the real issue is, how do we best serve Canadians? What you're debating here comes down to very real penalties for Canadians.

Before we came in, my colleague, Mike Ornstein, and I were talking about this. He had some wonderful examples. I'll actually defer to him to share, rather than my repeating some of the ones he shared with me just before the meeting.

**Mr. Michael Ornstein:** I have just two very brief examples.

I did some research for the Portuguese Canadian National Congress and spoke to them about the educational attainment of Portuguese Canadians. Portuguese Canadians are actually extraordinary. In a certain way, they've been very successful. They have relatively high incomes. But compared to other European groups, in fact compared to all ethno-racial groups, they have very low levels of education. This is a huge concern for the Portuguese community.

You can understand the logic of it. Many of them go into the construction industry. A lot of boys don't finish high school. But it is a huge concern for the community. So part of this research has to do with outreach in the schools. University attendance is one thing, but a big issue for them is completion of high school, especially by boys.

There are just an extraordinary number of examples like this. I've done similar research for African Canadian groups in Toronto.

As one final example, for the Law Society of Upper Canada I have used the census to look at the proportion of women, first nations people, and visible minorities who are lawyers in Ontario. Not only can you look at the numbers, because there are statistics on income and a variety of other things, but you can look at income differentials over time.

The whole thing about the census is that it's an extraordinarily multi-purpose instrument. There are all kinds of uses of the census that were never envisaged when the census was planned.

• (1050)

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

Mr. McKinnon, and then Mr. Cappe.

**Mr. Ian McKinnon:** Let me give you a simple example. You raised the issue of aboriginals. One of the strengths of the census is that you can get micro area data. You get very small, local data. It's not just to serve individuals or to generate demand. It can also serve to help keep our institutions and service providers responsive.

In British Columbia, we have a lot of data looking at student outcomes. One of the keys for aboriginal success in a life trajectory is to do well in school. If you just look at school-level data and ask who's performing well, who's graduating a lot of kids, who's sending

them to university, you find, typically, upper-middle-class schools in affluent suburbs. But children don't have the option of being born only to parents where both parents have a university education.

There was a recent study done by the C.D. Howe Institute that looked at educational outcomes and took into account the neighbourhood characteristics, the micro characteristics from the census. Low and behold, all of a sudden it's not just West Point Grey Academy in Vancouver, the affluent suburbs of Victoria, and one or two high schools around the city but real progress being made in Prince Rupert by two schools with lots of aboriginal kids. So that tells us, "Let's go and see what they're doing there, because those institutions are working and we can learn from that to help other aboriginal children province-wide". We're holding the institutions accountable by that small-area census data.

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

Lastly, Mr. Cappe.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** I have three points to make.

In answer to Mr. Lake's question earlier, Mr. Turk and Mr. Ornstein were afraid to say yes. I'm not. I think it is appropriate that they be threatened with fines in order to protect the integrity of the institution of StatsCan and the data.

In answer to Mr. McCallum's point, I don't believe we can reverse the enlightenment.

Of the two examples I would use, one is that the targeting of pandemic plans by the City of Toronto's public health authority was based on census track data to determine vulnerable populations and therefore protect the rich, because the poor might actually get H1N1. The other example is that the social determinants of health by census track, in general, allow us to measure how things develop, and I think that's very important.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cappe and Mr. McCallum.

Mr. Van Kesteren.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you all for attending.

Mr. McCallum had an interesting question. He mentioned something about the real people. It's interesting that he didn't ask the two real people. I'm not suggesting that any of you are not real people, but the people he was talking about are sitting right here at the table, so I'm going to give them an opportunity to respond to some of the questions he asked.

I think it's really important to once again set out clearly that what we're talking about is voluntary or mandatory. I really believe that if we give the real people a chance, two things are going to happen.

Number one, patriotic Canadians will respond wholeheartedly. If we tell people, "Folks, we need this information and we'd really like to have this information; we want you to contribute to this as well," I really think, be they marginalized, rich, poor, educated, or uneducated, we'll get a good cross-section.

Number two—and I think this is important—I know my constituents, because I do something called “Coffee and tea with the MP”. I get right down with my constituents. I buy them coffee. This is a little gadget I get. This was developed over a number of years. We have some pretty interesting conversations. It took a long time, but they trust me and I trust them. I think once we formulate this new pattern they're going to come to me and say, “Dave, why are they asking this?”, “Why are they asking that?”, “Why do we have to...?”, and that's really healthy. I think we're going to engage them.

Mr. Henderson, you mentioned that you had to spend some money. So I'm going to give some time to both you and Mr. Lam, the people who are really affected.

You had to spend some money to fill out your last one, and we heard how busy you were in that season too. But how would you feel if you knew that StatsCan was selling some of the information you sent them?

• (1055)

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I wouldn't be very happy about that.

**Mr. Mel Cappe:** What does that mean?

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Mr. Cappe, with all due respect, you've had lots of time. We're going to let some of the other people have a chance.

**The Chair:** Mr. Henderson has the floor right now. If he has anything to add, he can, and then we're going to go to Mr. Lam.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I'd like to know just a little more what you meant by the question.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Van Kesteren.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Statistics Canada gathers this information. There are groups that want access to it. They buy that information. How would you feel if you knew while you were filling it out that this was part of the process?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I wouldn't be very happy about that.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Of your friends and associates, are you alone when you believe that fines and jail are excessive?

Mr. Chair, can I get a little bit of order?

**The Chair:** You have the floor, Mr. Van Kesteren. Go ahead.

Mr. Henderson.

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Could I have the question again, please?

**The Chair:** Order.

Members of the committee, the witnesses are having trouble hearing the questions being put by Mr. Van Kesteren. I would ask that only those members and witnesses present recognized by the chair respond in this committee. Mr. Van Kesteren currently has the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Van Kesteren.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Mr. Henderson, among your friends and associates, are you alone in your belief that threatening fines and jail time is excessive for gathering that information? Are you alone in those feelings?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** I don't know if I'm alone or not. That's my feeling.

And it has been suggested that 30 minutes is the amount of time I need to fill out this form. It's more like three or four days. I don't think there's an awareness of what this form entails.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Okay, that's an interesting point. I'm not going to have enough time to go to that.

To go back to what I first stated, I suggested that if you give people the opportunity to do this without any threat of jail time or fines, if you engage Canadians...

Well, let me ask you the question: Would you wilfully submit this information if you were given that opportunity?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes, I would.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** It would just take you a little longer.

Did you know, for instance, when a census worker interviews you, he records your approximate height, your weight, and your hair colour as part of a follow-up process?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** No, I did not know that.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Have you ever written to the Privacy Commissioner about these concerns, or have you ever thought about doing that? Did you know you could do that?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** No, I didn't know that.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Would you probably agree that most Canadians don't realize they have the opportunity to do that?

**Mr. James P. Henderson:** Yes, I would agree.

**The Chair:** Mr. Van Kesteren, you have a little time left. I don't know if you want to hear also from Mr. Lam.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** I do want to ask Mr. Lam a few questions.

**The Chair:** Okay, go ahead.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** What do you think about the census, with the jail times and the fines? How do you feel about that?

We're going to talk about the special groups that Mr. McCallum was talking about, in his riding, the 40% who are Chinese. How do you think the 40% of the population who are Chinese feel about that aspect of the census?

**Mr. Joseph Lam:** We know why we come to Canada, because we have all kinds of freedom, such as freedom of speech and freedom of expression. But it seems to be that they take away your freedom if you have to answer questions that you don't want to fill in.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lam and Mr. Van Kesteren.

I want to thank all our witnesses for appearing and for their testimony.

The meeting is suspended until 11:30.

• (1055)

(Pause)

• (1130)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone.

[English]

Welcome.

As we resume today's meeting, we have in front of us the following witnesses as individuals: Mr. Veall, who is a professor in the department of economics at McMaster University;

[Translation]

Mr. Beaud, who is the dean of the Faculty of Political Science and Law at the University of Québec in Montréal;

[English]

and Mr. Rutherford, who is a broadcaster.

As well, we have Mr. Oh, from the Chinese Business Association.

[Translation]

We also have Mr. Bélisle, from the Federation of University Professors of Quebec.

[English]

We have Mr. Murdoch from the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg; and via video conference, Madame Vonn from the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association.

Each of the witnesses will be given five minutes for opening remarks, beginning with Professor Veall.

**Dr. Michael R. Veall (Professor, Department of Economics, McMaster University, As an Individual):** Thank you for this opportunity.

On July 6, on behalf of the executive of the Canadian Economics Association, I wrote a letter to Minister Clement asking for consultation on the census change and offering to do anything we could to assist. The letter makes the argument that the voluntary approach risks serious non-response bias and concludes that if there is inadequate time for such consultation, our view is that the risk of losing the embedded value in the census is too great and that the change should be delayed.

The elimination of jail time and fine reduction was also suggested, as was running mandatory and voluntary surveys in parallel so that a subsequent decision regarding voluntary surveys could be based on evidence.

The letter was respectful of the intrusiveness issue, and I would like to add that, as a person, I am also respectful of that issue. The problem is entirely the risk to the quality of data.

I would like to make one final remark, based on previous testimony to the committee, of July 27, when Mr. Bricker, a pollster, gave you the number that a likely response rate was 80%, based on his polling.

I'd like to point out that this number is probably biased high, because of course, it is the response to a voluntary poll, and people who aren't interested in responding to polls are likely just not to respond. So there's a problem with that number.

There have been test censuses run. The only published number that I'm aware of is for the 2008 test census, which had a response

rate of 46%. Test censuses are done on a voluntary basis. I view that number as almost surely too low.

The point is that it's very hard to know exactly what the response rate is going to be, and I think you should know that in your deliberations.

Thank you very much.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Beaud, you have the floor.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Beaud (Dean, Faculty of Political Science and Law, University of Québec in Montréal, As an Individual):** Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share some of my comments on the proposal to abolish the long-form questionnaire.

My name is Jean-Pierre Beaud. I am a political science professor, the dean of a faculty of political science and law and a researcher in an interuniversity research centre on science and technology. I will discuss the long-form census questionnaire based on my expertise not only in political science, but also in methodology, history and statistical sociology.

The first point is more specifically related to the analyses I have conducted as a political scientist. My colleague talked briefly about this issue earlier, but every citizen, even in Canada, must at least accept a few small constraints that enable us, as we say in political science, to live together. We pay our taxes, and if we fail to do so, we are penalized. We show our passport when entering the country. We provide proof of identification in order to access certain areas, such as Parliament. We answer questions that are sometimes very indiscreet in order to be able to perform certain occupations or, as in the case of Quebec, to rent an apartment. We must answer census questions once every five years. Once every 25 years on average, or at most two or three times in our lifetime, we will answer the long-form questionnaire. That's very little to ask, especially since the information we provide remains confidential and is basically aggregated with other information. When it comes to confidentiality, statistics bureaus, in Canada and abroad, have developed very elaborate protection mechanisms. They view confidentiality as a major issue, one which I believe they have resolved in a satisfactory manner.

The second point, which I will not discuss at length, touches on a common criticism from advocates for abolishing the mandatory long-form census. They claim that since Canadians are forced to answer questions even when they do not necessarily have a clear answer, some of them might say just about anything. In such cases, the reliability of the data would be compromised, and a volunteer sample would provide more accurate information about the phenomena being gauged. As a political scientist and a methodologist, I believe that this is a serious issue. When measuring a phenomenon, a statistics bureau cannot just take into consideration firm, unambiguous answers, such as "Yes, I often have difficulty hearing." What is more, it must not base its analyses only on answers of people who respond because they have an interest in doing so. This is usually the case with questionnaires in volunteer samples.

I will not discuss well-known analyses, such as the results of the Kinsey Report in the United States, a volunteer survey, which, in my opinion and that of many others, projected a false reality of how Americans behave sexually. A statistics bureau must also collect and analyze answers that are less firm, more ambiguous, such as “Should I answer this question sometimes or often?” The reality of a phenomenon is made up of all those elements, and that is what a statistical system must measure.

My third point is based on methodology. Abolishing the mandatory long-form census would create a major problem because it would replace a sound or almost sound methodology—there are always issues, of course—involving a random sample where answering is mandatory, with a much less sound methodology, one involving a voluntary sample. The latter sampling strategy is often considered as the worst one possible. It is used for lack of a better option, especially in medical surveys, and it is riddled with serious problems.

The other major issue, which has already been mentioned, is the facts that abolishing the long-form questionnaire would break the historical chain of data. Longitudinal studies conducted by statistics bureaus and research teams require consistent methodology: the same question, the same method of collection. However—and the paradox is a well known one—at some point, it will be necessary to change the questions, because they are no longer relevant, or the possible answers. Societal structure can change enough to warrant a break in the chain, but in such cases, scientific considerations should take precedence. Outside of those periods, as rarely as possible for researchers and political decision makers, consistency in the data collection process should be required.

The last point I wanted to raise is about the reputation of our statistical agency. I travel abroad very often. My work enables me to compare various bureaus and systems of statistics. I can tell you that the best calling card when I am travelling abroad consists in saying that I am from Canada.

• (1135)

Generally speaking, people have nothing but praise for Statistics Canada procedures. During an interview, the person appointed chief statistician of the Spanish statistics bureau called Ivan P. Fellegi a genius. That might have been an exaggeration, but it is nevertheless indicative of the kind of reputation our organization has built over the decades.

Having studied the facts, I know that that reputation is mainly owing to elaborate survey technologies and methodology. First and foremost, Statistics Canada is recognized for its methodology. I fear that if Statistics Canada had to collect very important data using highly criticized technology, it would not only make it impossible to conduct numerous longitudinal studies and would weaken the political decision-making process, but it would also—and this would have serious implications in the long term—jeopardize one of our prestigious institutions in Statistics Canada.

Thank you.

• (1140)

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

[English]

Mr. Rutherford, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr. Dave Rutherford (As an Individual):** Yes. Thank you.

For those of you who don't know, my name is Dave Rutherford. I do a talk show in Alberta. I'm a radio talk-show host in Edmonton and Calgary. I'm a private contractor, through my own company, Rutherford Media Inc., and I contract my show back to the radio stations that carry it.

Not for brevity of time but just to open the conversation, I don't know why I'm here. I think my opening statement could be answering questions about why I'm here: I don't why I'm here.

I have strident opinions about the long-form census and the process and I express them every day on my radio program. I've interviewed most of you in the room.

That's an opinion, and I think I'm allowed to express my opinion in Canada. So to go back to my original point, I don't know why I'm here.

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

I can answer your question. I as chair called you to appear, based on requests from members of this committee. I base my request for witnesses on what opposition and government members ask of the chair. All the witnesses present today are here because government and opposition members requested that certain people appear. That's why you're here.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Let me just put on the record, then, that I'm very pleased that the members of this committee recognize my talk-show work in Alberta. I appreciate it very much. Thank you.

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

Mr. Oh.

**Mr. Victor Oh (Honorary President of the Mississauga Chinese Business Association, Confederation of Greater Toronto Chinese Business Association):** Thank you very much for having me here today to explain my point of view.

Many countries in the world have taken on the mandatory census. I strongly believe our government has replaced the mandatory census with the voluntary national survey because we do not believe it is appropriate to compel Canadians to divulge extensive private and personal information. I do not believe Canadians should be forced under the threat of fines, jail, or both, to divulge the answers to certain intimate questions. I'm from Singapore, and jail is a no-no over there.

Furthermore, I have confidence that a sufficient number of civic-minded Canadians will complete and return the national household survey to provide equally valid and valuable information to the data collected under the threat of penalty. I believe a voluntary census, with 30% more forms sent out, will give more accuracy on information coming back.

The approach to this issue is about finding a better balance between collecting necessary data and protecting the private rights of Canadians. I recognize that the information gathered from the long-form census is valuable. However, I believe a balance must be drawn between the government collecting data under the threat of fines, jail, or both.

For the last four years I've seen a lot of new immigration settlements being set up across the GTA and Canada. So it shows that, from time to time, government has paid attention to how many immigrants are coming into the country, what they need and where they need help, and I think that is critical. I've been in Canada for 30 years, and this is the first time I've seen so many settlements opening up, over the last four years.

In conclusion, as an entrepreneur, I feel strongly about efficient use of taxpayers' money and about excessive intervention by government in the everyday life of people. Based on my network and discussions, I think many Chinese are not aware of the value of a census and that even completing the form, be it mandatory or optional, the information might not be accurate.

I have attended dozens and dozens of events with ministers and MPs from all parties, including accompanying Prime Minister Harper to China, and I see that despite its hard work the government's message does not always register 100% with the Chinese. Language and cultural differences are key issues.

In conclusion also, my association, I and my supporters, would like to offer help to the federal government and act as a bridge to the Chinese Canadian community, including information sessions and advertising in the ethnic media, so that they can better understand the importance of census ideas.

In terms of the United Way of Peel Region, just recently, they think the census of 2006 is already outdated. There is a new census conducted by the United Way of Peel Region, called the "community mapping process", which shows that the Peel region has 52% or more new immigrants. So you can see that our situation in terms of mapping is very important.

With today's technology, different companies and different organizations are doing a lot of different surveys on their own. That is a very important thing to show that we have a good census here in Canada but our information may not be up to date.

• (1145)

A lot of companies in the private sector are doing their own censuses, and I believe those censuses can be shared by everybody.

Thank you.

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

Monsieur Bélisle.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denis Bélisle (Vice-President, Federation of University Professors of Quebec):** Thank you. My name is Denis Bélisle. I am a professor at the Département des lettres et communications of the University of Sherbrooke, but I am appearing before you as vice-president of the Federation of University Professors of Quebec. I

would like to thank the committee for inviting the federation to today's meeting.

As the voice of over 5,000 university professors and researchers, the Federation of University Professors of Quebec believes that the radical and unjustified changes made to the Canadian census strategy this summer are unfortunate and untimely. We disagree with the new proposed format. We ask that the long-form questionnaire remain in use for the 2011 census and that the government make it clear to Canadians that responding to the questions has positive implications.

In a society like ours, privacy protection is a fundamental value. Transparency ensures that there is a trust relationship between the government and the public. Concerns about governance processes are at the heart of debates shaping our social fabric. Fairness, tolerance and social justice can only be defended on the basis of a clear vision. That is basically an accurate snapshot of what is, in fact, Canada. We think that to abolish the five-year census, which is the only procedure that allows Canadians to truly get to know themselves, would be irresponsible.

For Quebec, just from an academic standpoint, it would be extremely unfortunate if over 75 university research projects, some funded by the federal government, were jeopardized. As a result of the damage done to these initiatives and to all the entities that use the census or the data stemming from it, the overall snapshot would be blurred. Without clear, reliable data, decision makers could cause irreparable damage by holding on for too long to ideas that are no longer valid.

What is more, since the information retained can be manipulated, it would be upsetting if the Government of Canada took a back seat to those with the technical and financial means of acquiring relevant data, of processing and analyzing it as it best suits them, and then of trading their results and allowing the highest bidders to plan their operations with more chances of success. A government should never allow for another entity to be better informed about its own population, and a population should never agree that data about itself and which it has paid for not be generally accessible.

The last census in 2006 was the culmination of a decades-long process. It was conducted by skilled professionals who enjoy a reputation that extends beyond our borders. Contrary to popular belief, a census is not merely a questionnaire. It is a complex process in which each component is potentially weak. Sample planning, the drafting of questions, collection methods, data entry, file cleaning and data processing are only the most obvious steps. Errors can be introduced at each one of these steps, and we rely on Statistics Canada, an agency with recognized credibility, competence and unquestioned impartiality to ensure that errors do not occur. Canadians continue to have faith in Statistics Canada, even more so following the resignation of former chief statistician Munir Sheikh.

Therefore, we at the Federation of University Professors of Quebec believe that the census must, of course, be politically approved. However, the actual control over the entire census operation, over all the details, including and especially the questionnaire, should unconditionally be handed back to Statistics Canada, so that those who have been responsible for it can continue their work without any interference.

• (1150)

[English]

**The Chair:** *Merci.*

Mr. Murdoch.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch (Coordinator, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

First, let me explain that I am associated with the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg in relation to the coordination of Winnipeg member organizations in a national community social data strategy. This is a consortium currently of some 16 municipalities and municipal-level organizations, sponsored by the Canadian Council on Social Development.

The major purpose of this consortium is to purchase census data at sub-regions within municipalities, regions such as neighbourhoods, planning districts, or other small-area geographies.

The basis of my comments to you today is to bring to your attention how the availability of the rich data of the census at the local neighbourhood level allows citizens to identify themselves in a large city area across economic, multicultural, housing, and other demographic characteristics so that they can join with levels of government and funding bodies to address needs in their communities.

In Winnipeg, this consortium of local organizations was formed to obtain census data for Winnipeg's 232 neighbourhood characterization areas since the 1986 census year. One of the partners in this consortium has been the City of Winnipeg, which in turn has made much of this data freely available for those 232 neighbourhood areas through its website.

For the 2001 census purchase, this local consortium of community and government organizations fundraised a total of \$124,000 to purchase StatsCan data for those local geographies and the related socio-economic characteristics of the long form. For the 2006 census purchase, Winnipeg joined the national consortium in the purchase from StatsCan of what probably was the third-largest purchase of custom-level census data in Canada.

I might remind the committee that, if we were in the United States, this level of geographical data would probably be more readily available to citizens and their organizations, and at no cost.

I'll give you some community illustrations of the use of census data over the years.

As example one, a francophone community interested in exploring the child poverty issue within their constituency in Winnipeg discovered that, in addition to a child poverty presence, they also had a significant seniors poverty issue that nobody had recognized to that date. Their organizations are currently pursuing this matter with governments and funders.

Example two is of an inner-city Anglican church that wanted to address a housing concern within its neighbourhood through an innovative renovation of its premises to incorporate rental housing—that is, 22 units of both subsidized rent as well as market rental units—and space for a continuing small congregation. Census data helped

outline the need in the surrounding neighbourhoods, including the need for new low-cost rental premises for local residents living in dilapidated housing. I am pleased to announce that this initiative is about to get off the ground.

As example three, north-end community housing initiatives across several neighbourhood areas over the past decade were able to use consecutive census data for their neighbourhoods to indicate to the community and to governments that resources directed at new and major renovation housing programs had had a recognizable impact. It has encouraged governments to continue their participation in these initiatives.

As example four, the Institute of Health Services and Policy Research and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have worked with community groups in prioritizing health, educational, and other needs and illustrating their distribution through each of the neighbourhood areas of Winnipeg. Such data would not have been available unless the long-form census information had been purchased and made available by these consortium members.

Example five, the city and community groups use neighbourhood-level census data to review and determine community centre closures and new construction. The data provides a basis for a more rational and evidence-based discussion on the part of communities and politicians when it comes time for city hall decisions.

• (1155)

Example six, there has been a significant influx of aboriginal, mainly youth, citizens into Winnipeg over the past years. The use of neighbourhood-level census data over a period of time has allowed the aboriginal population, including the Métis as identified in the long form, and funders such as governments, the United Way, and the Winnipeg Foundation to target resources for this phenomenon where it is needed. Other significant players have been the city and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, to work at the street level on issues faced.

These kinds of stories could be duplicated in other communities across Canada.

These few illustrations are meant to convey to the committee the importance that census data—both the long-form, coupled with short-form, data—has had in the Winnipeg setting. To have this level of information available on a routine cycle has meant that communities, governments, private funders, businesses, and others have been able to identify and address issues important to citizens over periods of time, as well as measure progress on a number of fronts.

I will leave it to others to identify to you that the move from a census to a survey for a population characteristic found only in the traditional long form will now mean a break not only in the continuity, but also in the authenticity of data that has been available to Winnipeg citizenry over the years. Citizens of Winnipeg have participated in filling in the census forms over the years with the expectation that they will receive back that information in ways pertinent to their own and community interests. Please do not take that away from them.

Thank you.

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

The last opening statement goes to Madame Vonn, who is appearing in front of us via video conference.

Go ahead, Madame Vonn.

**Ms. Micheal Vonn (Policy Director, British Columbia Civil Liberties Association):** Good morning.

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association is the oldest and most active civil liberties association in Canada, and privacy is a core element of our mandate. The association has received very few privacy complaints about the long-form census, and the small number of complaints we have received have been, in the main, focused on the involvement of Lockheed Martin and the implications of the U.S.A. Patriot Act rather than the nature of the census itself.

As a civil liberties organization, we are obviously concerned about the severity of the penalties that can be brought against citizens who do not fill out the census, and we might question the policy justification for some of the more unusual questions that have been included in the past. But while it goes without saying that the association welcomes a strong stance on citizens' privacy from the federal government, the focus on the census is concerning.

Firstly, the census is not even on the list of the serious and urgent privacy issues in Canada today. That list includes, for example, the federal government's Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre, or FINTRAC; the Canadian no-fly list; airline passenger data sent to foreign governments; airport body scanners; lawful access expansion of police surveillance of telecommunications; and centralized electronic health records.

Not only is the census an extremely unlikely starting place for defending citizens' privacy rights, what is likely to replace a mandatory census—that is, a voluntary survey supplemented with recourse to data mining public and private sector databases—is a genuine privacy disaster for citizens' privacy rights.

Although the association is not aware of a concrete proposal to replace the mandatory census, two themes consistently emerge in the discussion: the first, the voluntary survey, which has been alluded to; and the second component, which has received less attention, which I would like to draw your focus to, the taking advantage of so-called “administrative data” and other data sources that already exist.

The current census does have a clear privacy advantage in being completely transparent about what data is collected, whereas data mining and data systems integration happen without citizens having any idea about what personal data is being disclosed. It is effectively invisible.

The federal government has an expressly stated goal of integrating data systems. The push to interoperability within government data systems and between data systems of, in fact, different governments is relentless. Data systems interoperability is said to create efficiencies, be convenient, and benefit research, but of course, it also creates data linkages that facilitate the compilation of de facto citizen dossiers, which we suggest is a privacy Chernobyl in the making.

The growth of the database nation presents a grave danger to democracy. Proponents of government-by-database will say that citizens are in favour of the convenience of governments just extracting their data without all the mess and fuss of actually consulting them, but history suggests that this opinion is wrong.

In the late 1990s, then federal Privacy Commissioner Bruce Phillips devoted two years to an investigation of Human Resources Development Canada's longitudinal labour force file, which was a collection of personal data on virtually everyone in the country, comprehensive enough to constitute a de facto dossier. It drew data from across programs, including income tax, child tax benefits, immigration and visitor files, national training programs, employment insurance administration, the social insurance master files, etc. This early venture in joined-up government was condemned by the Privacy Commissioner, but more importantly for our discussion today, it was condemned by the citizens of Canada. The outpouring of public anger about the longitudinal labour force file compelled HRDC to dismantle the program.

The position of the federal government and most provincial governments is to actively promote database linkages for, in the current buzz phrase, “horizontal government”. This is a direct attack on citizens' privacy. Citizens' privacy relies on there being discreet silos of information that limit the use and access of personal data.

Commissioner Phillips' 2000 report explicitly stated that comprehensive information-gathering is appropriate for Statistics Canada, and not appropriate for government generally. The report said, Only Statistics Canada gathers comprehensive information about individuals but does so only for statistical purposes, not to make decisions about them. And Statistics Canada's data are stringently protected; abusers can be fined or jailed.

• (1200)

In conclusion, simply put, if there is a need to collect comprehensive information about citizens—and our association does not take a position on this matter generally beyond saying that the justification must be compelling and the security and privacy protections of the highest standard—it is infinitely more protective of citizens' rights to have that information collected and in the custody of Statistics Canada, where the data collection is transparent and historically well protected, than to rely on mining data indirectly and invisibly. There is a critical loss of accountability when our data trails supplant us in our interactions with government.

Privacy is an inherently comparative analysis. We need to know what benefits we receive in exchange for diminished privacy and whether there are less privacy-intrusive alternatives to achieving the same goals.

Therefore, in our submission, it is not possible to assess the proposal to eliminate the mandatory long-form census without understanding the ramifications of what is being proposed in the alternative. We believe the likely alternative presents a much more dangerous situation for citizens' privacy than is currently the case with the long-form census, and we urge the government to present its alternative proposal in detail in order that a fair assessment can be made regarding the census and the privacy rights of Canadians.

Those are our submissions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will have about an hour and a half of questions and comments from members of this committee, beginning with Mr. McCallum.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank all our witnesses for being here today.

[*English*]

I would like to build a little bit on Mr. Murdoch's testimony, because I think it's very important to have concrete, real-life examples of why this issue matters and why it is not just some arcane academic question. I think Mr. Murdoch was very helpful in terms of examples involving child and senior poverty, as well as housing, health, and aboriginal issues in Winnipeg.

I'd like to give a couple of other examples and then ask some of the witnesses, particularly perhaps the professors, if they have other examples of why this is important in practical terms for real people.

My first example is a friend of mine named John Richards, a professor at Simon Fraser University, who has been doing research on aboriginal education issues for five years. He tells me he couldn't do anything without the census. He wouldn't even know how many aboriginal people there were, let alone the situation on health and education. So that's one example, and given that aboriginal people are among the most disadvantaged Canadians, I think policy on that issue is important.

As a second example, my riding of Markham is hugely multicultural—about 40% Chinese; 15% to 20% south Asian—with many, many new Canadians who, if only because of language issues, are less likely than others to fill out a voluntary census. So I think that's important too, because practical issues such as language training and other kinds of welcoming services for new Canadians are important, and without the census we won't have the information that is required.

So those are two examples to add to Mr. Murdoch's five or six, and I wonder if perhaps Professor Veall or some of our other witnesses would have other concrete examples to put on the table.

• (1205)

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

Mr. Murdoch, we'll begin with you.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** I appreciate your comments, because that was the purpose of me coming here, to indicate that the census is being used by citizens because they gave the information and they wanted it back to use for their purposes. I think those are the kinds of community things that we don't necessarily hear from the intelligentsia, even though I might want to engage them in discussion on the values of the census versus a voluntary survey. I tend to agree that the census will give us much deeper and better information.

I will let my *confrères* talk about this.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélisle.

**Ms. Denis Bélisle:** As to the Canadian census, I believe the main issue is that it is the only time or one of the few occasions when the disclosure process is actually mandatory. That is why the Canadian census data form the basis for many other surveys, including stratified sampling. The validity of a large number of other questionnaires, surveys and other research is based on the perceived quality of the Canadian census. This quality relies on the following two characteristics: it is comprehensive and mandatory. If we take away one of these two elements, we will face a representation problem and nothing will compensate for it. If we reduce its methodological qualities to the point of keeping only a few questions, it will be nothing more, for all practical purposes, than a count, which will not allow for the gathering of information that can support major research projects and government policies that may have positive effects.

There is a reason why big companies are conducting in-house censuses. If you do not have information about the goal or the organization you want to reach, you cannot reach it effectively. As I said in my presentation, in Canada, the mandatory five-year census is our only means of establishing a strong basis that allows us to find out who Canadians are.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Beaud.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Beaud:** I do not use raw data from Statistics Canada. So I will not address the issue from this point of view. However, I use studies that are based on these data. Recently, an example was presented to me during a conference at the Centre interuniversitaire québécois de statistiques sociales. A fairly detailed map of Montreal's neighbourhoods showed pockets of poverty in terms of social problems. This map, which I unfortunately did not bring with me, is very revealing and extremely important for policymakers. It identifies certain areas of Montreal, for example north and east. We are already familiar with this situation, but we see more accurately the places where people have difficulties, at least in terms of a lower level of education, potential delinquency, housing and other issues.

In terms of action both at the municipal and at the supra-municipal level, this type of information and analysis is fundamental. We know this because it has been repeated over and over again, but action is not possible if we do not have quality data provided through a mandatory questionnaire. The groups do not actually respond the same way when they do so voluntarily because they do not attach as much importance to the process. But it is extremely important, hence the need to maintain the long form.

I cannot provide further details on this example because I was not the one who did the study, but there are many similar examples. Mine is academic rather than directly political, but it is this type of information that allows policymakers to make good decisions because it allows them to target—although the term is perhaps a little strong—groups and areas where intervention is warranted.

● (1210)

[English]

**The Chair:** *Merci.*

Lastly, Mr. Veall, before we go to Monsieur Bouchard.

**Dr. Michael R. Veall:** Thank you for the question. I'll confine myself to one example.

You'll recall that I was talking about the estimate, which I thought was on the high side, of an 80% response rate. Even at an 80% response rate, it's going to be hard to get the level of geographic detail, census tract by census tract.

My hometown newspaper, the *Hamilton Spectator*, did a detailed analysis by census tract of a number of variables. There's a ton of them, but I'll just choose one.

One is the number of children below the poverty rate. There are a number of census tracts in Hamilton where the child poverty rate is in excess of 60%. The highest is 68%. There are also quite a number of census tracts in which the rate is 0%. So there's this huge span across census tracts. The trouble is that with this change in data there are a couple of possibilities.

One, if the response rate isn't great enough, we might just not get the data at the census tract level. It might just not be accurate enough and we won't know whether progress is being made on this high level of child poverty in particular areas.

It also might be impossible to link it to other variables. For example, we might want to know whether these children in poverty are going to school. That might just be impossible to know at the local level.

If it is available, there will also be some doubt, of course, as to whether the change is in the method of statistical collection.

Thank you.

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

Monsieur Bouchard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for appearing before us.

My first question is for Mr. Bélisle, but other witnesses are obviously welcome to answer.

Mr. Bélisle, could a voluntary questionnaire skew the data collected? As we know, it was previously mandatory for 20% of the population to respond, but a change was made. What is your opinion?

**Ms. Denis Bélisle:** I think my colleague Mr. Beaud is more qualified than me to answer this question in detail. However, I can

tell you that I personally do not know a single statistician, not a single person working seriously in statistics who will consider data collected on a voluntary basis as being essentially representative of a population. By doing so, we inevitably select people who are more docile, or compliant. So we get a slightly or a very distorted picture—we cannot be sure of how distorted it is—that describes the compliant sub-population within the general population. Just because some Canadians are resistant, lazy or careless and will not respond to the census, it does not mean that we have to refrain from taking the necessary steps to gather information to better understand and govern the general population.

It is a fundamental dilemma. If we do not get good representation in the census, a ripple effect will affect many other surveys, including the Labour Force Survey, which is conducted every month and is weighted based on census data. We will lose all those benefits. It is unfortunate that things are unfolding this way. The procedure has been split into two. In fact, my understanding is that there are now two methods of data collection: one of them is the official census, which barely includes some ten key issues, or eight or nine, and the other is the household survey, which essentially uses the 2006 census formula. All that is now supposed to be done voluntarily. We could make an argument that, by producing the statistics based on the results from those two methods, we would get an effectiveness index, which would help us determine whether the sample is representative, but I do not believe in that. I do not think it would be possible. It is very unlikely.

● (1215)

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. Beaud.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Beaud:** I can try to answer that. I mentioned it earlier. In terms of mandatory surveys, rates vary between 97% and 98%. I think part of the population always manages to avoid that obligation. The rates for voluntary Statistics Canada surveys, since there are some, of course, are around 70%. However, when it comes to somewhat different surveys that still rely on the same methodology, including opinion polls conducted by companies, we obtain rates well below 50%. This is also a big problem for the polling firms. It is often difficult to obtain information. It is a problem and it leads to extremely weak conclusions.

Just take as an example the percentages of 98% and 70%. We can see the problems with these figures. As I said earlier, there is no importance attached to the analysis of answers to questionnaires. Unfortunately, not all groups answer in the same proportion. The organizations are then forced to make adjustments. These are possible when you have a solid foundation provided by the census or by a mandatory questionnaire. If we change that, making adjustments will become more difficult. Voluntary surveys are even more problematic. The 70% would not be a problem if it was representative of the whole population, but that is not the case. That's what is extremely problematic.

The worst is that the polling firms themselves are increasingly having a hard time getting answers through a voluntary system. This is not necessarily because people do not want to answer, but because they are regularly contacted to participate. The advantage of a corporation like Statistics Canada is its credibility. We agree to provide answers because it is a public body that distributes its data to the public at large. I do not necessarily agree to answer questions from companies that will use my responses for private purposes. I think that many people react the same way.

As to the information we receive, I think the issue is crucial. Will we be able to make good decisions? Will we be able to identify pockets of poverty within the Montreal area, for example, and to implement policies that allow individuals to cope with poverty, instead of general ones that result in wasteful spending?

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** I do not know whether Mr. Bélisle or Mr. Beaud can answer my question.

My understanding is that going from a mandatory to a voluntary form reduces the scientific value of the data. Could you tell me if, from a statistical point of view, you believe that this decision will in fact diminish the scientific value of the data collected?

**Mr. Denis Bélisle:** In my opinion, and as noted by my colleague, that will definitely be the case. If all the characteristics of the population were evenly distributed across Canada, there would not be many problems. A 10% sample would then be sufficient. But this is not the case. Some features cluster in sub-populations difficult to identify. We are talking about immigrants, Aboriginals, poverty and perhaps all those combined. We are perhaps even talking about sub-populations that have not yet been identified and will never be, but that would need the support of the Canadian government.

It is not really the size of the sample that is a problem; it is the nature of the population. To get back to your question, I would say it is absolutely certain that, scientifically, we are going to invalidate the results that could make the survey scientifically valid.

• (1220)

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Murdoch, I think you had something to add to this.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** I tend to put things in practical terms, even though I have a major in mathematics and can talk with these people a bit.

The practical issue with a survey is that you don't know where the returns are going to come from; you don't know how representative they are.

Put it this way: Charlottetown, within P.E.I., may not be identified with enough returns to be able to say Charlottetown vis-à-vis P.E.I. Indeed, P.E.I. may not have enough returns to be identified other than in and of the Atlantic or Maritime region. That's what a survey means, as against a census that makes sure there is the distribution of returns to get representation.

In simple terms, that's the difference.

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

Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Actually, just to clarify, that's completely not correct. We still have a short-form census that's mandatory and would identify the exact same number of people living in Charlottetown or P.E.I. as we do now. So just to clarify, the short-form census is still mandatory.

Secondly, in terms of the information, we had a lot of conversation about information and we're still going to be collecting information, utilizing the considerable expertise of StatsCan officials, recognized as leaders in the world in terms of statistics. We're still going to be collecting, processing, and providing that information using that expertise.

We all want to reduce poverty in this country. I know it has been mentioned by a few. But surely we can find a way to reduce poverty without threatening the poor with fines and jail time because they don't want to tell the government how much time they spend with their kids or how much housework they did last week. Surely we can find a better way than that with all the expertise we have in this country.

Mr. Rutherford, I note there's an article on the CHED website that talks about you coming before the committee. Marc Garneau is quoted in this article as saying: the Government has trouble finding groups that support their point of view and so they're down to inviting individuals.

So we've scraped the bottom of the barrel—

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Apparently so, sir.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** —and we've invited you and Mr. Oh and a few other witnesses, who apparently we're “down to” now, to express their point of view. We think it's important that you're here.

And Mr. Oh, we think it's important that you are here.

Mr. Bélisle talked about the radical changes we made. I just want to talk a little bit about the process in how the census is taken.

Speaking of radical, we come to the door and we ask questions of people. We do it a couple of times. The enumerator comes, and let's say you were to say, "No, I don't want to answer that question". For whatever reason you have, you might not want to tell the government your religion or how many bedrooms you have in your house. After a couple of times, they fill out a total refusal form.

This seems radical to me—and I'll get your comments on this. At the top of the total refusal form, it says that the information provided in the sections that follow may be used to support a legal prosecution and that all details must be complete and accurate.

This is just the enumerator who came to your door and asked you twice and you respectfully said you didn't want to answer those questions. The enumerator fills out the description of the person who refused: age, gender, height, weight, other physical details such as facial hair, tattoos, glasses, birthmarks, and distinctive clothing, etc.

That's the form that the enumerator fills out and passes on to his or her crew leader. The crew leader comes to your house and asks again, and then fills out his or her section of the form, which asks the exact same question. That's just before it goes to the higher levels where I guess they follow up on the prosecution and potential there.

What are your thoughts on that in terms of which is more radical, the notion that we make the changes and have a format that is more voluntary, or the notion that we threaten the poor with fines and jail time because they don't want to answer questions of the government?

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Well, as I said earlier, I appreciate very much that I am here. I'm here because I have expressed an opinion that is in support of the government's action. So I don't want to be considered a cheerleader for the government, which is what Mr. Gameau was suggesting; I'm here, I guess, because I have an opinion. I said earlier that I find it interesting that people with opinions are invited to come to a committee to explain themselves.

I agree with the democratic process in this country. I agree with the fact that this is a House of Commons committee, and because I participate in democracy, I'm here. Other than that, I don't know why I'm here.

I'll get to some specifics in a second, because I am a talk-show host, after all. I wanted to jump in on all these guys but I couldn't do that.

• (1225)

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Feel free, Mr. Rutherford.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** And I will be asking for a commercial break in a second so we can just take some time.

On the idea that other commentators in this country may support one side or another but most of them, if not all of them, support the concern about eliminating the long-form census, they're not here. I don't see a cross-section of media people sitting here. I should be sitting at the table behind us, not sitting here. I don't see a cross-section of columnists from *The Globe and Mail* or other people who would support the opposition to the decision. Where are they? They're not here, so I find that a little bit telling.

Nonetheless, if I'm here to speak about things that are discussed on my radio program among the audience that talks to me, I'm fine

with that. But I hope I'm not here to have to answer to an opinion, because we all have opinions and we all have rights to them.

I express my opinion daily on my program. Am I biased? Yes. Do I come to my viewpoint from a certain political standpoint? Yes, and I make no bones about it, unlike some other media in this country—but that's another story, maybe another committee hearing.

But as a commentator, though, if you don't mind, part of what I'm hearing today is interesting. The assumption is, by my statistician colleagues—and these guys know way more about it than I do, because as I said in the beginning, I'm not an expert—and maybe there is some statistical data to prove that assumption, that a voluntary response is somehow less credible than a mandatory response. I think that's the submission of some of these experts.

Mr. McCallum took the position that if you have a language difficulty, somehow if it's mandatory, you can do it; but if it's voluntary, I guess you can't.

Sir, I'm sorry, but I don't follow the logic of that one.

Just a moment ago, the lady from the Civil Liberties Association—I'm sorry, I forgot her name—made the point that on their radar this issue is not registering at all, that there are much more serious things that people are concerned about. My submission is, how does she know that? She knows that because I assume she polls her membership on her own and determines what people are concerned about in the Civil Liberties Association. Right?

That's all I can assume. Whether you're opposed to the census is not a census question.

My point is that a lot of this information can be gathered elsewhere. The gentleman from Winnipeg suggested that a church decided what to do in its small congregation based on the responses in the mandatory long-form census, which only 20% of Canadians get. How many people in that congregation got a long form and specifically identified a problem? I don't know.

On the issue of poverty, which seems to be a recurring theme here, we wouldn't know where the poor people are. If the rationale for people filling out a voluntary form is that they're somehow motivated, they're more motivated from a vested interest to fill out a voluntary form, therefore it might not be accurate, which is what I think some of these people might suggest, wouldn't it make logical sense that if you are underprivileged you would be motivated to fill out that form because you would know there would be some tangible consequence to it?

I'm just saying there are some logical overarching themes here that seem to be lost.

I have one more quick comment before my time is up.

The long-form census has not been eliminated, despite what you read in the media. It is still there. In fact, there are more of them. It's just voluntary, not mandatory.

Mr. Lake, I probably didn't answer your question, but thanks for the opportunity.

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

Before we go to Mr. Masse, Mr. Oh, would you care to respond to Mr. Lake's questions?

**Mr. Victor Oh:** Yes.

My opinion is that the statistics have been going on for so many years, and with today's technology, the data are available. A lot of private companies are constantly doing surveys.

For instance, I mentioned earlier the United Way of Peel Region. Peel region, in the GTA, has a lot of population coming in. We are over 52% new immigrants. The movement of immigrants cannot be based on statistical information from five years ago. Five-year-old statistical information, for the last two years, is normally not accurate and no longer up to date, because our movement in the GTA, in certain places, is just too great, due to the job situation and various situations. So a lot of companies in the private sector are doing their own mapping.

It is important that many countries in the world are now dropping the mandatory situation. Why is Canada not moving forward? Why are we staying with the same thing? I think increasing by 30% the voluntary filling in of the form is a good way to go.

We all talk about human rights, and we want to know where the criminals live, people who have records. Are they my neighbours? It's things of that nature. I think we should be going on a voluntary basis.

In the private sector, for the communities that are asking for funding, a lot of the information is coming from their local situations and not the....

•(1230)

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

Mr. Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Windsor West, which I represent, is one of the most diverse in Canada. It also has, continually, one of the highest unemployment rates. It is also a place where there is a university, a college, and a lot of transition.

Back in the year 2000, it was part of what was called the "complete count" and was one of three ridings in this country that were chosen to have door-to-door census canvassing because the rates were so low despite the poverty being so high, and the language and other barriers, because it's an immigration destination, especially when you look at Old Sandwich Town, which is the oldest European settlement west of Montreal. The rates were deplorably low and we

were actually losing potential funding for settlement programs and other types of issues because the rate was so low.

That eventually was eliminated. Because of privacy concerns, they took away the door-to-door canvass that was historically part of the census-gathering.

My question is basically to any of the panellists: Given the fact that this census has already been vetted through the Privacy Commissioner and has gone through the Treasury Board process, are there any privacy concerns you have with regard to this process that has actually been completed?

I'll turn that question to anybody who wishes to answer it.

**The Chair:** Does anybody care to answer that question?

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** I will, if nobody else wants to step up.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Rutherford.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** I'm not sure what you mean, Mr. Masse, about privacy concerns. Do you mean violations in which your information would have been given?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Yes. I mean you and your family being exposed to loss of personal privacy.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** I guess, philosophically, if I give information to StatsCan, they admit they sell it to private business. Right?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Yes, as a lump.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** So if I don't want to give my information to private business, can I philosophically say, "No, I don't want to give it to Statistics Canada"?

What is a violation of privacy?

Again, the woman from the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, Ms. Vonn, just a moment ago suggested that privacy is their number one concern, except that when it comes to the census, that's okay. I don't understand that logic either.

Mr. Masse, I have not seen a categoric example of someone's privacy being violated by giving it to StatsCan, but if I don't want it to go to a certain business or have it sold—I give it up freely and they sell it—philosophically I have a problem with that. Maybe if they would pay me for it I'd be more inclined voluntarily.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** When Minister Clement was here—and I've gone over his testimony—he said in a response to Mr. Garneau: That was a government decision. There's no question about that. I'm not trying to suggest otherwise. We've worked with StatsCan over the months to implement that kind of decision, to make sure that the data that is collected is usable and reliable for the purposes for which it was intended.

The key point to this testimony is the fact that he says he was working with Statistics Canada for a number of months. That would mean that the House of Commons was still in session at that time. So the knowledge and the machinery to change this was actually taking place prior to the recess of the House of Commons.

I'd like to hear, in your opinion—I want opinions—why it is that there has been no legislation tabled to this committee, despite us having actually a very shallow amount of legislation, to eliminate the fine and penalty with regard to the census?

The minister was actively working on eliminating the long-form requirement, keeping the short-form, which is ironic and interesting in that the agricultural census is being maintained with fines and penalties.

In anyone's opinion, why is it that the minister did not eliminate, or table legislation in this committee to eliminate, the penalties that are being professed continually of prisons and fines, and making it assumed that there's going to be basically a census-induced crime wave that needs to be dealt with in this country as we move forward?

I'll invite anyone to offer why that process wasn't actually done.

•(1235)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélisle.

**Mr. Denis Bélisle:** I cannot really answer the question as is, in terms of what the political reasons are for there being no legislation tabled. However, my understanding of the matter is that there is a fairly obvious consensus on the issue of penalties associated with the failure to participate in the census. The Canadian government would be ill-advised to send someone to prison for this reason. I have not met anyone who was in favour of this kind of action. I think it is clear why these penalties have become obsolete. There should perhaps be a more clear-cut bill. When I say that the census should be mandatory, that implies that we look at consequences, but not as serious as jail time.

[English]

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Unfortunately, though, that is the current government policy that is actually in place. The point I've been trying to get across in terms of this basically rogue argument is that legislation has to be tabled in the House of Commons. That won't actually take place before this goes to print, so the government policy will continue to have, as this census rolls out, jail time and penalty time. Does anybody think jail time is appropriate?

They could have dealt with this a lot sooner than now, but legislation has to be tabled. It has to be voted on in the House of Commons. It then has to come to committee if we want to be able to study it, and there's a certain period or window of time in which we deal with it. It goes back to the House of Commons to be finally voted upon, and then it goes to the Senate for them to dispose of it.

Does anybody here think that process can get done prior to the actual census going out?

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** One moment. Mr. Lake has a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Lake. You have the floor.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Mr. Masse knows that the changes being made don't require legislation.

We will be putting forward legislation to address the prison issue in the fall and we'll hope for his support.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lake. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Masse has the floor. He has posed a question to the witnesses. Does anybody care to respond to his question?

Mr. Rutherford.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Mr. Masse, is that a requirement, then?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** That's my understanding.

My understanding is that it's a requirement. It's not a regulation, it's actually law.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** So you're suggesting that legislation is required to change the penalty phase as well as the mandatory aspect of the census.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** I believe so.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** If that's the case—I don't know that it is, and others in this room might object—I guess your larger question was, could we possibly do that fast enough? The answer, of course, is yes, if you wanted to.

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

Mr. Murdoch, I believe you had something to add to that.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** I'd just indicate that this is the wrong party to ask that question to. The proper place to ask that question is in the House of Commons.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Murdoch and Mr. Masse.

Mr. Bélanger.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chair, I would also like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

[English]

Thank you in particular, Ms. Vonn, for your comments. It reminds us that, whatever the outcome of the current discussion we're having, we will have to have consideration of what the alternatives are and the implications in terms of the protection of private information. But I won't go there now.

I want to follow up on Mr. Oh's testimony.

Mr. Oh, you mentioned that the United Way of Peel Region produced community mapping that was very useful. Correct?

• (1240)

**Mr. Victor Oh:** Correct.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Are you aware, Mr. Oh, that the president of the United Way, Mr. Al Hatton, wrote to the government—he and a number of other people—asking them to keep the mandatory long form?

**Mr. Victor Oh:** Yes, I am. I also have a copy of the paper here to talk about the mapping they are doing in Peel region. That was published less than 10 days ago.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** But do you know why the president of United Way of Canada is asking that the government reverse its decision and maintain the mandatory long-form census?

**Mr. Victor Oh:** Yes.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Why?

**Mr. Victor Oh:** They think the information is important to them. But I doubt that if they are doing two things at the same time.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Sir, we verified with the United Way, and according to them, the data obtained by the long-form census, which has been mandatory up until now, is the only source of reliable and comprehensive data regarding individuals and families in the local neighbourhood communities. They want this to be maintained, to be able to continue doing community mapping not only in Peel, but they do it in Ottawa and in other communities as well.

My next question to you is on the accuracy. You said because the government will increase from 20% to 30% the number of people getting the long form, although it's no longer mandatory, this will provide greater accuracy.

**Mr. Victor Oh:** Yes, because I believe voluntary information is more accurate than mandatory.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Everything we've heard, sir, up to now from the experts, from the people who administer the census forms, from the Chief Statistician who quit over this, from Mr. Veall today, and from others, maintains the opposite: that the voluntary form will not be as accurate, that there's a built-in bias.

I'll perhaps ask Mr. Veall or Monsieur Beaud to comment on that, to see if my understanding or comprehension of what they're saying is accurate.

Would you care, gentlemen, to comment?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaud.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Beaud:** I listened to a journalist interviewing a member of an association representing francophones outside Quebec, I believe. What was said was very interesting. The member was complaining, of course, about the demise of the long form. The journalist teased her slightly by suggesting that she tell her people to respond in large numbers to the voluntary questionnaire. Overestimating something is as problematic as underestimating it.

The problem is not the 30%. Statisticians know very well how to work with a questionnaire that applies to 20% of the population, which is a significant percentage. It is the representativeness of the

sample that is fundamental. Yet, this is only possible through a mandatory questionnaire. Penalties are another issue. I worked on the history of Statistics Canada. I found some letters in the archives.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bélisle.

[*English*]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** No, my question is for Mr. Veall.

**Dr. Michael R. Veall:** If it would have been possible to run a pilot test, we would have been able to give an absolute definitive answer to your question, but with all the information we have, yes, the voluntary survey will be less accurate.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** All right. Thank you.

Do I have time, Mr. Chairman, for a final question?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Please be quick.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** All right.

[*English*]

Mr. Oh, the voluntary census has been tested in the United States and they've moved away from it. They've gone back; they've abandoned it.

As a businessman, do you think it's a wise decision to spend \$30 million more to send the questionnaire to 30% instead of 20%, for less accurate information?

**The Chair:** Mr. Oh.

**Mr. Victor Oh:** There is no figure you pointed out to say that the 30% are inaccurate. Do you have that statistic to say that?

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Mr. Oh, Mr. Bélanger gave his position to you in his intervention.

We're now going to go to Mr. Wallace.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you, guests, for coming.

I do appreciate Mr. Rutherford pointing out that the long-form census is still in existence. We just aren't able to call it a census because it's not mandatory.

The previous long form went to 2.5 million people; this one is going to 4.5 million. Even assuming a 70% return rate, that's almost one million more returns, going from 2.3 million to 3.1 million returns.

I just want to make one quick comment about the previous panel where somebody from the National Statistics Council was saying that if a survey in English is sent to a French community, whether one sends 1,500 or 3,000 forms, the response rate will be lousy. Well, of course, because the bias against the French-speaking individual is built into both surveys. It had nothing to do with the volume they're sending. So it was kind of an odd example that somebody from the National Statistics Council was using to try to make a point.

I'll ask a couple of questions here, and maybe I'll start with Mr. Murdoch—I don't mean to pick on you.

Are you aware of the Canadian community health survey done by Statistics Canada?

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Did you know it's voluntary?

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Do you consider those responses less accurate because it's voluntary?

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** They're less accurate than the census. But the census doesn't ask those kinds of health questions, so the best we have at the moment is the survey.

Mr. Lake indicated, in terms of P.E.I., that you'll have a count, but you won't have any flavour behind that count.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Let me give you some more examples of what Statistics Canada sends out as voluntary.

There's the adult education and training survey. There are general surveys on victimization, social engagement, families, and retirement. There is a national population health survey and a post-secondary education participation survey. There's a whole list here. All these are done on a voluntary basis.

So are you telling me that the only valid information that organizations in the Winnipeg area will use is, every five years, the long-form census? Or is this other information actually also valid?

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** The other information is valid, but when it comes from StatsCan, you have to recognize that they have the ability to look at the census data as a way of correcting bias. If you don't have that kind of census background, you cannot test for bias.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I'm going to ask you another question. West European countries, such as Norway and Denmark, are often cited by social service organizations as having great social services. Their taxes are a little bit high, in my view, but they provide a tremendous amount of service and our opposition members often like to quote them.

You are aware that they do not have a census program.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Without a mandatory census, are they still able to plan and understand where their poor are, where their needs are, and where their issues are, to provide social services?

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** Yes, because they have a different system for getting that information. You have your personal ID card. If you move, you have to register that move. If you go to school, you have

to register that with your card, and so on. That's how they map out where people are and the characteristics of people.

I think it has been said here that, in the North American context, it would not fly. So you have to have an alternative, and we have a traditional—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** Yes, you do. Go ahead, Mr. Wallace.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** My last question, and I'm sorry I'm picking on you, but—

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** Who else?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** I think he's picking on you.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** No, I don't think so.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** It's just because I'm from Winnipeg.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** No.

For the last census, the response rate was 95%. Regarding that 95%, is the threat of jail time and fines the motivating factor, for the group that you represent, or do they do it because they think it's the right thing to do as Canadians? Of that 95%, does your group really believe the only reason they filled it out was that they might get a \$500 fine?

•(1250)

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** I have no evidence to give you in that regard.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wallace and Mr. Murdoch.

Monsieur Cardin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here today.

My first question is for Mr. Oh.

You said in the beginning of your testimony that you were not interested in answering intimate questions. Could you give me an example of a sensitive question in the questionnaire that you were uncomfortable answering ?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Oh, Mr. Cardin asked you about your having mentioned that there were sensitive questions that you wouldn't be comfortable in answering. He is asking you what specific kinds of questions those would be.

**Mr. Victor Oh:** I didn't state any specific intimate questions that I would not be answering.

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** You simply said that you did not like answering intimate questions. Have you ever filled out a mandatory long form before?

[English]

**Mr. Victor Oh:** No, I haven't received one yet.

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** It is just because, from your remarks, you do not seem very fond of mandatory forms. All the examples or comparisons are not perfect, but let's take a mandatory form that you must fill out each year, at the risk of being fined or even imprisoned. I am referring here to your tax return.

If the tax return was no longer mandatory but voluntary, do you think there would be that many people filling it out?

[English]

**Mr. Victor Oh:** No, if it is for the survey, of course, it's not as detailed as what the Canada Revenue Agency sends to us, and I think people will fill it out.

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** I just wanted to point out that there are still forms to which penalties are attached. They even go as far as imprisonment. The government will not change its position on the penalties. Of course, that means having to look for money. People are taking part in the public and social efforts, but it is obvious that a census also contributes to the evolution of society. For this to work, if we want to gather accurate information, the census should also be mandatory. I am just trying to say that—and the Conservatives are well aware of this—there are still penalties and prison sentences associated with certain optional forms.

I would like to go back to what was said earlier. As Mr. Lake mentioned, there is still the mandatory short form. I would like to know what incentives will still be offered, for example, so that people fill it out because it is mandatory.

As to jail time, we could resolve the issue immediately and reinstate the mandatory form. However, there may be fines, no question about that.

Mr. Bélisle mentioned positive reinforcement a little earlier.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cardin, Mr. Lake would like to raise a point of order.

[English]

**Mr. Mike Lake:** I don't know if it was an issue with translation or if he actually said this, but what I got was that he is curious to know if people would fill out the short form because it's voluntary. That certainly hasn't anything to do with what we changed. It's probably translation that caused that miscommunication.

**The Chair:** I have been listening to the translation, and the translators are translating accurately and professionally. I think it is done in an accurate manner. If there is a problem with translation, we'll stop the committee proceedings and address it, but there is none at this time.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** It was just to be clear.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Cardin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** My time will be cut short, so I would rather have Mr. Bélisle tell us about positive reinforcement.

**Mr. Denis Bélisle:** For that to become mandatory, there are two options, one of which is a big stick approach with fines. Penalties should probably remain in place. Yet, there is also positive reinforcement. In my opinion, the whole census issue should be presented as a patriotic gesture, a kind of duty. We should feel compelled to help paint the picture of the Canadian population as a whole. The investment required to accomplish this task is not huge. To complete the form in question, it takes about two hours. Two hours in five years, that's two minutes per month. We are talking about an investment of two minutes per month from people who are asked to contribute to the creation of this important database generated by the Canadian census. I think we could show positive reinforcement in promoting this idea, arguing that it is a patriotic duty.

• (1255)

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Thank you.

Is there enough time for Ms. Vonn to make a comment?

[English]

**The Chair:** It looks like we've lost the video link. It may take some time to get that back up.

In the meantime, Monsieur Cardin, we'll go to Mr. Van Kesteren, and we'll come back to you once the video link has been restored.

Mr. Van Kesteren.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you, witnesses, for appearing before us.

I want to emphasize again—and we all know this, but it just bears repeating—the long form is not being eliminated. It's becoming voluntary.

There's something that is of interest here, and I said this in the last session too. I have, I think, a very average riding. We have urban, rural, professionals, farmers, all different types of Canadians there. I have to tell you, when I poll my riding, this is not heavy on their radar. This is not a big issue. In academia it is, and I recognize that. I also recognize that you would probably be much more involved in that, so that's the interest. But the average guy on the street really doesn't get this. When I talk to people about it, they're somewhat puzzled.

The argument I make is that we need to engage people. I think, should we make this voluntary, the result is going to be that my constituents will come to me and say, “Dave, why am I asked this question?” It gives me an opportunity to go to the government and ask why we are asking this question. If there's a good answer, I can go back and give the answer. So we have that opportunity.

I don't think we give people enough credit. Along those lines, I'm curious, and I really want to bring this back to my constituents because it involves them. These are the people it affects. These are the people who have to fill this thing out. These are the people who, as they fill it out, are going to be affected, either adversely or in a positive manner. There will be some cause and effect.

Mr. Rutherford, what are you hearing on the airwaves? Am I wrong? Is this a big issue out west? What are normal Canadians, not those gathering information, not those who use the information, saying about this long form?

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** It's not on the front page of people's lives—let's put it that way. It just is not. It's not a priority. There are many other things important in people's lives, variously, at various times of the year.

But you're absolutely right. Among the people who participate in my program—and I'm sure there are those who like what they hear on the radio and they share ideas back and forth—but among those people, it is not a big issue. There are many other things in an agricultural environment that are much more important right now. There are many other things in economic life that are much more important now, such as getting a job, keeping a job, making sure our governments don't have deficits that are too big, paying taxes as we all do, without having to pretend it's going to be a voluntary form. We all want to pay our taxes, to a certain point.

It is not a big issue in people's lives. It's not a burning issue. When I bring it up specifically, that's the response I get. If it's an open discussion, that is not the issue that comes up first.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** The video link is back up. Great.

Madame Vonn, have you read the mandatory long form? I assume you have, but if that's the case, do you think the Privacy Commissioner is right to suggest that there are minimal privacy concerns with regard to some of those questions?

• (1300)

**Ms. Micheal Vonn:** Yes. What we are here to really sound out is the sense that although in fact the long form includes personal data, as many things do, that does not in itself constitute a privacy violation.

Our point here is that privacy is an inherently comparative analysis. If you are looking for a privacy-annihilating experience, apply for disability through the Canada Pension Plan. The question is not do we ask very sensitive questions; the question is, are they needed? Is it proportionate? Is that information abused in any way? So the comparative analysis is required for privacy assessment.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Have you read the form?

**Ms. Micheal Vonn:** No, I haven't read the entire form, but we've had various points brought out about which questions are considered the most controversial. We suggest that if there are controversial questions that don't actually have a benefit that is proportionate, they be extracted. But that doesn't constitute an assessment of the privacy profile of the entire program. That's my point.

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren:** Thank you.

I just want to make one clarification, that major corporations make billion-dollar decisions—and this relates to Mr. Murdoch's point that

there would not be enough information gathered—on a few thousand people polled. So I recognize that sometimes the numbers might not be as great, although we'll find out. I just don't think that's a valid argument. It's just disappointing.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Kesteren.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Cardin, you can ask Ms. Vonn a question.

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Good afternoon, Ms. Vonn.

In your presentation, you mentioned one thing that left me somewhat confused. You have slightly touched on it in answering the question of the Conservative MP. You talked about comprehensive data for statistical purposes rather than for—and you did not agree on this—policy development purposes.

In our case, it goes without saying that a census with questions that are slightly more precise can be used for government policy development. You seemed to be saying that the use of these data for policy development purposes ran somewhat counter to privacy protection principles. Have I understood correctly? If so, could you tell us a little more about the consequences?

[*English*]

**Ms. Micheal Vonn:** I hope I'm grasping the heart of the question there. We are concerned that one of the alternatives will be to rely increasingly on data integration from different programs to, essentially, profile citizens through databases rather than asking them directly. That has significant privacy implications that we are desperately concerned about. We know it has been a push of both the federal government and various provincial governments to make sure that data integration, that interoperability, is possible.

So we feel that in the comparative analysis, which is inherently the privacy analysis, asking Canadians directly may be ultimately less privacy-invasive than data-mining all the information about us in government databases in discreet silos that can be linked.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madame Vonn, for that clarification.

Mr. Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hoback asked some interesting questions of Mr. Henderson, a farmer, about the census and how much time it takes him, and he indicated that it took up to three days. The interesting thing, though, is that the agricultural census is actually not going to be changed. It will remain there and he'll continue to have to fill that out.

So I guess the question would be, is the agricultural census valuable to maintain?

The minister disagrees. He actually said that it “will help farmers”, and he added, The argument obviously to farming associations and to farmers is, “You fill out the form; it'll help the government help you in your farming activities.”

So how could the minister be right about the agricultural census that requires three days for Mr. Henderson to fill out, but then wrong about the general census?

• (1305)

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Mr. Masse, why don't you look at the question the other way? How can the minister be wrong about the agriculture sector when he's right about the mandatory census? Maybe the agriculture census should be voluntary as well.

I'm just saying, you can look at it the other way.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** That's it, though, Mr. Rutherford. So is the government wrong to keep the agricultural census?

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** If there is going to be a consistency of policy, you would think yes.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** What about the others?

**The Chair:** Do any other panellists wish to comment?

Mr. Veall, go ahead.

**Dr. Michael R. Veall:** I would just like to point out that the labour force survey also remains mandatory. That, of course, yields the unemployment rate variables that lots of people have referred to today that I think most people regard as one of the most important economic indicators.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Hence the absurdity of what we have here, because we're supposedly getting some type of change.

On the prescribed amount for the voluntary census—maybe I can get some opinions—in moving it up to 30% of households, we're going to spend more money to move more voluntary forms out there. Is 30% accurate? Will the government then, for example, if it faces a shortage of returns, make it 50% so every other Canadian will have to do it the next time around? How is 30% voluntary, versus 40% or 50%, or 15% voluntary?

**The Chair:** Mr. Masse, is your question directed to any one witness?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** It's for anyone on the panel.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rutherford.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** I was just going to suggest that if that's the concern you have, that the sample isn't big enough, send the voluntary—

**Mr. Brian Masse:** That's not my concern. It's what the—

**The Chair:** Mr. Masse, let Mr. Rutherford answer. He has the floor.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** But I just want to be clear: I don't know.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Right.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** It's an arbitrary 30% that's being polled.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** I understand.

And Mr. Veall suggested that he doesn't know either what the return rate would be on a voluntary form. He admits that. He'd like to have a pilot project to figure it out.

So if the case is to be made in regard to the national household survey—if that's what it's called now—send it to everybody. Would that be all right with you?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** I don't know. I think that would actually have an increased cost. I'm not sure. To me, it would be about the value of the investment. If we're going to spend millions of dollars more—\$30 million, if you believe the government's numbers—to move up to 30% of Canadians, I don't know how many more millions it would cost to do 100% of Canadians, but my concern would be what we get back, whether that is good money in terms of what we have spent. That would be the question.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Well, it's a very good question, but the economics have never been raised. You guys haven't been raising the economics.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Yes, we have, absolutely.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** So you want the most cost-efficient census. Is that what you're suggesting?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Well, that's part of the equation. It's also about the value of what you get back. I've been raising this since the beginning of this change.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Then let's have everybody get the voluntary long form. Would the statisticians be okay with that?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** That's a good question.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** He's good with it. How about you guys?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélisle.

**Mr. Denis Bélisle:** I would like to reiterate what was said by Mr. Murdoch and Mr. Beaud, namely that the problem is not so much the size of the sample as it is its representativeness. Whether 20%, 30% or 10%, it may work, but what is really important is that completion be mandatory for the sample group. We want to have a good representative sample.

What is at stake here is not really the percentage, the total number or the size of the sample, but the guarantee of the sample being representative. In addition, as we mentioned already—and it is a fact that is misunderstood—many surveys, projects and polls are carried out first, and then their data are corrected using the Canadian census data.

If we undermine the validity of the Canadian census, we indirectly invalidate much of the other data available.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bélisle. Thank you, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Preston.

[*English*]

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of you for being here today.

I'm going to volunteer some information, so I know some of you will find it inaccurate.

The real thing we're talking about today here—and we can blow a lot of smoke and talk about a lot about other things—is whether the long form should be voluntary or mandatory, whether there should be a punishment for not filling out the form. We've discussed whether it's jail time or fines, but the one question that's at this table today is, should the long-form census be voluntary or mandatory?

We're not talking about the short form. The short form is going to be the way it is and it will have the number of questions it needs to do that job.

We can throw in a bunch of other stuff if we want. Mr. Rutherford just threw in the cost of it, or we can talk about the structure of it. We've talked a bit about privacy and stuff, but let's get the smoke out of the way. We're talking about whether it's accurate and whether voluntary versus mandatory will do the job it's supposed to do.

Mr. Rutherford, you asked earlier why some other people weren't here. I know some great people who are back home volunteering on things. It's the middle of summer. Tomorrow morning I'll attend a firemen's barbecue. They're all volunteer firemen—and trust me, I trust most things they say to me.

Mr. Bélisle, you talked about that pride-in-Canada piece, that people are happy to do it. Whether it's those same volunteer firemen or the United Way workers, or the baseball coaches, hockey coaches, or whatever, these are all volunteers in Canada, and they're happy to do it because they make Canada better.

I want to take the upside of this, that I believe people will voluntarily fill out this form and send it back because they believe it's the right thing to do. You just said that yourself, that the pride-in-Canada aspect is a big part of this. I think that's right. And it's not just my riding. Even in the riding that Mr. McCallum described, of 52% new immigrants and that type of thing, I believe they have pride in Canada. Coming to Canada as immigrants, they've chosen Canada over every other country in the world.

Mr. Oh, you represent an immigrant group, people who have chosen to come Canada. I'm guessing that your group is voluntary. You don't fine your people if they don't join your group, do you?

•(1310)

**Mr. Victor Oh:** No.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** So it's voluntary, and do you consider the information you collect from your members to be pretty accurate to make decisions on their behalf? I would think so. I'm a businessman myself and I voluntarily do the same.

But for new Canadians—and I'm going to ask this as nicely as I can, because I'm not one, but you represent some—if their first interaction with their government was someone knocking on their door with a census form asking a question or some questions that they would not think to be appropriate or didn't want to answer, to them, what's that relationship like?

I think in the 2011 census we'll be asking a question on religion. A new immigrant to Canada might not want to answer that, and then they're threatened with some punishment for not answering it. How is that relationship with their new country?

**Mr. Victor Oh:** I think they're going to have a choice of voluntarily answering the question.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** That's what we're trying to decide here today: Is it mandatory or voluntary that they answer those questions? It's as simple as that. If the person at the door starts writing down their physical description because they chose not to answer the question, I don't know, but in terms of the Canada I'm proud of, that isn't it.

It's my thought that the volunteer versus mandatory question here is exactly that. We can question, if we want, whether we'll now send it to 30% of the households, or as Mr. Rutherford just suggested, send it to them all, and if we need a representative sample, we'll get back the answers. It's about it being voluntary or mandatory. It's about punishing people for not doing it.

Mr. Bélisle, I'll give you a shot, because you talked about pride in Canada and people doing things with that belief. Are you suggesting that they won't earnestly come forward?

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

Monsieur Bélisle.

**Mr. Denis Bélisle:** Indirectly, I do. You mentioned some great people such as firemen and volunteer coaches—and I'm one of them. Those people will definitely answer the survey. But from being there, from having done numerous kinds of surveys, I don't think, as of right now, the survey has been promoted as something essentially Canadian. It hasn't been there; it's not there. At the moment, the census is not associated with Canadian pride. That's something we should undertake, but it's not there now.

So my answer is that I do not think you will have a valid and reliable portrait of the Canadian citizenry with a survey that is not mandatory. That is my belief.

•(1315)

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** I just want to interrupt a little bit. I have an e-mail that's somewhat representative of my audience. This person starts out by saying they're one of the many who had to fill out the compulsory long-form census form and they did not fill out one answer correctly.

I think this is the assumption that's being made incorrectly, that because you're forced to fill it out, you're going to tell the truth. I don't know how you could possibly determine whether people who fill out a mandatory form or a voluntary form are telling the truth, and just because it's mandatory, that they will be telling the honest truth in the survey.

You're not. So you are basing your statistical analysis on possibly a falsehood. You don't know if that represents Canadian values or the reality of where they are.

The other thing is that I don't think it's patriotic, sir, to know whether I have a loose tile in my bathroom or whether the railing on my stairs is loose. I don't think that's a measure of my patriotism to reveal that to the government.

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

Mr. Gameau.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** *Merci beaucoup.*

My first question is to Ms. Vonn.

It's very clear to me from your testimony that the B.C. Civil Liberties Association has an extremely strong focus on the issue of privacy. You made that very clear in your opening remarks. Yet in the case of the long-form census, what I understood you to say was that there's an important dimension of public good involved in the gathering of that information and that, so far, Statistics Canada appears to have had a very strong focus on the critical importance of ensuring privacy.

So while you cite many other examples of issues where privacy is far more of a concern in government, would my interpretation of what you say be essentially correct?

**Ms. Micheal Vonn:** Yes, that is essentially correct. I would just alter slightly the notion that we understand that the long-form census is a public good.

With the requisite humility of non-experts in statistical matters, we leave it for statisticians to determine whether the mandatory census is the best way to go about extracting these data, because there is clearly some data that's needed. Our understanding of that expert testimony is that it is. Given that, we agree with the Privacy Commissioner that the privacy implications appear to be proportionate.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you.

It seems to me that, in this debate on the census, understanding the issue is the main problem. It has become evident over the past two months that not all Canadians understand or are interested in the census. There is a great deal of misinformation that, unfortunately, has been spread in part by my Conservative colleagues.

I would like to know what you think of the following comment by the member for Kootenay—Columbia.

[*English*]

He is quoted as saying that Ottawa is retaining the long-form census, but unlike in the past, it will now be voluntary rather than mandatory, and that this is how it should be. He says, Going about it in this way is far more accurate and intelligent than if the system had continued by coercion.

I would like to have your comments on that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Garneau, who are you directing your question to?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** First to Mr. Bélisle, then Mr. Beaud and then Mr. Veall.

**Ms. Denis Bélisle:** If I have understood correctly, he is saying that a voluntary survey or poll would have greater validity.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Yes. In fact, he said “far more accurate”.

**Ms. Denis Bélisle:** I do not understand.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaud.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Beaud:** I have already answered this question several times. The size of the sample—whether it is 10%, 20% or

30%—is not a problem. We spoke about this earlier. It is the strategy used to collect the information that is the issue.

All the scientific literature on this subject indicates that voluntary samples are more problematic. Given that, in practice, we have not used a voluntary long form, what we are saying is based on our knowledge of what took place previously. Will it be 70%, 75%, or 80%? We do not know. The problem is that the damage will have been done. There will be a break in the data series used to carry out analyses and enabling governments to make good decisions.

I do not believe that many statisticians or people interested in these matters would defend this. The quality will diminish. To what extent? It is difficult to say because we have not yet gone through the exercise.

• (1320)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** *Merci, monsieur Beaud.*

Mr. Veall.

**Dr. Michael R. Veall:** With a voluntary survey, the statistical problem is not the answers of those who do answer, it is the answers of those who do not respond.

Mr. Rutherford made the good point that you might think people who are disadvantaged would see it to their advantage to answer questions like this. However, we can compare responses on voluntary and mandatory surveys and it turns out that this is not so. Low-income people tend not to respond.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you.

Just as a final comment, because one of the witnesses—you specifically, Mr. Rutherford—questioned whether people who had difficulty with language would be filling out the questionnaire, we had Ms. Elisapee Sheutiapik, who is a board member of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, speak to us at the last hearing, and she told us that with a voluntary survey, because of language difficulties, nobody in the Inuit community would fill it out.

It is precisely because of the mandatory nature of this program that the government offers help for people to fill out the questionnaire. That's why it is filled out, because help is offered. That's why there's a 95% response rate on this.

I just wanted you to be aware of that.

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

Mr. Rutherford, we're going to give the floor to Mr. Lake, and you can make your intervention afterwards when Mr. Lake is finished his intervention.

Go ahead, Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Mr. Garneau quoted a Conservative member and made the assertion that he was speaking for the entire party when he did so. So I assume Justin Trudeau was speaking for the entire Liberal Party when he said, Ignatieff, he's a little all over the place sometimes... He says this, he says that — he contradicts himself. For me, he's not someone with... maybe he has the intelligence, but maybe not the wisdom required.

I assume, Mr. Garneau, that he was speaking for you as well.

Anyway, I'll move on to the topic at hand. One of the things I want to focus on is just the actual question here, and again, let's get down to the fact that really what the government is saying is that it's not a statistical question. It's not a question of whether we like information. We all like information and we all want to do the best we can to solve the problems facing this country. The question we're trying to answer here today is, should the government force people, under threat of fine or jail time, to answer the questions in what was previously the long-form census?

We agree that we have a mandatory short form that most Canadians would actually associate with a census—who you are, where you live, and those kinds of things. But when it comes to the long-form questions, questions such as what time you left for work or how much housework you did—and I'll come to you, Mr. Murdoch, and ask you this question—should one of the people you represent, someone from a poorer background who the opposition party has stated repeatedly is the least likely to answer the questions, or a new Canadian or someone from an aboriginal community, the people who are least likely to answer the questions, be forced to answer those questions under threat of jail time or fines? Should a single mother with three kids, living at the poverty line, be threatened with a \$500 fine because she doesn't want to answer a question about how much housework she did last week?

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** I may disagree with jail time, I may disagree with a \$500 fine, but I think you have to have something behind a mandatory return that requires people—

**Mr. Mike Lake:** So you would say that she should be fined because she doesn't want to tell the government how much housework she did last week.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** It's hard for me to reply to that, as I think it would be for anybody else. We don't like mandatory fines and things like that, but we have certain other instances where we get fined—

**Mr. Mike Lake:** With respect, though, mandatory means penalty, so there has to be a penalty. The penalty is a fine or jail time.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** I have to stop at a stop sign. If I don't, I risk a fine.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** The safety of others is at risk if you don't stop at the stop sign, though. I think you'd have a hard time convincing this mother of three who is living near the poverty line that someone else's safety or life is at risk because she doesn't tell the government how much housework she did last week.

• (1325)

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** When the reason for that question is explained—which I think is one of the problems we're dealing with, because we have been so used to having just the questions and not the reasons behind them—I think it would give some benefit to a person in that situation—

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Okay, so some people would not get fined.

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** —and we're asking that person, therefore, to respond, to give that information so that we can address that question as Canadians.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** So if new Canadians receive a census form that asks them what their religion is and they say they're uncomfortable answering that question, should they be fined \$500 or threatened with jail time?

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** I might say the fine should be \$10.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** What would you say?

**Mr. Ken Murdoch:** I think the question is real and has verity, and in order to make it mandatory, you have to have some penalty. If we're talking about jail and \$500, we're talking about the extremities of that penalty.

That's a different question from whether it's mandatory.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** We're not, actually. It's \$500 per question. So when you multiply it by the number of questions, it's pretty significant. I think there's some clarity needed in the argument.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** Mr. Lake, Mr. Masse has a point of order.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** I'm just curious. Could we have the researchers give us information about how many people have been fined and how much?

**The Chair:** That's not a point of order, but that's something we'll get them to do.

If you have requests of the chair that aren't points of order, please take them up with me after the meeting or when your intervention takes place, so that we can give the people who do have the floor the full time.

Mr. Lake, go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I acknowledge the fairness of that question. I guess the answer to that question is that it's the threat of fines and jail time.

If you're a new Canadian coming to Canada and you have somebody at your door asking you questions such as what your religion is or how much time you spend with your kids, and it's your first experience with the government—because, let's face it, that person is seen as a representative of the government—I think your being threatened with fines and jail time for not answering is an issue.

Maybe I'll see if Mr. Oh wants to respond to that.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Oh.

**Mr. Victor Oh:** In my contact with the communities, the feedback I had was that this survey was not a big deal, and why do you make it so political? What the country should do now is focus on the economy and jobs. We should stay ahead of the G-7. The average person is not interested in why we're sitting here today. I don't think it's important. I think the most important thing is the economy and job creation.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Mr. Rutherford, you look as though you might want to weigh in on this.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** There's just one thing. We talked about the validity of the answers if the questions are voluntary. I think that's the premise that the statisticians are suggesting, that a voluntary response doesn't have the same material value as a mandatory response.

I think that's pretty much what has been said.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** It isn't.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** It isn't?

Mr. Garneau says it is not as good.

**The Chair:** Mr. Garneau, Mr. Rutherford has the floor.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** I just want to know if that is the premise, because clearly the obvious question—

**The Chair:** In the interest of order, only one person at a time has the floor.

Currently Mr. Rutherford has the floor. If he poses questions, they are through the chair and the chair may wish to direct the answer to you, Mr. Garneau, but right now Mr. Rutherford has the floor, as does Mr. Lake.

Go ahead, Mr. Rutherford.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** I don't know how far you want to extend the argument, because obviously you guys seem quite firm on this.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** I'd be glad to clarify.

**Mr. Dave Rutherford:** Okay, then, really, the whole process that got you guys elected clearly has deficiencies. If only those who were motivated to make a decision voted for you, then clearly you're suggesting it's not valid.

That clearly is not on, right?

Mr. Garneau, would you agree with that?

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

Mr. Lake, do you have anything further to add?

**Mr. Mike Lake:** I think it was perfectly valid, actually.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Thank you to all the members of the committee for your comments and questions.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing.

The meeting stands suspended until 2 p.m.

• (1325) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Hello everyone.

[*English*]

Welcome to our witnesses as we resume today's meeting.

In front of us on our third panel for today we have Madame Taillon, who is from the Canadian Council on Social Development; Monsieur Noreau, from l'Association francophone pour le savoir; and Mr. Zhong, from the Toronto Community and Culture Centre.

As well, via video conference from Victoria, B.C., we have Mr. McFarlane, who is an editorial writer for the *Times Colonist*.

Each of you will have five minutes for an opening statement, beginning with Madame Taillon.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council on Social Development):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My family and I just flew back from Yellowknife at one o'clock in the morning, so you can take advantage of the fact that I have a bit of a fuzzy brain today. But it is great to be here.

For those of you who don't know us, CCSO, the Canadian Council on Social Development, is Canada's longest-established social policy organization in the country. We were founded in 1920 by Charlotte Whitton. We have a long history of working collaboratively with successive governments. Just to give you a couple of highlights, CCSO developed concepts of EI, disability, and old age pensions, and worked collaboratively with governments to roll those out—very foundational Canadian social infrastructure.

One of our flagship programs today is the community social data strategy. This is a pan-Canadian partnership where members collectively purchase over \$900,000 worth of census and other StatsCan data. Members of our consortium include police services, municipalities, United Ways, provincial government departments, front-line service agencies, social planning councils, and many others. The partners use the data to respond to troubling trends in our local communities. The information allows communities to focus their efforts at the neighbourhood level, making better use of our tax dollars and targeting services to those who are most in need.

From our perspective, losing the long-form census is equal to the government turning off Canada's navigation system. Those of you who are supporting this decision need to really think and consider the impact very carefully. Ask yourselves whether you are willing to accept responsibility for the following.

Ten years from now, when your local hospital has an empty maternity ward and your parents can't get geriatric care because the decision-makers didn't have accurate census data to plan for which services were required in that community, what will you say to them? Ten years from now, when the police take five minutes longer than necessary to respond to a burglary in your neighbourhood and thieves get away because a police force didn't have the information from the long-form census data to effectively plan for staffing allocation, what will you say to your neighbours? Ten years from now, when there's an epidemic of a new disease and doctors don't have accurate population data to plan how to respond, will you take your share of the blame for any resulting deaths? Ten years from now, when a new school sits empty on one side of town while another is overcrowded because the census data that informed the school planning and construction is no longer available, what will you say to your community? Ten years from now when fire trucks take an extra three minutes to respond to a blaze at the seniors' home because they didn't have the census data to determine the best location for a new fire hall, will you console the families of those who don't make it? Ten years from now, when your church has to close because of an unanticipated decline in membership, while the congregation speaking a different language is filling up a school auditorium, will you take the responsibility? Ten years from now, when governments at all levels are wasting taxpayer money delivering services that are less efficient and less targeted to local communities because of less accurate information, will you be silent and gladly paying for the wasted time and resources, because you're a taxpayer as well?

Over 340 organizations that serve or represent the ordinary Canadians you wish to hear from have spoken out very clearly on this matter. They have put forward thoughtful alternatives to cancelling this important tool. They have responded to the concerns about privacy, intrusiveness, and coercion.

Privacy? StatsCan is a fortress. Our information is virtually impenetrable. We have to navigate it on a regular basis.

Intrusive? As has been stated before, I know, there are many measures, rules, and regulations that could be considered intrusive in this country: seat belts, stop signs, and airport security. We all understand that these are put in place for our collective good. The same can be said about the long-form census.

Coercion? We actually agree with you: No one should be jailed for not filling it out. But we all know no one has.

Thank you.

• (1405)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Taillon.

Monsieur Noreau.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Noreau (President, Association francophone pour le savoir):** Hello. I represent the Association francophone pour le savoir, Acfas, the largest association of francophone researchers in the world. Acfas was established in 1923. Its membership includes researchers from practically every francophone university that conducts research in French and represents all disciplines. Every year Acfas organizes a conference that brings together approximately

6,000 researchers from 25 countries. Two years ago the Acfas conference was held at the University of Ottawa.

It is a privilege for me to address the members of the committee today. I have often said that if citizens had the opportunity to see the work done by parliamentary committees more often and to attend their proceedings in person, they would hold public institutions in higher regard. I have always considered it a privilege to participate in exchanges such as those that will take place later.

The question is whether or not to keep the long and detailed form used every five years by the federal government, specifically Statistics Canada, in order to obtain much more accurate information from the census. The answer is that we must keep it, for five reasons that are generally similar to what Ms. Taillon mentioned in her detailed comments.

First, from a societal perspective, every community should be able to have a certain idea or create a certain image of itself. In order to develop, societies must have self-knowledge. We must know who we are and how we are evolving. The long form must be kept for no other reason than society must have self-knowledge. It provides essential information about our development.

It is also crucial for the government because fundamental public policies are and must be formulated on the basis of very long-term projections, bearing in mind the cost and consequences of decisions made by the state. Therefore, it is vital that these data be available for a number of reasons and primarily because governments must justify a decision on the basis of facts. The best way to obtain the facts needed to make any political decision is to administer a survey that uses a recognized methodology. That survey is the census. That is the justification. It is required by the federal, provincial and, to a greater extent, municipal governments, which do not have the means to carry out such detailed surveys but continually require the data to shape their own decisions with respect to transportation, social development and public services.

It is important on the international level, as indicated by recent articles in *Nature*, a British journal, which has spoken out against the current debate on whether or not the census long form should be kept. It is important for international relations because Canada constantly provides data to western nations, the OECD, the WHO, and others. A very large number of similar organizations need census data. They make it possible to establish benchmarks and to compare ourselves to other states. To uphold its international reputation, Canada absolutely needs to maintain a very high standard for its data collection. The best way to do this is to ensure the integrity of the existing system, which has truly proven itself.

It is important to the scientific community that I am representing here. In fact, in a very large number of sectors, especially the social sciences and humanities as well as the health sciences—particularly public health—all the data is indispensable. Census data is the starting point for all our research. To a certain extent, it is the foundation for all our research. Therefore, it is not just a survey like all the others. It is the baseline survey. It is the first, the one which gives rise to all other surveys.

It is needed for economic reasons. It determines the parameters for the establishment of a business in one sector or another, and it provides the characteristics of the clients as well as identifies the best place to develop the activities of a business, for example. I am referring strictly to financial and economic reasons. To a certain extent, it is fundamental information for businesses.

•(1410)

For these five reasons, I believe that we must keep the long form and establish appropriate conditions to ensure it is completed. I believe that this has been done so far, that this has been a very useful tool for our communities and that we must continue to use it.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** *Merci, monsieur Noreau.*

Mr. Zhong.

**Mr. Xinsheng (Simon) Zhong (Executive Director, Toronto Community and Culture Centre):** I'm Simon Zhong, and I come from the Toronto Community and Culture Centre. I am the executive director of this organization.

Our organization's formal name is the Toronto Mainland Chinese Community Centre. It was founded in 1995 and registered as a charitable organization in 1998. Since 1996, the Toronto Community and Culture Centre has delivered settlement services, social programs, and youth internship programs, which are invariably supported by three levels of government.

The Toronto Community and Culture Centre provides settlement information to walk-in clients, as well as individual services through telephone inquiries and in groups. Since its inception, TCCC has successfully delivered a large number of programs to help immigrants settle in Toronto, which they call their new home, and provides opportunities to newcomers, particularly Mandarin-speaking immigrants, so that they may participate and integrate with mainstream society and volunteer at community events as well. The Toronto Community and Culture Centre targets 250,000 Mandarin-speaking community members in the GTA.

On August 13, 2010, we organized 38 organizations in the Chinese community on behalf of 100,000 community members, who fully support the federal government's change of the previously mandatory long-form census to now voluntary.

In 2006, the filling in of the long-form census became mandatory and was passed as law. Citizens could receive a penalty or be sent to jail if they refused to fill in the mandatory long-form census. It was a violation of the Canadian Privacy Act. The sentence was unnecessary.

The federal statistics department can find statistics based on various other data, such as municipal immigration data, NAPO data, and—

•(1415)

**The Chair:** Mr. Zhong, if you have another copy of your prepared text that might assist the translators, I'll ask the clerk to provide that to them.

Thank you.

**Mr. Xinsheng (Simon) Zhong:** We also noticed that, every time during an election, 30% to 60% of people are absent from voting, including the vulnerable communities, and this creates an unjust election.

Recently we conducted a survey in our senior community in regard to this matter. We found that 82% of the seniors in the Mandarin community do not support the mandatory filling in of the long-form census, 8% support the mandatory filling in of the long-form census, and 10% are undecided. This shows that most of our citizens disagree with filling in the mandatory long-form census.

Thank you.

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

We'll now have the last opening statement, from Mr. McFarlane, from the *Victoria Times Colonist*.

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane (Editorial Writer, Victoria Times Colonist, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll begin by saying that, although I write for the *Times Colonist*, I am here on my own behalf.

There are three points that I want to bring to your attention. The first has to do with privacy. I've heard it said there is no issue of privacy, that because Statistics Canada anonymizes our data there is no invasion of privacy. There could be no greater misunderstanding.

The notion of privacy that I want to draw to your attention is the need each of us has to be secure in some aspect of our personal lives, the need to keep some part of ourselves to ourselves, the need for an inner sanctuary—in short, the right to privacy in at least some corner of our existence.

On the matter of compelling data, I've heard it said that the important interests at stake here justify gathering this data by compulsion. I disagree. I worked in the health care field for some years. I was a deputy minister of health in B.C., and I set up the first regional health authority in Saskatchewan. We don't compel people to participate in clinical trials, we don't access or link their patient files without consent, and we certainly don't threaten them with jail time if they won't release their medical records.

For example, when the new drug Herceptin was introduced some years back, there were high hopes. Herceptin is used to treat breast cancer. In the laboratory, it demonstrated significant results, but it also produced troubling side effects, including interfering with heart function. More than 5,000 women were recruited in the series of clinical trials to see if it worked, and the results were a triumph. Herceptin improves the chance of surviving breast cancer by about 25%. That translates into 500 lives saved every year in Canada alone. But although the stakes could not have been higher, no one was forced to participate. There was no compulsion.

Finally, in regard to due process, no doubt privacy rights can be withheld if circumstances demand it, but in such eventualities, we expect two things: First, the need must be imperative and there should be no other reliable alternative; and second, there should be sufficient due process to guard against arbitrary use of power. Neither of these requirements is met in the case of the census long form.

### Statistics Canada gives the following justification for compelling intimate details of our lives

Community groups, social agencies and consumer groups use the data to support their positions and to lobby governments for social changes;

This scarcely rises to the level of an imperative need. If such a vague and flimsy justification is sufficient, the right of privacy hangs by a very slim thread, for it should be kept in mind that there is no end to the kinds of information that some group or other will find useful. The huge expansion of the census long form in its relatively brief history is proof of that.

Finally, the decision-making process is brazenly arbitrary. The public at large has no meaningful input. Decisions are overwhelmingly influenced by the requirements of statisticians and other groups. At a minimum, some broader oversight is required to balance the interests of research with fundamental privacy rights.

I want to assert that this debate is not about data, statistical reliability, or how many people in opinion polls support the census long form. It is about the right of citizens to guard their privacies—indeed, to be allowed those very privacies. No one who cares about such matters can be untroubled by the direction of events. The last two or three decades have seen intrusions into our personal lives undreamt of by earlier generations. From x-ray strip searches at airports to the B.C. government's plan to create an electronic profile of every citizen, the space we call our own is rapidly being eroded.

It seems to me that the question before you is quite simple: Is there or is there not a right to privacy? If there is, the census long-form abrogates that right.

Thank you.

• (1420)

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

We will have just over an hour and a half of questions and comments from members of this committee, beginning with Mr. Bélanger.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you all for participating today.

[Translation]

My first questions are for Mr. Noreau and then for Ms. Taillon.

Mr. Noreau, with regard to Acfas, you mentioned that 6,000 researchers meet every year. In fact, the meeting was held at the University of Ottawa two years ago.

You gave reasons why we should continue to use the detailed long form but you did not specify—and that is my first question—if it should be mandatory or voluntary.

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** There is no doubt about that. Given that it is fundamental research and the basis for a great deal of other research, the data from this survey must be much more reliable than all other data. We have to start with initial research that can be used eventually to verify the validity of other research in progress.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** All right.

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** It is very clear that the questionnaire must be mandatory in order for the data to be reliable. In the scientific sector, and this is also the case for the public sector, we need reliable data to make decisions. In the sciences, we need reliable data to understand the reality.

• (1425)

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** In your opinion, would we obtain reliable data only if the long form was mandatory?

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** It is the only way to ensure that there is effective representativeness of the population being surveyed. It is clear that when participation is no longer mandatory, the problem that arises with any voluntary survey comes into play: some segments of the population never participate in any survey. They drop off the radar. They disappear altogether. We can no longer report anything about these groups because the survey is not reliable or complete enough. Representatives are missing. We know that, in general, youth spend little time on surveys about themselves. The vulnerable and seniors are other such groups. Thus, there are extraordinary gaps in some surveys precisely because they are not mandatory. This cannot happen with the census.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Noreau, some people do not seem to think that a survey is not a census and that completing a detailed questionnaire as part of a voluntary survey does not provide data that are as accurate as those collected with a mandatory survey, as you have argued. Why do you believe this?

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** My opinion is based on the body of research carried out. I do a lot of quantitative analysis. The response rate for surveys we use and administer in ordinary conditions is steadily declining. A few years ago, approximately 75% of the population answered questions for an ordinary survey. Today, a response rate of 50% is considered to be good. And yet, it is clear that an entire segment of the population is underrepresented. This cannot happen with the census.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** I will come back to that later.

In your view, does Canada have international obligations with respect to information sharing, which it would not be able to fulfill if the long form was voluntary?

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** I do not know the extent of Canada's commitments to the OECD with regard to providing specific data about its population. However, I do see how this would be useful. It is not just a question of legality or obligation. It is also Canada's credibility as a modern society that is at stake. It deals with other societies that make the effort to study the reality of their own populations. It is a question of international credibility.

[English]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Ms. Taillon, earlier this week there was an article published in the journal *Nature*, written by two leading statisticians in the United States—actually, one of whom came from Canada, Mr. Fienberg, who grew up in Toronto and was vice-president of York University; and Mr. Prewitt, a former director of the U.S. Census Bureau. They make a rather strong affirmation in there that this is a short-sighted decision that will end up costing us billions more, which is somewhat along the lines of what you said. They also say that detailed, reliable data is needed for everything from determining how many hospitals are needed to tracking how poverty and prosperity relate to health or education. They say,

Census data provide the gold standard against which all other studies on such issues can be corrected and judged.

This morning we had Mr. Mel Cappe, who is heading up a fairly well-respected research organization in Canada, and he used to be Clerk of the Privy Council. In response to a question from one of the government members, he brought up a point that has not been explored at great length, and unfortunately we've not been able to get the Canadian Nurses Association before us, although they want to appear. It has to do with the social determinants of health.

In your position as chair of your council, could you elaborate on the usefulness of the long-form census data in terms of social determinants of health and what that all means?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Yes, I'd be happy to.

Just to give you a bit of background, before I came to CCSD, I actually was the senior vice-president at the Ottawa Hospital, one of the largest academic health science centres in the country. So I often call myself a “recovering hospital administrator”, and still in recovery.

But I would say, from the perspective of the social determinants of health, the information in the mandatory long form is really, again, as I mentioned, kind of a navigation tool. It focuses on those aspects that determine our health, such as income levels, whether you are a

single parent, whether you have supports such as child care so that you can get to work. All those things are taken into consideration, because we all know that all of them determine our path through the health care system.

It also helps us project out forward. We all know that we have this aging population in Canada. It's not enough just to know that we have an aging population; we also have to understand where to find them. Where do we need to focus our resources? Are they in urban areas? Are they moving back to rural areas? The long form helps us do that. It's a fundamental tool for that work.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Since the Government of Canada has the responsibility for aboriginal health issues, contrary to the provincial responsibility in non-aboriginal populations, would the same apply, or would it even be more compulsory or more necessary that the Government of Canada have very accurate information vis-à-vis its aboriginal population?

• (1430)

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** As the government responsible for the provision of health and social services to aboriginal Canadians, it absolutely has the responsibility for it. If you survey or speak to aboriginal leaders across the country, they'll tell you that the data that we have right now on aboriginal Canadians isn't the best. So a lot of work needs to be done there. But the mandatory nature of the census actually gives the leadership in aboriginal communities a lever to help them work with their local communities to get that data from people who typically would not fill out a survey.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Bouchard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Welcome madam and gentlemen. Thank you for appearing before us.

My first question is for Mr. Noreau.

Does the data, the information collected with the mandatory long form, provide a precise snapshot of society and the general population?

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** I believe that the response rate for the questionnaire is presently 97%. In fact, it is this rate that assures researchers and governments that the data is reliable. That is the case for any study. In terms of data certainty, the most important element is the percentage of people who participate in the survey. The closer this percentage comes to the total number of individuals in the population studied, the more accurate the snapshot and the easier it is to use the data for other, much more refined studies. It results in a much more nuanced understanding of our reality.

The participation rate is important but the number of participants is also quite crucial. For example, if you need information about the situation of young parents under 24 years of age—and God knows that young families are a reality—a sufficient number of young people must participate in the survey in order to obtain the data required to establish family policies, for example. That is the case for all areas. The greater the number of respondents, the more accurate the data, the more nuanced the analysis of the data, and the more your public policies are in tune with reality.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** In short, the mandatory long form provides an accurate snapshot.

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** It is more specific, more reliable. It can be very reliable given that the response rate is adequate and that it covers practically all the characteristics of the population being studied.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** All right.

How would you describe a snapshot of a society and its population based on data collected using a voluntary questionnaire?

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** In that case, the snapshot would be much more blurry. As I was saying earlier, some segments of the population do not respond or do not readily participate in surveys of this kind when they are voluntary. Consequently, those people are underrepresented in the sample, in the part of the population to be studied. Therefore, there will not be enough data about them to really take their situation into account when the time comes to establish public policies.

This applies to public policies. However, as mentioned earlier, it also applies to determining needs. Should hospitals be built? Where should a school and, in future, shopping centres be built? All these questions require very detailed information about the population and, therefore, a very accurate measurement. In order to be accurate, the participation rate must be high and, therefore, the questionnaire must be mandatory. This is all the more true given that other surveys we conduct cannot be made mandatory. That is because at this point we generally cannot force people to participate in an existing survey and we need this one. The number one survey, on which all the others are based, must be as complete as possible. It is truly the foundation for all research on Canada's population.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. Noreau, with regard to the statistics, will the decision to make completion of the long form voluntary rather than mandatory diminish the scientific value of the data collected?

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** Yes, that is obvious. It will reduce their reliability. In the long term it is going to be a problem for reasons that have not yet been explained. When a survey such as the census is carried out in a specific year—2011, for example—we obtain a snapshot of Canadian society at that point in time. When a number of subsequent censuses are conducted, it is as though we have a movie about our society. It is not just a snapshot. We can see how our society is evolving.

If you wish to plan future public policies, you have to see this change. You can only measure it by conducting the survey in a consistent manner. For this reason, it must continue to be mandatory. It is the only way to reliably compare the results of the next census with those of previous ones.

•(1435)

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** My next question is for Ms. Taillon.

You talked about taxpayers' money. When you conduct a census, taxpayers' money is spent. You are aware that this change represents an additional expense of \$30 million for the government. Moving from a mandatory questionnaire to a voluntary one represents an important change.

Do you think that spending \$30 million on this change represents value for money for citizens?

[English]

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Absolutely not, because it's going to cost us more and we're going to get less accurate data. If you follow the line of thinking I mentioned earlier, you're going to get less responsive services on the ground and communities aren't going to be as well served as they were in the past. Some of the implications of this we'll see over decades, and it compounds. So I'd say absolutely not.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. Noreau, how does the mandatory form contribute to increasing knowledge in the social sciences?

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** It is the basis for calibrating almost all research conducted in a vast number of social sciences, especially economic analysis, sociology and political science, three areas with which I am particularly familiar.

Every time we conduct a survey, we must assess its value by comparing it to census data. For example, it is possible for housewives to be overrepresented in a survey. In fact, with a telephone survey, the people most likely to respond are those who are at home. They are often women. Consequently, in most of our surveys, there is overrepresentation of housewives and underrepresentation of youth, who cannot be reached at home during the day, in the evening, or even late at night.

The only way to take into account the fact that our survey has flaws is to recalibrate the survey based on census data. We use the latter to correct our sample. That is why the census data must be the most reliable. We use the data to correct all our other surveys. In most areas, particularly the social sciences and humanities, it is vital to have a completely reliable survey. In fact, all the others have flaws and we truly need the census data to correct them. That is the case for research.

If census data were to become less reliable one day, we would have serious problems with the accuracy of our research in the six-year period after the census. It would be a very big problem for the social sciences and humanities.

[English]

**The Chair:** *Merci, monsieur Noreau.*

Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Thank you, Mr. Chair; and to all the witnesses today, thank you for coming.

Actually, before I ask a question, maybe I'll just see if Mr. McFarlane wants to weigh in on anything he has heard so far.

I'll give you the opportunity, if you have anything to add or comment on from what you've heard from the other witnesses.

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** Thank you. I have two or three quick points.

We already have difficulty with the existing census and getting responses from native groups. Some native groups refuse to comply, in part because they don't like the element of compulsion.

The United States carried out a voluntary survey some years back at the request of Congress. What they found was that response rates dropped about 20 percentage points, meaning that they were getting fewer than they would have gotten but still a large number.

It was going to cost more, by all means, to do a voluntary process, but let me put these numbers in context.

There are roughly 14 million families in Canada. Let's assume 10% of them are poor: 1.4 million poor families. The response rate in the United States for poor groups was 20%. In other words, for the voluntary census in the United States, 20% of black, urban, poor Americans responded. If we got a 20% response rate in our groups of poor families, we would get 280,000 responses. That's a huge sample size. There is clearly room here for us to have a voluntary survey in which admittedly the number of responders will fall, but because we're starting out with such a massive base—this is the whole of the population we're surveying—we would still end up, I think, with a very significant response.

Although I may have misheard, I thought I heard Monsieur Noreau say we shouldn't be forcing people. If that's the case, there is no dispute here. Nobody that I know of thinks we shouldn't be trying to get this information. The question comes down to the degree of compulsion.

Thank you.

• (1440)

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Ms. Taillon, you had made a comment and I just want to clarify. You talked about the aging population. So to understand the aging population, not only do we need to know who they are but where to find them. I think you were saying not only do we need to know their date of birth, but we also need to know their address, where they are distributed around the country. Is that accurate?

I think you also touched on school location in your opening comments, and it's the same thing there. So it's more than just knowing how many people there are at whatever age; we need to know where they are located as well.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** We need to understand it so that we can put better services on the ground and understand best where to put geriatric services versus day care, and so on, when we have a better sense of where they are specifically located.

It's the same for new Canadians. If we're targeting a particular area that we know is struggling and has lower incomes in Canada, it's

good to know that, but it's even better to know, are there a lot of new Canadians? Are there specific new Canadian populations that have moved into that area? Do we need to tailor services in that area to Somali Canadians, for example?

That is the beauty of it, because it really takes it down to the neighbourhood level.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Ultimately, though, as it relates to schools and the aging population, I agree with you that we do need to understand that, but I would point out that both date of birth and address are on the mandatory short form that everybody has to answer. So we do have that data, moving forward, on the mandatory short form.

As it relates to settlement funding and things having to do with immigration, of course, we would have information on where new Canadians are settling through the statistics that CIC would have as well. Of course, our government has increased settlement funding significantly over the last four years, as one of the witnesses in the previous committee testified.

You represent within your group a significant number of people considered to be from vulnerable communities, the same vulnerable communities that I know the opposition members have said will be less likely to fill out a voluntary survey. I would imagine that it would make sense that they would also be less likely to fill out a mandatory survey.

They are less likely to fill out a mandatory census. They are less likely to respond to those things. Correspondingly, then, they would be more likely to be threatened with fines, significant fines, for not wanting to answer a question.

So again, take somebody from one of those vulnerable communities, let's say a new Canadian—because you just referred to that—who may not want to answer a question that the government asks about housework or how much time they spend with their kids, or religion, those kinds of things. On whatever principle it is that they decide they don't want to answer it, the enumerator goes there a couple of times and asks them and they respectfully say they are not comfortable answering that question. Do you believe that person who doesn't want to answer a question about his or her religion—to put a specific question on the table—should be fined \$500, or threatened with a fine of \$500?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** The thing we have to remember is that the mandatory nature of the census signifies that this is a significant instrument for all Canadians. So under that, we're all equal.

I've talked to a lot of average Canadians throughout the summer and have asked them, "Do you know what the census is?" People will say to me—and granted, this is anecdotal—"It comes to my house and I know it's something that I have to fill out. It's really important".

Do they understand that it's mandatory and there's a fine attached? Maybe not. Maybe some do; maybe some don't.

●(1445)

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Sorry. I need to interrupt you for one second. I know my time is limited and I want to make sure that we get a clear answer on this.

Let's say the enumerator explains those types of things—because I agree with you that there are people who generally, when they get the long form, haven't had it before, so it might require some explanation. Let's say the enumerator explains very clearly that it's a responsibility, that it will make Canada a better place, all of those things, and the person still says, on principle, "I'm not going to tell you what my religion is. I'm just not comfortable with that. And I don't want to tell you how much housework I do".

So that's two questions they refuse. That's \$1,000. Do you think at that point you are fully in favour of this person, who might be of low income, being threatened with a fine of \$1,000?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Unfortunately, if we're all equal under the census, then if I choose not to fill it out, I should get a fine; a millionaire should get a fine; and someone else should get a fine.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Somebody living below the poverty line on social assistance should get a fine.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** People can get fines in this country for not sending their kids to school, whether they're rich or poor. What I'm saying is, at some level, we are all equal. I think the mandatory nature of the census makes it more inclusive. There's a process attached to the mandatory nature of it that helps people comply with it.

Do I want people fined? Do I want to pay a fine? Absolutely not, but if an instrument like that is necessary to get this information, then I would have to say, we're all equal.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madame Taillon.

Mr. Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Thank you, Chair.

I love these imaginary scenarios about the single mother under the poverty line. About the only thing that hasn't happened to her yet is that her dog was run over, or something like that. It's like a bad country and western song.

It's unbelievable in the sense that the minister has turned himself into almost a pretzel, when you think about his quotes when it comes to the agricultural census. He said, The argument obviously to farming associations and to farmers is, "You fill out the form, it'll help the government help you in your farming activities."

But I guess that doesn't apply for the other, urban, Canadians. So I'd like to have your opinion about whether the minister has it right on the farming, by keeping it mandatory and keeping penalties. Ironically, he's making the agricultural community different from every other community, because they've gotten a special treatment of having to continue to have a compulsory long-form agricultural census, with fines and penalties, unlike other Canadians.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** I'm very clearly saying that the long-form census should be mandatory. If there's a strong rationale for other survey tools within the basket that StatsCan administers and there's a

good rationale for why they need to be mandatory, they need to be mandatory.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** This is one of the things that makes it really interesting as we've listened to witnesses. One of the government witnesses was a farmer who had to spend three days filling out the form and had to do it at a time that wasn't convenient. Yet nothing changes for that individual, which is quite ironic.

What I would like to move to and get Monsieur Noreau's and Ms. Taillon's opinion on is this: When there's SARS or a public health and safety issue such as, even most recently, H1N1, do the public health and safety offices—the health units, and so forth, that do the public response—use census information on how to deal with pandemics related to human health?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Absolutely. Unequivocally, that's where their data comes from. That's how they ramp up their response. That's how they know where to find people. That's how they know to place a clinic in this school or in that community centre. That's the information that drives that process.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** That is an excellent question. During the H1N1 crisis, everyone thought it was first and foremost a health issue. We knew that we would manage to produce a vaccine. We knew very well how to do it and how long it would take. The big question was in the area of the social sciences: how would it be distributed? Therefore, it was a all about managing the population and the quantities.

In such cases, census data is precisely the type of information needed. That is also the case for a very large number of government interventions, where specific groups or even the entire population are to be targeted.

●(1450)

[English]

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Obviously the immediate human health aspect is important, but what is also critical is how we deal with it through our economy. If we have this investment in having reliable information, are we apt to be able to save more money in the long run by not having more guesswork, and more specific data versus using less-reliable data?

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** Various studies use census data. If the data were not available, we would have to collect them every time they were needed. Thus, we would have to conduct a large number of specific studies to compensate for the lack of specific census data. That would cost a fortune. The census is not an expense: it is a form of savings. Once we have the data, we can rely on them for a certain period of time because they are robust. In addition, we do not have to carry out a good number of other surveys to collect the same information. To some extent, the census results in savings for the community.

[English]

**Ms. Peggy Taillon:** Absolutely. If you think about some of the questions in the census, if you looked at them individually you would think they were almost absurd. Why do you need to know how many bathrooms I have in my home? But that helps direct important government infrastructure and important government services to Canadians and it best informs what the sewer infrastructure should look like in a given community.

So, absolutely, without that information you are kind of feeling your way around. We all know every level of government is rationing, and you're not using public resources effectively.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Mr. Zhong, how many people in your community have been fined for not filling out the census?

**Mr. Xinsheng (Simon) Zhong:** We have conducted a survey, and 82%—

**Mr. Brian Masse:** How many have actually had to pay a fine because they refused to fill out the census?

We know that nobody has been jailed. We don't know how many fines have been out there.

Has anybody you're aware of not filled out the long-form census and then had to pay a fine?

**Mr. Xinsheng (Simon) Zhong:** We don't know that number.

For a long time, especially for the Chinese community, with it being mandatory, it has been very difficult for them to fill out the long form. They need to find an interpreter, especially senior groups, as they don't know English.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Is that more the issue?

I was part of what was called the “complete count”, in the year 2000. I worked at the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County. What we found with people who had English as a second language was that they actually wanted to participate in the census and other government programs, but they needed, as you said, the interpretation and someone to sit down and help them fill out the forms.

If the current situation stands, 30% of your community will get the census form. It won't be mandatory, but it will show up in their mailbox. That will be something they'll have to deal with. Do you think they will really know it isn't going to be mandatory now? Will they participate? Will they throw it in the garbage? What do you think will happen?

More people are going to get the census as things currently stand, unless it changes.

**Mr. Xinsheng (Simon) Zhong:** Filling out the census form is okay; they support it. If it is mandatory and they are filling it out, that's great. But if you change it to voluntary, it is good.

Another issue is our—

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Why is that good? What will improve? Why will the response rate then increase if it becomes voluntary versus mandatory?

I'm just looking for the reason it is good, in your opinion.

**Mr. Xinsheng (Simon) Zhong:** If they fill out the form, everyone will let the government know about immigration data and other issues. But I think if these details are only collected from the short form, it's okay.

The first thing is that the long form is so lengthy. Another thing is that if they won't fill it out, they will get the penalty.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** But you don't know of anyone who has actually been—

**Mr. Xinsheng (Simon) Zhong:** No, I don't.

• (1455)

**Mr. Brian Masse:** And I think that's part of what has been an insincere debate about this. Nobody has been thrown in jail. Yes, there have been some fines. There have been a few complaints. There are issues, always, that have to do with it. But what I've learned is that people just need more assistance, and that seems to be the issue more than actually doing it. It's having somebody there to help you work through it, because whether it's voluntary or not, if you have English as a second language or you're still just learning English, it can be very frustrating, period, regardless of whether somebody is going to beat down your door and try to wrestle you to the ground and make you fill out your census form.

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

Mr. Garneau.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madame Taillon, I certainly appreciated the way you, in your opening remarks, talked about the cost or the implications of going to a voluntary census. You talked about what would happen 10 years later when government—whether it's municipal, provincial, or federal—and community organizations no longer had the quality and accuracy of data they get through the mandatory long-form questionnaire. I think it's important to state it again: That is the only way to get that accurate information.

But I want to be constructive here. Mr. McFarlane said that, for him, his privacy was very important. My privacy is very important to me, as I'm sure it is to you as well. But I'm the science critic for my party, and I also recognize that, for good governance, I need to have the most accurate information on which to base good policy.

I also recognize another dimension, called “public good”. Public good is something that resonates with me, and I think, most Canadians, and for that, I'm willing to share a little bit of myself. First of all, I don't think I'm that important, but I'm willing to share a little bit of myself.

How do we get that concept across to Canadians? I think that's the nub of problem.

It's looked upon, as many witnesses have said this morning, as just a cost to the individual, as opposed to understanding the greater benefit to society. So how do we get that across?

**Ms. Peggy Taillon:** That's an absolutely great question and certainly, I think, at the heart of the matter for Canadians. Canadians need to understand what the census actually does, what it is.

Again I think, when it comes to the door, people think, “Oh, I’d better fill it out”, but understanding that it actually provides services that they use every day is really important. So I think we need to do a better communication and public education piece with Canadians.

I will tell you, though, that in one of my roles at the hospital I was chief privacy officer. We put a really rigorous privacy program in place to protect health information, which is, we all know, the most sensitive information about each of us. I do believe people are willing to share information with public organizations, absolutely with government, because they trust their government and they trust their government to have the right provisions and tools around to protect their privacy. They don’t understand the specifics, but they do understand that in some way this is going to benefit them.

At the hospital, that’s how we would communicate it with folks. We had a whole communication strategy out there about how their data is used, how it is stored, how we make sure that it’s de-identified, and how it actually benefits them—because if it doesn’t benefit them, why would we take that data and collect it?

So I think you’re absolutely right. We do need to do a better job of communicating to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you.

Mr. Noreau, some people believe that census data are only used by university researchers, that the data really have nothing to do with ordinary citizens, that they are often offered free of charge to our university researchers or to other groups, and that this is its only purpose.

How can we explain to the public that it derives a benefit from use of the data? I think we have some work to do in that regard.

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** It is a question of communicating with the public. I believe that this is a problem not only with the census but with a good number of issues involving relations between the state and its citizens. As members of a society we generally have obligations towards one another. I believe that the state has an obligation to maintain this connection and to make it transparent. In general, governments do not tend to show us what it means to be part of a society and what obligations we have toward one another. The census is just one aspect of this. I believe that not enough information is provided about the census and that this is far from being an exception.

When you pay taxes, you get something in return. We have to realize that when an ambulance comes for a neighbour who has suffered a heart attack, we cover the cost of the ambulance and, therefore, save the life of the neighbour. This information is not adequately publicized. It comes down to communicating with the public. It is the responsibility of the state to show the common thread that links people. It does not do enough information sharing. The census only highlights a more general problem of communication between the state and its citizens.

• (1500)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** That said, it is very easy to show. The truth is that the state probably uses the census data much more than researchers do. In fact, most public policy is based on census data.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to everyone for coming out this nice afternoon and sharing all your wisdom with us.

There is one thing, Chair, that I want to get straight on the record right at the start. Mr. Masse was questioning the witness about how many in his community were actually fined. I think that’s a very unrealistic question to ask the witness, because there’s no way he’d know that unless the privacy at Statistics Canada wasn’t that good and he was actually given that information wrongly.

One thing that would happen—and that actually is a good example—is that someone could tell him. For instance, when he’s having coffee with a neighbour, they might say they got that threatening phone call. I’ve had a few farmers tell me that they received a threatening phone call from Statistics Canada during the middle of the harvest, so they do it, but they don’t like it.

That’s about the only way the witness would know. So I don’t think it’s appropriate to use it for a question.

Mr. McFarlane, you have heard a lot of things. I know you’re in Victoria and it must feel a little frustrating being on TV. You probably wish you were right here in the middle of the action.

Again, it comes back to balancing what you throw people in jail for and what you fine people for and information.

I’ll add a dog in this case, Brian, because I know you want to add a dog into the single-mother example.

If you have a scenario where you have a single mother with three kids, who are on the poverty line, and a dog—because the NDP is concerned about the dogs—is it fair to ask how many bedrooms she has and allow her to not answer that, or fine her \$500 or threaten her with jail?

Let’s say the scenario is an 85-year-old senior who is hard of hearing. Is it fair to ask her that?

What are your opinions on that?

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** I think the fundamental question here is how you keep a balance between the importance of information and the lengths to which you are prepared to go in order to get that information.

I am sorry that I’m not with you. I am not able to fly or I would be happy to be there. But certainly in this debate the sense I’m getting is that whenever that question is confronted head-on, we’re seeing some skirting around it. I suspect that indicates there’s a degree of whistling past the graveyard going on here as people try to get back to the issue of the importance of the data and are clearly uncomfortable talking about the degree of compulsion that’s required to get it.

For example, Mr. Garneau said he wants the most accurate information possible when we're making decisions. The most accurate information available in the health care field, the gold standard, if you like, is personal health files: my health file, yours, and the next person's. Is the suggestion here, then, that because that information is indisputably valuable, that gives the state the authority to compel me to release it?

We don't do that in the health care field. We have something called "informed consent" where we do what I'm hearing talked about a lot today. We go to people and we give them the information about how important this is. Perhaps the physician sits this patient down and goes through all the different kinds of issues in the community that we've heard about: AIDS, SARS, or the difficulties that low-income groups have with health issues. By the end of that kind of discussion, very large numbers of people will give their data. That's the experience we have. But if you put a gun at their head and you say you're taking it whether they want you to or not, it's at that point that you create a difficulty, not only in the health field, but in my view, you create a moral dilemma.

• (1505)

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Actually, Ms. Taillon, I flew in late last night too, so I understand being a little drowsy.

You used an example from the hospital that you worked in, where you went about educating clients—for lack of a better word—

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Patients.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** —on the importance of the data. You explained the process to them.

The data that you collected, though, wasn't forced data. It was voluntarily given to you. Correct?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Was it accurate?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** It was accurate.

In some instances—for example, for mental health patients who are involuntarily admitted—health information would still be collected.

Ontario has gone a long way—and I can only speak from that example, because that's the legislation I was working under—to ensure that patients understand what hospitals and other health providers are doing with their information, that there is the potential in an academic setting for their health information to be used for research. There's an informed-consent process for that. But it was a very rigorous process to get that data.

People know that it's to their benefit, but not all patients want that level of information about them collected. So we would have to work very closely with them and put some provisions in place to satisfy them.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Again, you did a great job in educating the client—or in this situation, the patient—as to why it was important, and then they were voluntarily giving you the data, and as you said, not 100% of the time, but most of the time.

That's where I get really confused, because if it's mandatory, in order to make it mandatory there has to be punishment. So it's either

fines, or jail, or something. There has to be a leverage or a stick to force that question to be answered. If it's voluntary, it's voluntary.

So then I look at the collection of data. If someone is holding a stick or a gun to my head, the quality of data that I would give them would be, "What can I do or say to get this done with as quickly as possible?" But if it's voluntarily given out, it's probably going to be more accurate in a lot of cases because there is no force.

There is nobody threatening me. I'm doing this as a Canadian, as a proud Canadian, and I understand the consequences of the data. I understand that it's going to impact the location of my hospital. It might impact where I have schools. It's going to impact where my parents go for their seniors' home. If I understand all that, I'll fill it out.

So I guess the question that comes before us is, do we have to use a stick to get this data? Some people say yes; some people say no.

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

Madame Taillon, would you answer briefly?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** We've looked at this issue from every angle, obviously because it's a fundamental issue. The mandatory nature of the census actually ensures that there's a budget attached, not to enforce but to promote compliance and inclusion. That budget actually helps people go out and do that community engagement and get people to comply and help them understand what it's being used for. If it's just a voluntary survey, you're not necessarily going to have that budget attached to it to do that work.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madame Taillon.

Monsieur Cardin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Conservative members have been talking non-stop since this morning about jail time and fines, but they have also been saying that the short-form census is still mandatory. So there are still fines, even though people will not go to jail. I think everyone agrees that the prison sentences should be dropped. It is as simple as that. Still, the Conservatives keep bringing up jail time and fines. But there will automatically be fines associated with the short form that everyone is going to have to fill out, because it is mandatory. They are not being straight with us. I am disappointed that, since this morning, we have repeatedly seen what I would call intellectual dishonesty.

A representative of the Chinese community was present at every stage of the day today. Clearly, not everyone wants a mandatory form, and they will never fill out the voluntary form anyway. Earlier, someone said that, when the answers in the questionnaire are voluntary, there is a break in the continuity of data. So the voluntary questionnaire is not reliable. Then you told us that the census data were used by researchers in a number of areas.

Now, I have a better understanding of the attitude of the government, the Conservative Party. You will recall that university research grants in the humanities and social sciences were slashed so that funding could be directed toward research and programs that generate revenue. I am sure you remember that. I believe that we are seeing the true nature of the Conservative government, which basically wants to abdicate its responsibility when it comes to the humanities, to social sciences and even to poverty. That is clear. With researchers such as yourselves conducting research based on unreliable data, the government will question the reliability of that research and will cut your research funding. I think that is now clear. Just watch: it could be expedient from the perspective of political ideology to use incomplete data to deny that poverty exists and thereby to justify their lack of action on the issue.

I do not know whether this is how you see things, but I really believe that something is not right. It is wrong to just say that people are put in jail. That is wrong. It has never happened. What is more, there is general agreement that those provisions should be eliminated from the act. But there are fines associated with the mandatory short-form questionnaire, and Mr. Lake never mentioned that.

• (1510)

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** Perhaps I could say something. I am not here to put the government on trial. You have your own debates, and that is fine, but we are trying to see what can be done in a given society to gather accurate information about that society. I believe that there is some consensus around the table about the need to do that. The problem, as we well know, is that the response rate for a completely voluntary questionnaire would be roughly 30% or 35%, which means that the reliability of the questionnaire and the census would become extremely fragile. The less reliable the survey results are, the less people will want to take part.

In fact, from the moment a questionnaire is made voluntary, a process will start whereby people are going to be less and less willing to fill it out. Since the data will not be reliable, people are going to wonder why they should bother answering the questionnaire. This creates a feeling of alienation in the public. This is well known. It has been studied in Sweden and Great Britain, two countries that changed the rules in midstream. Today, it is very difficult to restore the credibility of the British and Swedish censuses because people are not interested in the census now. That is what we must avoid.

The question you asked earlier is very timely. Certainly, in a very small population, a personalized approach can be used to convince people to respond to a questionnaire or survey. If I understand correctly, that is what happened in your case, in the public health field. But in the case of a population as large as Canada's—and this would also apply to Quebec specifically—it would not be possible to take the same approach. It would not be possible to take an individual, positive approach and personally convince everyone to answer the questions. Another sort of system or framework is needed. That is how the mandatory system came about. The positive approach requires different methods. It should not be ruled out, though.

That said, I believe that, for vulnerable populations, seniors—the Chinese community was mentioned earlier—it would be a good idea to think about specific needs. We need to support these people so

that they fill out the form. There have to be positive incentives, and there needs to be support for populations that we want to reach but that ordinarily have no incentive to respond to the questionnaire or do not feel obliged to do so. This would increase the quality of the measurement. It should not preclude having a general framework to ensure that the census data are clear and therefore making the questionnaire mandatory. One thing does not rule out the other.

• (1515)

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

Mr. Preston.

[*English*]

**Mr. Joe Preston:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair; and thank you all for coming today.

If some of us look a little weary, we all did some things similar to you and flew in either late or very early, and have been sitting here in the position that our brains may not be working quite as well as those of some others.

I'd certainly like to thank my colleagues for some of their good questions, because they're really kind of answering all of us.

As I said in a previous round, this is about whether this form should be voluntary or mandatory, because that's the only question there is. Mr. Masse keeps talking about how many people have gone to jail and how many people have been fined. Well, if nobody has gone to jail and nobody has been fined, then it is already voluntary, so thank you very much.

You mentioned in one of your comments that people are really willing to share information with their government. They trust their government maybe more so with it, so they are willing to do it. Monsieur Cardin and some of my other colleagues asked questions and pointed out that perhaps the deficiency is education—so the more we tell people that this is really important.

That's certainly something else that's being accomplished by this committee meeting and the open public discussion of it. I happen to agree that this is really quite under the radar back on the farm, as they might say, but at least it's out there, and that, to me, is a great assist to the side I'm going to take, that I think this can be a voluntary situation if we ask the right questions and really do help.

Mr. Masse said he was part of the total count and that it was really good, but when we got to certain cultural pieces—and I've been involved in some pieces like this before—we really had to do some explaining. We really had to do some education as to why this was important. When we did and gave a little bit of aid, it got done, and in spades, above and beyond what people would expect.

I think the other thing we can say during this process is that the interest groups—I hate using the term, but the groups that can be best benefited by great statistical information out there—know enough that it has to be collected. I have to tell you, I have a really good feeling that this piece of education has also been done and that if tomorrow three million voluntary census forms went out, there'd be a great deal of groups such as yours, and Mr. Zhong's group too, pushing their people and saying, "Did you get one? Make sure you get it filled out. If you need some help, I'll make sure you do it".

Am I wrong? Is that not correct? Would that not happen?

Madame Taillon.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** I'd love to respond.

As I've said, I think public awareness, public promotion, investing in compliance is crucial. So what I would offer as an option, if we're looking at how we can bring these sides together, is that instead of spending, what is it, \$35 million in additional taxpayer money on the voluntary survey, why not take that money and use it to assist us in compliance of the mandatory tool?

**Mr. Joe Preston:** Yes, but still fine people if they don't fill it out.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** As I said before, it's an unfortunate thing for me to say, but we are all equal and there are all kinds of other tools that we have to comply with; and if we're doing the public education right, I think our compliance would go up.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** I'm agreeing with you, I think, because I think compliance would go up as we convince people what value this has to the country they've chosen, or for citizens who have been here forever, the country they believe in. I believe we can get that compliance to the right number, too.

I feel bad for Victoria, because we're not really talking too much about what's out there.

I've made some points here about just plain public education and about voluntary versus mandatory, and I'd like to make some points about what types of questions are mandatory on this form, but Mr. McFarlane, I'd like to get some input from you.

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** In the 2001 census—and it was all compulsory then, I guess—but in the compulsory short form, 20,000 Canadians identified themselves as Jedis. When the question was asked what their religion is, they said they support the Jedi religion. In other words, they've watched too many Star Wars movies.

The idea that you can get accurate information by compulsion has no support that I am aware of anywhere in the literature. What you can guarantee by compulsion is a response. You put a gun to somebody's head and that person is going to say something. It's almost like the argument for waterboarding. If you waterboard enough people, they'll tell you something. The question is, are they telling you something that is reliable and usable, and what damage have you done to their sense of trust in their government, particularly if the information you're asking for goes very close to their sense of private domain?

I don't think there's any inconsistency in using fines, and even prison, when the information is of the most fundamental sort and when we can all clearly see that it does not go to one's internal privacy. Needing to know where someone lives, what their language

is, what their address is, or how many kids they have is in the public domain. If someone is not prepared to answer that information, then I think they are showing you a degree of contempt for society that justifies some additional measures.

But when you want to sit down and question someone about whether they have mental illness, or what their child-rearing habits are, or how much money they have in their bank account and what their pension is going to be that they've worked for, and when the person who's asking you that question is quite possibly a volunteer from down the street, I think you're going to get a lot of people who feel that it is so much an intrusion on their privacy that they're going to bend the results in order to skate around it.

The consensus I'm hearing here is that this information, in the long form as well as the short form, is very important and that the question this comes down to is, how can you get accurate information without putting a threat in place that destroys the relationship of trust between government and its citizens?

• (1520)

**Mr. Joe Preston:** Well said.

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

Mr. Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Thank you, Chair.

Still, in all this debate, we have yet to hear any evidence, really, of people in Canada who have been intimidated to any significant degree or felt threatened by a fine or a census worker. We still haven't had any of that come forward despite the witness list being open.

There have been cases where people got phone calls and didn't appreciate them. Ironically, that farmer will still get that phone call, because the census for agriculture is not voluntary.

In your opinion, what would the result be if we actually moved the short-form census to voluntary?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Again, I think the repercussions are that you're going to get fewer people filling it out, less accurate data, less effective services on the ground for Canadians, and less accountability for spending tax dollars.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** The fine and the penalty are going to remain there, so nothing changes for that as well.

I asked this question earlier in terms of the previous panel. They are increasing the voluntary census to 30% of households. Do you have any idea in terms of how that number would be derived through statistical science? When they do a voluntary census, why not 40% or 50%? I'd actually be interested in knowing the cost if we provided every Canadian with a census sheet.

What's going to happen is that more and more Canadians are going to get the census information. The interesting thing is, I don't know what they're going to put on it, that you may or may not want to fill this out. I don't know how you promote that anyway.

What do you suggest in terms of a percentage? Is there any mathematical or statistical support?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** We've looked at that with some of the experts we work with, and it's their contention that it just increases. It's just more of the same. You're going to get certain groups that are going to fill it out, and the groups that typically don't fill it out are still not going to fill it out. So you're just going to get a larger sample that looks exactly like that.

• (1525)

**Mr. Brian Masse:** In a riding such as mine, where we have over 100 different ethnic cultures that are organized and English as a second language is a significant issue, we have several groups that do training, and so forth, on that. In the past, we actually had a lower result, and that's why we did the door-to-door canvassing, which isn't done anymore. That was dropped for privacy reasons. We were one of three ridings.

Do you anticipate that a riding such as mine will now suffer from a loss of information? They would know exactly how to pinpoint who did and who didn't respond and how to get the number up to a recoverable amount that's comfortable for a statistical analysis. Will a riding such as mine have further challenges?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Yes, absolutely. What data you have will be skewed. You'll have a less representative number. It's harder to plan for services if the numbers are small.

Again, our main push for the mandatory census is that we believe that's where you get the greatest amount of information on all Canadians, and particularly on Canadians who are vulnerable and need government services, and services from other, non-governmental, providers.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Yes. That's what I worry about, that we're going to lose some services at the end of the day, too, especially for those pockets that are affected.

With the system in place right now, if things were changed, would it make more sense to spend a little bit more attention to having people fill out the forms and them getting assistance? Is that something that should be done? Are there any gaps in our census information right now, on the long form or the short form, some vulnerabilities that need improvement, even if we did go back to a mandatory one?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Targeting groups and getting compliance is always an issue, whether it's mandatory or not. Investing money in that community-level mobilization, going to communities in a culturally appropriate and linguistically appropriate manner and engaging them in the right way is how you get compliance, so that's where the money should be invested.

As I said earlier, I would take the \$35 million and put it there and test it out with the mandatory long form before I would throw out the baby with the bathwater.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madame Taillon.

[Translation]

I think Mr. Noreau has something to say.

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** Yes, and it is going to answer some of the questions that have been asked.

I think that we must not be naive: standard research surveys have response rates of around 30%. If you use electronic forms, the mail and so on, the response rate for all those surveys is roughly 30%. In fact, it is usually lower than 30%.

If you want accurate data, you have to have a sufficient number of respondents participating. We must not be naive. We are talking about people being available in the course of their everyday lives. This has nothing to do with their patriotism. We are talking about normal activities in a normal life. In a normal life, if someone has a whole slew of things to do in a day and this voluntary thing is added into the mix, then without a doubt it is the thing that person is not going to do. This means that the data are no longer going to be reliable. It is very simple. We should not delude ourselves into thinking that, if we explain things to people, they are going to be more willing to fill out the questionnaire. That is not how things work. But we do need to help people who have language problems, such as people who are illiterate. People who have difficulty filling out the questionnaire need to be able to get help. Generally, though, it would be a mistake to think that a completely voluntary questionnaire would have a satisfactory response rate. That is not true. The response rate would be around 30%, and we would clearly not meet our objectives.

Lastly, it is not so much the amount of information as the accuracy of that information that is the problem. Would some services be lost? The same services might exist, but they would not necessarily be tailored to people's needs. Accurate policies require accurate information. The higher the participation rate, the more accurate the data. It is as simple as that. It is simple math.

[English]

**The Chair:** *Merci, monsieur Noreau.*

Mr. Wallace.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here this afternoon. It's getting close to the end of the day.

I'll start with Ms. Taillon.

Your discussion with us really surrounds the issue of accuracy. Would that not be an appropriate statement? You're concerned about accuracy.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Sure.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I don't know if you know this or not, but I spent 13 years at municipal council, and some of the examples at the beginning of your five-minute presentation, I would say, were less than accurate. Would you agree that there are factors other than the census that go into the decision-making around where the schools would go, where the fire hall would go, or the size of the pipe that you would put in for the sewage system?

Would you agree that from a municipal point of view—because those are all municipal issues you dealt with—it would be accurate that it isn't just the census, the long-form census information, that decides where those things would go, that councils have to look at other information that's available?

• (1530)

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** That's a great question. I wasn't suggesting that the census actually makes the decision. It actually assists in the decision-making. That's what I said.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** No, I have to take some exception to that, because the way you presented your argument was that I would be responsible for the death of somebody if I had moved the fire hall three minutes further away because we changed the census form from involuntary to voluntary.

So I want to be accurate, based on my experience, that there are a tremendous number of factors that go into the positioning of a school site, and the school can decide where they go based on provincial law. And the size of the pipe, to be frank with you, is not about how many bathrooms you have in your house; it's about how many people live in the house.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** It's a combination of both.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** We have a number of neighbourhoods in my community where we have lots of senior citizens with lots of bathrooms but they don't use the water system nearly as much as some other areas.

We're talking about accuracy. I think it was a nice speech, but it should be accurate in what we're doing.

There was another piece that you brought up that I thought was very interesting, but you didn't get to complete your thought and I'd be happy to hear it.

You stated to one of my colleagues, I think, that when the census form comes to a mailbox, you are not absolutely positive, based on your discussion this summer, that when people pull that out and see that it is from the Government of Canada and it's going to take them 25 to 40 minutes to do and it's 4, 5, or 40 pages long, or whatever we claim, they actually understand there are penalties attached to not doing it. They are citizens and they feel that it's a responsibility. The government has asked for it and they'll give it to them. It's going to Statistics Canada and not the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, or the NDP. It's going to Statistics Canada, and they have confidence in Statistics Canada.

Did the people you were talking to respond that they knew there were penalties attached to it?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** When I mentioned it, some people did and some people didn't. I said that in my response.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** So my next question then is, if we send out the same survey—and it is the same, just not called the “census”—and it goes in your mailbox and we do a good job of promoting that we need you to fill this out as part of your civic duty as a Canadian, or a new Canadian, that we need your feedback on this, do you think we can still have the same quality or accuracy?

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** Evidence suggests that people will not fill it out.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Right, and we've heard a variety of numbers today as to what the evidence suggests. We just heard 30%, but the most we heard was somewhere between 55% and 75%, or somebody said 80%. But let's take 70% as an example.

So right now we get a 95% return rate. I personally believe Canadians think it's the right thing to do. They don't do it out of fear of the \$500 fine or the jail term that we know nobody has ever had, but because it's the right thing to do. We are now going to send out 4.5 million copies, and 70% of that is almost a million more returns.

I'm confident and have faith in Canadians of all economic and ethnic backgrounds that they will understand that this is something that's important and it's going to Statistics Canada, they will voluntarily fill it out, and we will get an additional 800,000 back—to be more accurate. I don't understand the argument that this isn't going to represent neighbourhoods. We're going to get more feedback if we do the proper job in terms of getting people to do it. I don't see where the accuracy is going to be hurt.

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

Madame Taillon, go ahead.

**Mrs. Peggy Taillon:** I'm not a statistician. I'm taking advice from statisticians. The advisory council to StatsCan and so many experts across the country have indicated that they do not believe that will render the same results as the mandatory long-form census, so I'm going to trust the expertise on this one.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madame Taillon.

Mr. McCallum.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Thank you.

Just following up on that, the statisticians have told us that it's not how many forms are returned, it's the bias in who fills them out. So even if you get back large numbers, you won't get representative numbers from each group in society, and that's the issue.

But I'd like to ask a question to Mr. McFarlane.

I guess you didn't hear the testimony earlier from the B.C. Civil Liberties Association.

• (1535)

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** No, I did not.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Okay, I can summarize it briefly, because I was struck by the big difference between what Ms. Vonn said and what you said.

Her number one concern, obviously, is civil liberties and privacy issues, and she said the long-form census wasn't even on her list of items that she was concerned about. She was concerned about many things, but not that.

She went on to say that if you didn't do the long-form census, some of the alternative methods of doing it instead would cause greater privacy concerns than the long-form census. The examples she gave were if governments used various kinds of databases that they have about individuals to obtain that information, or if they use the methods used in Scandinavia, which are much more intrusive than what we have.

I know you're not responsible for her position, but how would you square your position with the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, which says it's not a significant privacy issue?

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** I certainly don't feel the need to defend anything I would say in the context of what the B.C. Civil Liberties Association might say. I think one judges an argument on its own strengths.

The case we're hearing, as I think Mr. Noreau said, is that something like a 30% response rate would not be enough. There are quite a number of studies—I have a couple in front me—that indicate that response rates in the 20% range are perfectly adequate. The issue here is not the size of the survey, it is the way in which it is carried out.

You made a point that I think is accurate, that one has to be careful in ascertaining that certain minority groups have responded. In other words, one of the difficulties with shrinking down the response level is if you see a particular drop-off in certain groups that have a history of not responding to the same level—the poor, certain ethnic groups, aboriginal groups for sure, and one could go on.

The need, therefore, is to come up with a survey instrument that is particularly responsive to those minority groups. I don't know any research that shows that the best way to get to minorities is to threaten them.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Let me just say that today we had two expert witnesses, Professor Veall and Ian McKinnon, who is the chair of the National Statistics Council, both of whom said definitely, based on their experience, the results from the long-form census are more accurate than any survey. Previous witnesses, I believe, including Don Drummond and others, had said the same thing. So I think the view of the experts on that particular issue is clear—

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** I disagree.

**Hon. John McCallum:** —and like Peggy Taillon, I guess, I will believe the witnesses, the experts.

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** The experts who you've heard took the view that you gave. There are other experts who are equally credible, who've published peer-reviewed work, who take a different view.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Well, we haven't heard them.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. McCallum; and thank you, Mr. McFarlane.

We'll now go to Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll direct my questions to Mr. McFarlane as well, if I could.

I want to continue on that conversation, because it's kind of an interesting one.

It seems to me that at an individual level, when a person receives a long-form census—to go back to 2006—and voluntarily fills it out, it would be pretty accurate. I think most reasonable people would assume that they're going to get a pretty accurate response from somebody who receives it in the mail and instantly fills it out and sends it away as part of his or her public duty.

Does that seem to make sense to you, Mr. McFarlane?

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** I believe I agree, but carry on.

● (1540)

**Mr. Mike Lake:** So that's at the micro individual level.

I want to stay at that individual level and assume that Statistics Canada has received all the voluntary responses and the next phase is to go out and carry out their threats to the citizens who actually aren't interested in filling out their long-form census. At that point, would a reasonable person agree that you're probably going to get a little bit less accuracy in your responses from the people who are forced to fill it out? Does that make sense to you?

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** Intuitively it does. I think it depends, to some extent, what information is being asked for.

I think if you compel someone to give you information that the person knew was easily gotten, such as their address, their name, or how many people in their family, intuitively most of us would figure, "Well, they're going to find out anyway, so I'll give them that".

But if the question goes to something that I feel should be private and you're trying to compel me to reveal it, I think there's a very high likelihood that I'm going to play games with you.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Again, in this case, I'm thinking specifically about the long-form census. So I am thinking about the questions pertaining to religion, how much housework you do, and how much time you spend with your kids, those kinds of questions.

I guess the point I'm getting at is that there are all sorts of sayings about statistics, and I won't repeat any of them here, but it all depends on the angle you're looking at. At the micro level, the individual level, when a person gives information voluntarily there is no question that we're going to have more accurate information from that person. When we go to the next level, that incremental group, the 15% to 20%, or maybe it's 25%, of the population that only gives you that information on that long form because they are forced to, I think any reasonable person would look at that and say that information is going to be less accurate on average than the information obtained voluntarily.

Does that make sense?

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Is there anybody at the table who disagrees with that?

Maybe Mr. Noreau disagrees with that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** I think that, essentially, we have to distinguish between an opinion poll and a survey with factual questions. The census questions are not opinion questions; they are really very factual questions. With very factual questions, the problem you raise is much less of an issue. Forcing people to express an opinion and take a stand can be problematic. When people are asked very concrete, factual questions, the risks you mention are much lower. The problem does not really come up in practice. I think we have to draw a clear distinction between these two types of surveys.

The census is not an opinion poll. It is made up of factual questions that are easy to answer. The information people have to provide is not a barrier to answering, and, in terms of what the census requires from them, the price they have to pay is very low. I think we need to count on that. We need to talk about the reliability of the data, even though the process used to gather those data is mandatory for people.

[English]

**Mr. Mike Lake:** So looking at a question again, you talk about facts, and I'm looking at the fact that one of the questions we had in the 2006 census that somebody could be threatened with a \$500 fine for not answering was as follows: Last week, how many hours did this person spend doing the following activities:

(a) doing unpaid housework, yard work or home maintenance for members of this household, or others? ...

(b) looking after one or more of this person's own children, or the children of others, without pay?

*Some examples include: bathing or playing with young children, driving children to sports activities or helping them with homework, talking with teens about their problems, etc. ...*

It doesn't seem like a very black and white question. It seems like the type of question where, if someone says for whatever reason, "I really don't want to tell the government that information," you might not get a perfectly accurate answer.

Does that not make sense?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Noreau.

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** In theory, anything is possible. In practice, we are not talking about information that is so personal that people are giving away family secrets. People give much more problematic and sensitive information to banks, insurance companies and so on. That is really sensitive information. The data that currently come out of the census are much less sensitive than the information out there on most people that is controlled by private information banks. In that context, I think that the implications of the questions should not be overstated.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Noreau.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Lake.

Monsieur Cardin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that we have covered a lot of ground today and that we have a fairly good idea of what the government wants and where it is headed. I think that people really have a social responsibility to respond to a census. It is a way of contributing to the advancement of our society and living the dictum "know thyself". There is a real need for this. I feel that going with a voluntary questionnaire would put the census on the same level as opinion polls. And any politician here will tell you that no one wants to comment on opinion polls.

**The Chair:** Mr. Noreau.

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** The cost of the drawbacks compared to the benefits is a basic issue. It is also what is at issue here, I think. It is often said that people have to do this for their community. That is true, but they also have to do it for themselves. In my opinion, people who answer census questions do not do it just for society's sake; they also do it for their own sake, because they are part of society. We have to recognize that the drawbacks are quite minor. The odds are that a person is likely to have to complete the long-form questionnaire once every 25 years, and it takes 20 to 30 minutes. So we have to realize that it represents a very minor inconvenience for anyone, given the benefits that come from it. We have to look at the problem in terms of this balance between the pros and the cons.

The same question applies to all the laws that are voted on here in Parliament: are the associated disadvantages—and every act creates constraints—worth the benefits that come from it? The census is a very good example of a case where the cost of the disadvantages is quite minor compared to the significant advantages for the community and for individuals. I think it should be held up as an example of legislation that is in the public good.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Noreau and Mr. Cardin.

Mr. Lake.

[English]

**Mr. Mike Lake:** I'll just continue with Mr. Noreau, if I could.

Coming back to the example I gave, I'll read it one more time: Last week, how many hours did this person spend doing the following activities: ...

(b) looking after one or more of this person's own children, or the children of others, without pay?

*Some examples include: bathing or playing with young children, driving children to sports activities or helping them with homework, talking with teens about their problems, etc. ...*

It's a very nice sounding question. I think most people would probably just fill it out. But again, you get a respondent who, for whatever reason, says, "I just don't think I want to tell the government that; I just don't feel that I should do that." The enumerator comes back again, because the person has refused, and in the manual it tells them to try twice. So they go back again and ask them, and the person respectfully says "no" again. Then out comes the total refusal form, which I read earlier.

I don't know if you heard me read it. Again, in contrast to the light and fluffy nature of the question, the total refusal form notes at the top that it is important that the information provided in the following sections may be used to support a legal prosecution and all details must be complete and accurate.

So the same enumerator who was trying to convince the person to perform their civil duty and answer the question and the person respectfully said "no" then fills out the section that asks for the description of the person who refused: age, gender, height, weight and other physical details such as facial hair, tattoos, glasses, birthmarks, distinctive clothing, etc.

Does that seem reasonable? To me, it seems kind of heavy-handed. Does that seem like a reasonable approach for someone who just doesn't want to tell the government how much time they spent talking to their teens about their problems?

I guess they have one more problem to talk about now.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Noreau:** The question shows that there are a number of problems related to the discussion we are having. Ultimately, the question is whether the census should give an accurate measure of Canadians' reality and how that can be achieved. That is the question.

If we get into the questions in the census, we are starting to talk about content. Should we ask this question or that question? In my opinion, we have to look at that constantly. Do we need these data or other data? This has to do with the content of the questions. But I am not sure that this is the issue here. I believe that the issue is how we can obtain an accurate measure of the reality of our society. That is the issue. The secondary issue is how to go about that, whether by requiring people to complete the long form or making the questionnaire voluntary. In general research practice, we know that, if it is voluntary, the response rate for certain segments of the population will not be high enough to give an accurate picture of the reality of those subpopulations. They are precisely the ones who are most vulnerable. The government should know their reality.

It is important to always come back to the objectives. Otherwise, we could look at the long-form questionnaire and ask ourselves whether each question should be asked. I am quite sure that Statistics Canada does that and that it does not work alone. I am certain that it brings in experts in a whole range of fields to determine which questions are really necessary. If you believe that certain questions could be changed or other variables are needed, then I think that it is part of your job as the government to tell Statistics Canada. But that has nothing to do with the fact that the measure must be accurate and that there are not a whole lot of ways to go about that.

There is another issue, and it has to do with methodology...

I am sorry. This is your forum.

• (1550)

[English]

**Mr. Mike Lake:** I'm sorry. I have only a limited amount of time.

Of course, that's what the government has done. We have decided that there are going to be 10 mandatory questions and the rest are going to be voluntary, instead of the 40—I can't remember the exact number—mandatory questions and then the other thousands of questions that Statistics Canada asks that are voluntary. So that is precisely the decision we've made.

I would argue that, certainly with all of the statistical experts we have in this country, the expertise at Statistics Canada has been lauded by many during this debate. There is no question from our side in terms of that. Certainly we can find a better way to collect information than to threaten our most vulnerable citizens with fines and jail time. Certainly with all of this expertise we can find a better way to address this issue.

If Mr. McFarlane wants to comment, I'd be glad to hear his thoughts there.

**The Chair:** Mr. McFarlane, would you like to comment before we go to Mr. Masse?

**Mr. Lawrie McFarlane:** It seems to me that there's a consensus here that the country needs good information in order to run itself well. The question then comes down to the degree of compulsion and whether there are, both statistically and in other means, ways to get around the use of force.

I believe there are, and if I were a member of the committee, I think I would be spending my energies developing those.

I think it's noteworthy that institutions that use coercion in order to deal with people characteristically have relationship difficulties with the people they deal with. I don't think coercion is a useful sort of policy tool.

For heaven's sake, if the concern we have is around the value and importance of data, I don't know of any data that's more important to the running of the country than health care data, and we do not compel people to give up their health care data.

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

Mr. Masse, did you have any questions?

**Mr. Brian Masse:** It's redirected. It's a comment here more than anything.

It's not like we have a situation of an unreported crime and someone says unreported census crimes are sweeping a wave across this country. The reality is that the minister could have changed this well before; and yes, there is agreement that there is no necessity for jail time. The reality is that it's the current policy of the Prime Minister, the cabinet, and the administration. They have that policy in place; it exists today. We can't pretend it doesn't exist. That could have been changed before any of this debate even took place.

In the testimony I referred to earlier, the minister was quite candid, saying that he had been working on this for months with the officials. So I think it's important.

I don't think I want the impression to be out there as well to Canadians that there are all kinds of census problems and issues related to reporting.

So I'm going to wrap this up. I think we've gone on long enough in this debate. But I think it is important once again to really point to the fact that it is the government's own policy for the fines and penalties. We haven't seen legislation to cease that, and unless we get some type of agreement to take place as to whether this is going to be voluntary or not voluntary, it has to be passed before the census goes out. So it will be interesting to see whether the government is committed to doing that prior to actually printing the census.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** *Merci, monsieur Masse.*

*Le dernier intervenant sera M. Bélanger.*

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I've been listening here and there are a few things that are bugging me a bit.

On the line of questioning we've heard from Mr. Lake in terms of some of the questions on the long form, whether it be mandatory or not, such as the questions on how much time you've spent in the last few days or week helping with family members, whether they be children or whether they be parents, and so forth, it is fairly obvious to me why any government—federal, provincial, or even municipal—would want to have that information to drive good public policy.

The other thing I think should be said is that cabinet agrees as well, because cabinet has kept these questions for the long-form questionnaire that's going to be sent out on a voluntary basis.

There are a couple of other issues that we seem to be glossing over. One is the quality and the accuracy of the information. It is very clear from all the testimony we've heard that a voluntary survey will not yield the accuracy that a census yields. If you're going to start basing your public policy on less accurate information, then by definition your public policy will be less probing, less accurate, and less effective. To want to go in that direction, to me, is rather astounding.

We've heard all kinds of arguments and debate here, and the government should pat itself on the back. They have unanimity, I think, around the table and from all parties about removing the threat of jail. No one has ever gone to jail and we're not going to use the threat, so let's remove it. That is a step forward in the grand scheme of public policy and public good.

That was the reason we were initially provided by the government as to why they were doing away with the mandatory long form, because they didn't like the fact that we threatened to put people in jail. We've agreed to that and we've all agreed to remove it.

However, we have a fundamental disagreement on the nature of the information that is going to be yielded by a voluntary questionnaire. The experts we had today and at the previous meeting have agreed that it is not as accurate. I recall very clearly Don Drummond, who was on the advisory council for Statistics Canada, appointed there by the government, saying that if we're going to go this route, it's going to take at least 20 years before we can re-establish the benchmark that all and sundry use whenever they do surveys, whether they be done by Statistics Canada or by a myriad of private sector or public interest groups.

So that is the nature of the beast that people have looked at, and I'm astounded that the government is not prepared to understand and realize that an overwhelming group of witnesses here, representing all levels of government, all kinds of academia, have very clearly established that you made a mistake, guys. Correct it, and we are prepared to help you correct it.

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

I want to thank our witnesses, including our witness in Victoria, for appearing today and providing their testimony.

Your witnessing and testimony is appreciated.

The meeting stands suspended until 4:15.

• (1555)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1615)

**The Chair:** We will continue today's meeting. So that members of the committee are aware, we are in public and televised.

I understand Mr. Hoback has a motion to move.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Thank you, Chair. It's just some house-keeping here. It's a motion for a budget, that the operation budget in the amount of \$39,800, for the committee's study of the long-form portion of the census, be adopted.

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

We have a motion on the floor. Is there any discussion?

This budget is for the committee travel for witnesses.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** We now move to the second item listed on the orders of the day, which is a notice of motion from Mr. Garneau. I believe all of you have a copy of this motion.

Mr. Garneau, would you care to move and speak to your motion?  
[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you said, I would like to move this motion.

[*English*]

But I would also like to ask if my honourable colleague Mr. Bélanger could propose a friendly amendment to the existing motion.

**The Chair:** I will allow any amendments.

Mr. Bélanger.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chairman, I'd like to add to the motion the words, "and that the committee submit a report to the House of Commons".

**The Chair:** Okay, we have an amendment on the floor. Is there any debate on the amendment?

Seeing no further debate, I will call the question on Mr. Bélanger's amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** We now have in front of us the motion as amended by Mr. Bélanger. Is there any debate on the motion as amended?

Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** I'd like a recorded vote on this, please.

**The Chair:** Certainly we can do that.

Mr. Lake has requested a formal recorded vote. I will ask the clerk to conduct that vote if debate has ended.

Debate has ended, so I'll instruct the clerk to begin the formal recorded vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** I want to thank members of the committee for their participation today. Seeing no further comment, I will adjourn the meeting.

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