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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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• (1400)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Good afternoon and welcome, everyone, to meeting number six of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

[Translation]

With us today are three subject matter experts. First, we have Professor R. Kenneth Carty, from the University of British Columbia. Next, we have Professor Brian Tanguay, from Wilfrid Laurier University.

[English]

We also have Nelson Wiseman, who is the director of the Canadian studies program and professor in the department of political science at the University of Toronto.

I think this is a very interesting point in our hearings, because we've heard from the minister and we've heard from the Chief Electoral Officer and the former chief electoral officer, but now we're really starting to look, from an academic perspective in many ways, at electoral systems, comparative electoral systems, and comparative experiences across countries.

We're really looking forward to hearing from all of you today so that you can share with us the fruits of your research over time on these important questions and allow us to get a perspective that we can take into further hearings and also when we travel across the country.

[Translation]

Without further ado, I'll hand the floor over to Mr. Carty.

[English]

The floor is yours for 10 minutes.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty (Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the invitation to be with you today.

Although my academic work has focused very much on the issues you've been charged with considering, I think it's also fair to say that I've spent a good deal of the last 30 years in the real-world application of these issues. I served on the electoral boundaries commission and the Fisher commission in British Columbia. I served on the Lortie Royal Commission on Electoral Reform over two decades ago. I worked for both the CBC and the British Columbia ombudsman on electoral issues and electoral broadcasting, and

consulted with the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. I was a federal electoral boundary commissioner for British Columbia after being appointed by the Speaker. I directed a British Columbia citizens' assembly on electoral reform, and subsequent to that, consulted with citizens' assemblies in Ontario, New Brunswick, the Netherlands, and the constitutional convention in the Republic of Ireland.

I've seen a lot of these issues in detail over the years in a number of different locations. On the basis of those observations, I really want to make just six simple, general observations, and then I will happily respond to any questions you might have.

My first observation, I suppose, is the obvious one that there is no perfect or even best electoral system. That's why no two countries in the democratic world use exactly the same system to elect their parliaments. Each has had to find a unique combination of electoral system parts and the wide range of parts that go into a system to suit their history, geography, social order, and their political life.

Interestingly, we saw this very powerfully a decade ago when five provinces launched electoral reform exercises in this country. At the end of those exercises, all five produced very different recommendations for different kinds of electoral systems, I think because they recognized that what maybe would suit them in New Brunswick was not what British Columbians wanted and so on. In the end, of course, despite the discussions that were launched by governments in office in all five cases, none of those five different systems was adopted. In three cases, that was because the provincial voters turned the system down, and in the fourth, because the government was defeated. So there's no perfect or best electoral system or easy choice.

Second, I think it's fair to say our experience cannot tell us how a change in the electoral system will actually play out in practice. That's because under any new rules, political parties, the candidates, and the voters will have clear incentives to behave differently than they do under the first past the post system. Rules that change the voting system will directly affect the whole system, including the way candidates are chosen and who chooses them, the organizing and financing of campaigns and how money is spent and collected in campaigns, the structure and the internal dynamic of political parties, the number and the character of the political parties in the electoral contest, the number and the character of the political parties that get elected to the House of Commons, and, of course, the decision-making mechanisms that voters go through when they choose.

Just for an example, in the last election, we saw a good deal of strategic voting. Under a different electoral system, there might be none, because there wouldn't be the same kinds of incentives for voters, there wouldn't be the same kinds of candidates nominated, and their campaigns would be run in different ways.

Third, I would observe that when a different electoral system produces a different party system and a different parliament, it's going to produce a different pattern of government. That's quite clear, but we can't honestly say how that will ultimately work after new patterns of voters and candidates and members of Parliament and political parties have evolved and changed over time.

I think it's fair to predict that under most other electoral systems, majority governments of the sort that Canadians have been generally most used to will disappear. We have so little experience with multi-party governments in this country that we don't have any clear idea how they'll work either in the short term or in the longer term or what they will look like. They seem to be working very well in Denmark, for instance, where the Prime Minister actually comes from the third-largest party in the Parliament. The parties have found a way to build working relationships. They don't seem to be working so well at this moment in Belgium or Spain where the parliaments have been struggling to form a government. As well, there is a whole range of examples in between that one could point to.

We don't know what governments will look like or how they'll work. This is something we'll have to learn and we'll have to change as new parliamentarians and new voter patterns evolve.

Fourth, I would say that we need to remember that the federal realities of our country will necessarily govern possible or even desirable reforms.

• (1405)

If we maintain our constitutional practice that assigns members of Parliament by province, then we must recognize that some systems that will work well in large provinces like Ontario might not work very well in the territories or some of the smaller Atlantic provinces that would have many fewer members, particularly if we wanted to go to some kind of proportional system that consumes more members than electoral districts.

It, of course, would be possible to have different systems in different provinces, or different parts of provinces. We experienced that in Canadian history over time, but that would undermine our understanding of elections as common national events and we would have to begin to think about what a national election was in that case. It would, of course, also produce a House of Commons whose members had very different responsibilities and orientations.

If we're concerned with the principle of "all votes counting equally", and there's been a lot of discussion about that, then it may well be that the place to start is surely with the fact that we don't have representation by population in this country and never have. Votes have always counted more in Prince Edward Island than in British Columbia, several times more. Changing the voting rules to a different system isn't going to change that reality. That won't give us equal votes as long as we don't change that system. I know it's deeply imbedded in the Constitution, and that's probably beyond where anyone on this committee reasonably wants to move, but

that's the kind of reality we need to keep in mind when we think about equal votes, this federal dimension to the system.

Fifth, let me say that the thousands of Canadians who took part in the recent provincial reform debates in the citizens' assemblies in Ontario and in British Columbia, in the Commission on Legislative Democracy in New Brunswick, on the parliamentary commission hearings all across Quebec, have been very clear about what they want in an electoral system. They've identified pretty clearly what they think are the three values that they most highly value.

One was fair representation, and by that most voters meant something like proportional representation was the value that was to be put near the top of the list.

Secondly, they valued strong, identifiable, local representation by which they meant an individual, local MP they felt connected to and that they could identify with, and would identify with them and their community.

Thirdly, many Canadians, in fact a plurality in British Columbia, said they wanted more choice on the ballot. They wanted a more sophisticated ballot. The one they have now allows them to put an X beside one name and they thought that, frankly, they made more complex choices every day in Safeway than when they went into the ballot box. Most other electoral systems provide for different patterns of choice, so choice was something they would like to see.

That was the perspective of voters, but those are three very different aspects of any system: the counting rules, the representational basis, and the ballot form. Those three dimensions of a system, which are part of any different electoral system, can be and are combined in very many different ways in different systems. Often, to give up some of one is required if you want to get some of the other. For instance, it's why they recognize that there's always a trade-off between proportional representation and local representation. If you want a single electoral representative from your district, it's very hard to have proportional representation because you have to go to multi-member districts, and so on.

In fact, all electoral systems involve difficult and contentious trade-offs between those three dimensions that then spill over into all the other dimensions of the electoral system I've referred to. That's in fact why the five provinces came up with five different systems when they went through this exercise, because they combined those basic pieces in quite different ways.

Let me conclude with a more personal note, drawn perhaps a little bit less from the comparative experience. As a scholar of political parties, and I've spent my career studying political parties in this country and abroad, I'm particularly struck by the extraordinary role that they've played in Canadian history. This is a country put together by political parties and constantly re-engineered and reimagined by political parties as nation builders. They are one of the few institutions that Canadians have in common. National general elections are one of the very few things that Canadians do together. On election day we all do that together. It's national political parties that tie us together at election time. When I cast my vote for a national political party's candidate, I'm acting in concert with my fellow citizens in Montreal and Saskatoon and hundreds of other communities across the country. I believe we risk losing a good deal of what gives elections their national meaning, gives common cause to our public life together, if we undermine national political parties.

• (1410)

In the past, both of the great historic national parties in this country have broken apart and fallen into pieces, only to be stitched back together in response to the powerful incentives of our current electoral system, the most recent example being the rebuilding of the Conservative Party after it broke into three pieces in the 1993 general election. My view is that with a highly proportional electoral system, there's a major risk that we would lose our national political parties. I think the electoral incentives would powerfully favour regional and sectoral parties at the expense of national ones. Our national parties might easily break into pieces of different kinds and different shapes depending on the party. Under proportional representation, like Humpty Dumpty, national parties would not easily be put back together again.

If the country was badly governed, if there was evidence of a genuine national democratic malaise, if there was a representational crisis, it might be worth taking the risk and moving to a radically different kind of electoral politics, a different kind of way of linking Canadians together on that one day in which we act together in concert in advancing our common community life, but I don't think those things are the case. In defence of political parties and our common national political life, my own personal vote would be against proportional representation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Translation]

The Chair: Professor Carty, thank you for that very clear presentation.

We will now move on to Professor Tanguay, whose research focuses on electoral reform in liberal democracies. He studies the relationship between political parties and their interests outside the political system. I should also note that Professor Tanguay authored the Law Commission of Canada report entitled *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada*, in 2004, I believe.

Professor Tanguay, you may go ahead.

Mr. Brian Tanguay (Professor, Political Science, Wilfrid Laurier University, As an Individual): Thank you.

Good afternoon everyone.

[English]

I am extremely grateful to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform for inviting me to speak to today's session. The work being done by this committee, as everyone here no doubt knows, is of vital importance for the future functioning of our democratic polity and I am honoured to be part of the process.

In 2003, I had the great pleasure and privilege of working for the Law Commission of Canada, drafting its report, "Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada", which was submitted to the minister of justice in 2004.

This followed an extensive and multi-faceted public consultation strategy undertaken by the LCC, in which citizens and experts were asked what values they wanted to see enshrined in our electoral system. Two values appeared to be the most important to voters and experts alike when they were asked to think about their ideal electoral system. First, it should promote demographic representation; in other words, the legislative body that emerges after a vote ought to reflect or mirror the population that elected it. Second, the translation of votes into seats ought to be fair or equitable in its treatment of the political parties; there should be a rough correspondence or proportionality between a party's share of the vote and its representation in Parliament.

Of course there were other values, as Professor Carty mentioned. The importance of local representation came out strongly in our consultations as well.

Just to underscore the importance that most voters place on this idea of the fairness of electoral outcomes, let me give you some illustrations from the 2007 provincial election in Ontario and the accompanying referendum when 63% of those voting rejected a mixed member proportional or MMP system for the province.

At that time a few colleagues and I conducted a survey of the electorate. When asked if it was acceptable or unacceptable for a party to win a majority of seats without winning a majority of votes, 44% said "unacceptable", versus 29% who said "acceptable".

When asked whether a party that comes in first in an election with about 40% of the votes should get more than half the seats in the legislature so that it can govern easily on its own, only 23% agreed. Fully 50% thought that the party with 40% of the votes should get about 40% of the seats. This idea of proportionality seemed ingrained even among voters who rejected the MMP proposal. We conducted our survey after the referendum.

Our existing electoral system—whether you call it single member plurality, SMP, or the more colloquial "first past the post", or whatever you want to call it—does not do a very good job of meeting either of the requirements I have mentioned. Of course this is not to deny that the present system has its strengths: in particular, its simplicity to the average voter, its ease of administration, its promotion of territorial representation, the link between the voter and his or her MP in a defined constituency, and its fostering of accountability—voters can usually easily identify the decision-makers, parties to reward or punish after their term in office through the time-honoured practice of throwing the rascals out.

But in terms of producing a Parliament that is a mirror of the nation, the present electoral system does a very poor job indeed. It poses significantly high barriers to the election of women, minority, and indigenous candidates. This was actually one of the original complaints about first past the post made by one of the earliest advocates of PR in the 1850s, John Stuart Mill.

First past the post, as we know, simply does not produce proportional results. It does not treat all parties fairly. Most importantly, from my perspective, the present system throws up enormous barriers to the inclusion of new voices in Parliament—like those of the Green Party, for instance—something that detracts significantly from the effectiveness of this body as a forum for the generation of new ideas and policies to cope with the challenges posed by this rapidly changing world.

Taking into account the data from the public consultations, the LCC report's main recommendation was to establish a mixed member proportional, or MMP, electoral system in Canada, similar to those currently in use in Germany, Scotland, Wales, and other jurisdictions.

Such a system, in the thinking of the commissioners, would offer the best of both worlds since it would feature the election of individual members of Parliament in geographically defined ridings, a hallmark of the British-style system that we've used here in Canada since before Confederation, along with European-style representation of diverse currents of opinion in the electorate through proportional representation from party lists.

• (1415)

I don't have sufficient time to get into the nuts and bolts of the model that was proposed by the LCC, but suffice it to say at this point that the essential feature of the system would be to divide the House of Commons into two different tiers of seats. Two-thirds would be constituency seats, elected through first past the post, and one-third would be regional list seats. In our current 338-seat Parliament that would translate into 225 constituency seats, 110 compensatory list seats, and with three single-member ridings for the territories as is presently the case.

Voters would have two votes, one for a candidate in a riding and one for a party, and they could split these votes, opting to support, for example, a Liberal candidate in their constituency while voting for the Greens on the party portion of their ballot. We have found in a country like New Zealand, which has adopted the mixed member proportional, that between 30% and 40% of voters will actually split their ticket.

A party's share of the seats would be determined by the party vote and the number of constituency seats it wins is then subtracted from this total. Remaining seats are filled from regional party lists, which would be determined in any of a number of different ways.

The law commission proposed so-called flexible lists, which would provide voters with the option of either endorsing a party's slate or indicating a preference for a particular candidate on the list. Since the law commission report was published it's become abundantly clear in the referendum result in Ontario, for example, that a majority of voters will not tolerate any hint of party elite manipulation of these list candidates. That was one of the biggest

factors contributing to the defeat of the referendum, in my experience.

The other was the proposal to increase the size of the legislature simply to restore the size that it had prior to Mike Harris and the Progressive Conservative government that was elected in 1995. That proposal raised the ire of a lot of voters.

If I were to rewrite or amend the 2004 report, I would try to ensure that these lists we're selecting from are in the most open fashion possible, either in the form of completely open lists where the voter can tick beside whatever list candidate they would want to support or even—why not?—in the form of regional party primaries, which would be one of the most democratic ways possible of selecting these candidates.

If this model were adopted, the MMP proposal from the law commission, one of the most significant consequences would obviously be to make majority governments an unlikely outcome of elections. Coalitions of necessity would become the norm. Many view this prospect with fear and loathing, but I firmly believe that this change would represent a tremendous opportunity for Canadians.

One of the biggest flaws in the Westminster model is that it allows the governing party with its artificially or mechanically swollen legislative majority to dominate the political agenda almost completely for a period of four or five years thereby contributing to the marginalization of Parliament. As Professor Henry Milner has recently argued—I'm happy to see he's on the list of witnesses scheduled to appear this week—our electoral system contributes to what he calls PMO autocracy and the only effective way of remedying this problem is to share power at the highest level by replacing majority governments with stable minority or coalition governments.

I share the view of the Dutch political scientist, Arend Lijphart, that consensus democracies, those whose electoral systems are based on some form of proportional representation, on the whole have more satisfied electorates than is the case with the majoritarian democracies—like our own—that operate under first past the post based on the Westminster style of government.

The consensus democracies in Lijphart's study, which is called *Patterns of Democracy*, do indeed provide a kinder, gentler form of democracy than their Westminster counterparts. They outperform the latter in terms of representing women's interests, promoting political participation, and providing the majority of their citizens with an adequate social safety net.

At the same time Lijphart shows that the most typical criticisms of PR systems, that they produce governments incapable of making the tough economic decisions and therefore lead to diminished economic performance, are highly exaggerated. PR systems are in use in a wide range of countries—think of Sweden, Norway, Germany—whose economic performance has been as good as or better than ours or the United States' in the last couple of decades.

•(1420)

Even though the law commission report was shelved by the government of the day, its analysis and recommendations have continued to inform recent debates over electoral reform in this country. I know that Fair Vote Canada frequently makes reference to the law commission report, and I find that gratifying.

This is an issue that simply refuses to die no matter how many referendums or plebiscites were held in the past decade. In my opinion, the only way to address the significant defects in our Westminster model of government is through fundamental electoral reform, by adopting a system that ensures both demographic representation and proportionality in the translation of votes into seats in Parliament.

Thank you.

•(1425)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Tanguay. It was very interesting to have that historical perspective from the report you wrote.

We move on now to Professor Nelson Wiseman, director of the Canadian studies program and professor of political science at the University of Toronto. Professor Wiseman has appeared as an invited guest at the Senate's legal and constitutional affairs committee, the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and the House of Commons procedure and House affairs committee. He authored an invited brief on Canada's fixed election date laws for the U.K.'s House of Lords as well.

Without further ado, Professor Wiseman, the floor is yours.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman (Director, Canadian Studies Program, and Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for inviting me to participate in your deliberations. You're welcome to my 10 pages of notes.

Your mandate is to study alternate voting systems, mandatory voting, and online voting. I'll state my positions briefly.

There is, of course, as Professor Carty pointed out, no single best electoral system. If I lean toward any one alternate system, it's the hybrid system used in Manitoba and Alberta between the 1920s and the 1950s, whereby you had a single, transferable vote in one large multi-member riding for the cities—Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg—and you had the transferable ballot in the other areas.

I would not put the issue of an alternate voting system to a referendum. It's unnecessary, it's a waste of money, and it will almost certainly fail. You may as well recommend not changing the system and save Canadians the cost.

If you have a free vote in Parliament on an alternate system, if it is a free vote, I also believe it will fail, because it's not in the interests of most members, or quite frankly, the governing party.

Mr. Kingsley gave you some examples of the distortions caused by the first past the post system. Here's a more glaring example. In 1993, 2.2 million Canadians voted for the Conservative party and 5.6 million voted for the Liberal party. For all those Conservative votes, they elected two members. That's 1.1 million votes to elect an MP.

For every 31,000 votes, the Liberals elected a member, and they got 177 seats.

I do not favour mandatory voting.

You've also discussed Internet voting. I don't favour that either, but if it is going to be used, I think it should only be for the housebound and the disabled.

Let me also say something about Elections Canada, because I had a chance to read the testimony of the Chief Electoral Officer. I don't think Elections Canada ought to have any education function beyond letting people know where to vote, the ID requirements, and how to register if not on the voters list—in other words, the conditions in the current Fair Elections Act.

Now, many have studied alternate voting systems, including a number of provincial governments, citizens' assemblies, academics, the law reform commission, and others. I'm curious what your committee is going to learn that is new. In fact, striking this committee suggests that the government is hesitant to fulfill its election promise.

There has been reference to the Ontario citizens' assembly. My thought is that we should look at it more closely, because I think the experience is instructive. There were 986 submissions about changing the system; 692 offered pro comments and only 7 or 8% tendered con comments. By a vote of 94 to 8, the assembly proposed MMP but in the referendum, the cons prevailed overwhelmingly. As Professor Tanguay pointed out, barely more than a third of the public voted for it.

I respectfully note that Mr. Reid discounts the cost of referendums. He said to the media, "If we're worried about the cost of democracy, then we should suspend having any future elections, shouldn't we?" This, I submit, is a false equation. If Parliament changes the electoral system without a referendum, the international community will barely take note. If elections are suspended, the reaction will be much different.

I'm aware of a recent poll that says 65% of respondents favour having a referendum. I suggest you discount such polls. I have yet to see a poll on any issue in which respondents said a referendum was not their preference, when they're asked.

I think referendums are a dreadful way to determine policy or to be taken as the cardinal measure of democracy. If Canadians feel strongly enough about how a government has changed the electoral system and they oppose the change, they'll defeat the government in an election, no matter what system is used. The term "democracy" is too readily bandied about in debates about the electoral system.

●(1430)

Democracy has a kaleidoscopic quality that transcends election rules, much more vital than the electoral system, much more vital than turnout rates or a country's underlying political cultural underpinnings. The health and vigour of its civil society, the independence and probity of the judiciary, media freedoms, transparency and accountability in public administration, informed debate in crafting public policy, unfettered competition in political ideas—on these scores, Canada's electoral system is actually a sidebar.

Proportional representation promises to end distortions caused by the current system. Proportionality, incidentally, is something courts consider in the context of section 1 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The ranked ballot, which I do not oppose, may also cause distortion. A party could receive 40% of all the first-choice votes and not win a single seat. B.C.'s experience demonstrates that the public's appetite for electoral reform varies with perceptions of the unfairness of the most recent election. In B.C., 58% of voters supported a change in the 2005 referendum, but 61% opposed it in the 2009 referendum. This suggested a fickle public.

The elections held before the referendum, however, explain the inconsistency. In 2001, the Liberals won 77 out of 79 seats on 58% of the vote. The NDP only won two seats out of 79, and it got well over 20% of the vote—22%. This seemed palpably unfair to many. In 2005, however, the Liberals won 46 seats on 46% of the vote, and the NDP won 33 seats on 42% of the vote. For many, this fairer outcome sated their appetite for change in the 2009 referendum.

I do not believe there is much popular desire for change nationally. The public perceives that although the Liberals won less than 40% of the vote in the last election, the result was consistent with 2011, when the Conservatives won the same percentage, and in both cases the parties formed majority governments.

MPs are elected to act on their party's platform and to exercise their judgment, not to make policy by transmitting the momentary and impulsive opinions of their constituents.

Some believe the constitutional convention requires a referendum. I think you're going to hear this tomorrow. I disagree. Tomorrow you'll also hear from the eminent constitutional scholar, Peter Russell. I look forward to his opinion. He may surprise me, but I think he shares the view that there's no such convention.

Some argue—and I saw this argument in *The Globe and Mail* by the former prime minister's legal adviser—that a reference case is necessary because the courts might rule a change unconstitutional because it lacks provincial concurrence. They cite the Senate reference case.

There's no parallel, in my opinion. Senators represent provinces and provincial interests. MPs do not; they represent parties and the people in specific constituencies. In the Senate case, the reason we had a reference is that many provincial governments questioned the constitutionality of the federal government's proposals and launched references themselves. No province has hinted at questioning the

constitutionality of changing the federal electoral system. If they do, I think they'll be batted down by the courts.

I have many more comments and observations, but I thank you for your time.

●(1435)

The Chair: Professor Wiseman, you have about a minute left, but I see your brief is much longer. Do you want to address some of the points in the rest of your brief through answers to questions, or are there specific points you'd like to make in the minute that remains?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Okay, let me attack Elections Canada, because nobody else has.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You have 45 seconds to do that.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Elections Canada doesn't need an education campaign to alert voters to new systems. The media, the parties, and the candidates will do it. In my opinion, Elections Canada has become too big and is constantly looking to increase its bureaucratic net. It and many others, including media outlets and more than 400 academics, claimed that the Fair Elections Act would disenfranchise citizens and lead to lower voter turnout, but we had an uptick in turnout, from 61% to almost 69%. It has never increased that much between two elections since Confederation. Linking the electoral system to citizen disengagement is unconvincing. I suggest you look at what happened in New Zealand.

I believe my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Wiseman.

Thank you to all three witnesses for those positions on electoral reform that were obviously very well informed by experience and research, positions that are not all in harmony, I would add, which will make our discussion that much more interesting and stimulating.

We'll do two five-minute rounds, keeping with our normal practice that we've established already.

We'll start with Mr. DeCoursey, for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Our thanks to all three of you for sharing your perspectives, which are based on years of experience and hard work in this field.

[*English*]

I'll ask my questions in English for the benefit of everyone here.

Professor Carty, you talked a little bit from your experience working with different institutions and from your research. There's an appetite for citizens to have more choice in their balloting. I think Professor Tanguay, you mentioned the Law Commission of Canada was excited by some desire for that. I didn't hear that from Professor Wiseman.

Maybe starting with Mr. Carty, can you speak to some of the benefits that you may see or that you've heard from citizens, if they were allowed to have more choice or more preference in their balloting? Then maybe we'll get a perspective from the others.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: We've heard a very great deal about this in the British Columbia exercise, which involved the citizens assembly and 50-plus public hearings around the province. In many of the presentations, voters said, "You know, we're faced with putting an X beside one name or another, and that really doesn't give us much of a choice". They understood, because they'd been studying other systems, that in some places people were able to perhaps rank—one, two, three—the order of their preference; or that in some systems, people had a vote for a candidate and a vote for a party. There was a range of different ballots that offered them what they believed to be more sophisticated or more complex patterns of choice, and they were keen to exercise those, given that they had one day every four years to have some kind of input.

The other reason that was often strongly voiced was that they believed that this would give them more say in whom their representative was, and they thought that, in fact, the losers in that, or the people who would have less say, would be the political parties.

There is a deep antipathy and suspicion of political parties amongst voters. They said that, you know, 30 people get together in a church basement somewhere and foist a candidate on them. If the parties had to give them several candidates and they got to choose one, then they would have more say. This was a way in which they believed that citizens would have more say with respect to the parties and the candidates they offered, even in a party they strongly supported. It was a way in which, I guess, they would think of bringing a primary system and building it into the electoral system, so there was a double level of choice there.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: In terms of the law commission, one of the reasons we recommended the mixed member proportional was precisely because of the fact that it would seemingly maximize choice for voters. It would give them the opportunity to vote for a candidate, which we heard loud and clear is very important for voters, that geographic link that they have with their representatives. But at the same time, there was the other portion of the ballot, this fact that they would get two votes, the other for a party, which would allow some kind of heightened strategizing on the part of voters. In a single riding, they could say that they really do like the Green candidate but they think it's really important that the NDP get support. They could play one off against the other, and we've seen from the operation of mixed member proportional in Scotland, Wales, and New Zealand that this form of individual strategizing does take place, and it does seem to be important to voters.

● (1440)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Professor Wiseman, do you have any comment?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I don't think Canadians are terribly interested in this issue. I think studying alternate voting systems is an elite pleasure industry.

If you look at any of the polls taken before the last election, in which people were asked what the most important issues were, you'll see that changing the electoral system did not register. Now, are

Canadians interested? The people you will be meeting—and you're going to be travelling across the country—I suspect are going to be largely self-selected. Most will be in favour of changing the system, but they will not be representative of the public. We have experience with one stand-alone referendum on the issue, and that is in Prince Edward Island. In all the other places—and I heard Mr. Reid refer to a turnout of 61% in the referendum in B.C., but that's because there was an election going on.

In Prince Edward Island, the turnout rate is consistently 80% and above. It was that in the last election. When it has its stand-alone referendum on an alternate voting system, according to Peter MacKinnon, the political scientist, 35% of Islanders turned out.

The Chair: On that note we'll go to Mr. Reid, who I'm sure will have a number of questions.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you.

I want to start by asking Professor Carty to give a comment to follow up on a comment Professor Wiseman made. Professor Wiseman has indicated he's not an enthusiast for referenda on this subject.

Professor Carty, you were involved in the design of the B.C. STV system, which was subsequently submitted to a referendum. Back in 2004 you indicated that you thought referenda were the gold standard, as you put it then, for deciding on electoral reform. That was, in all fairness, before the referendum that took place.

I'm wondering what your views are on that today.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: Well, I would say I wasn't involved in designing that system. That system was designed by the assembly members, and I was only their humble servant in that exercise. The evidence from the referendum—and we did a fair amount of research after it—was that the large majority of people who voted in the referendum really knew nothing about the issue on which they were voting. People who voted for the referendum voted to adopt the system. I think someone said 58% voted in that referendum in favour.

The large majority of people who voted for it were people who knew about the citizens' assembly and who approved of that exercise. What they were really doing was signalling their approval of an initiative that had come from their fellow citizens. They understood that their citizens had spent a year going around the province consulting, thinking about it, and working out a range of alternatives, because they devised an MMP system, an STV system, and a first past the post system.

All that the evidence suggests, from the polling we did, was that people who voted for it were really people who knew about the system, but more to the point knew about the citizens' assembly and believed they had done a good job. The majority of people who came to the polls who knew nothing about it essentially voted against it. I think the evidence, certainly from Ontario, suggests that the large majority who come to these referendums really know nothing about the substantive details of the issue.

In both those cases they were being asked to vote on a very specific proposal, because both those citizens' assemblies weren't recommending a change to an MMP system or to an STV system, but were recommending a very detailed, worked-out, complex system, which it would probably be unfair to expect people to understand.

As to what I said in 2004.... I'm sorry, I don't remember.

• (1445)

Mr. Scott Reid: That's fair, and I did not mean to imply—

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: Nor do I remember the context, but I think our evidence suggests that it wasn't a good exercise. There are other aspects of the citizens' assembly that, in retrospect, didn't work very well, if you're interested.

Mr. Scott Reid: I did not mean to imply at all that you were in any way manipulating the citizens' assembly, but you did participate and provide expert information to them.

Let me ask this further question, then, relating to the whole notion of citizens' assemblies. They provide an alternative way that this process we are engaged in today could have been done, and this raises a question. Whatever comes out of this process, there is this committee, which will make a report, and then the government may or may not choose to follow that report.

The government has been very explicit that cabinet will have the final say on how this thing is designed. This raises the question, effectively of whether that is going to cause the same outcome to seem less legitimate in the eyes of Canadians than it would have been had it come out of a citizens' assembly exercise.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I don't think we know about that. I think it will depend on what comes out of it. People have conflicting views about the legitimacy of everything governments do. The citizens' assemblies were held, really, following the example of Premier Campbell, who thought it really wasn't the business of politicians to be writing their own rules. That was his logic, and it was one that he in effect sold to his caucus and sold to the province, so the citizens' assembly went at the business of devising a system.

The counter-argument is that it's precisely the business of elected representatives to make these kinds of decisions. I don't think we could extrapolate one way or the other about how people would respond to a report that came out of a balanced committee and that had a kind of measured consideration of the proposal that ultimately came out.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Your five minutes are up, but you'll have a chance to ask more questions later.

It's now over to Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thanks, everyone, for being here.

I wouldn't mind perhaps, Mr. Carty, later finding out some of those lessons learned from the citizens' assembly. That is not the direction the government has chosen, although we would have

preferred one. Perhaps not today, but I know there was a great deal of...particularly on the side of the things that were learned.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I wrote an excellent book on it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Buy the book; that's a good book promotion.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm posing a question to you, Mr. Tanguay. It's with respect to what you learned at the law commission and what we learned from other research on the direct connection, that in whatever system we come up with there has to be some direct connection between a voter and the person who represents them.

You talked about the potential of a party primary to derive the list. There have been concerns about MMP systems around the world where parties and party leadership decide who will be on that list and there isn't as much of a connection. They're like senators suddenly. You don't know who they are and you don't feel any connection to them, and that wouldn't be healthy for democracy. Have we seen that anywhere? Can we find some modelling of how that primary system would work in terms of deriving those lists? I assume it's at the regional level.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: It would be at the regional level, and to my knowledge, no. My thinking is that the law commission advocated what we called flexible lists, where as a voter you could choose between either the party slate or individual candidates on that slate.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm imagining something akin to what we have right now, which is candidates for each of the parties running in local nominations at that riding level and first past the post. But in a consensus-based system that proportionality can get made up also of candidates but who ran at a more regional level, who were picked and then presented to the voters that way.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

I committed to taking some questions from Twitter, and Eleanor Grant has consented to me asking this. If a Conservative in Toronto or an NDP in Atlantic Canada, you would like a sympathetic rep to talk to who knows your region. As it is right now, if you're a Conservative in downtown Toronto, or if you're NDP out in Atlantic Canada, if you're a Liberal on Vancouver Island, what does the proportional system offer that's improved from the winner-takes-all system for people who happen to live in a region in which their political views are not being expressed by the winner at the ballot box?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Again, if it's the law commission model, it combines the two of geographic representation, of single representatives in a defined constituency, supplemented by these compensatory list MPs, however they're chosen. What we seem to find in both the law commission and subsequently the Ontario referendum is that the regional compensatory lists have to be small enough that you can't be a voter in Nipissing getting somebody from Toronto representing you.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's right, at the right scale level.

•(1450)

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Exactly, that's right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I have one follow-up question perhaps, and I don't know if Mr. Wiseman can comment on this, or you, Mr. Tanguay. I think you made reference about the stability of governments that are chosen by consensus democracies, by proportionality. How stable are those governments, because there are sometimes inferences that they're not? How successful are those democracies, and by that I mean economically, social programs, and that type of thing? Is there anything to fear in the examples that have gone ahead in other countries that have chosen proportional systems in terms of the effect on real people's lives and real outcomes in terms of policy?

Mr. Wiseman, do you want to start, then perhaps Mr. Tanguay?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: We could talk about the Nordic model. It seems to have worked well up there, in Denmark, Norway, Sweden. We could talk about what happens in the Mediterranean basin. In Israel, in Italy, and in Greece, it hasn't been quite that co-operative, so I come back to my point that the electoral system is secondary to the underlying political culture. That's going to be much more influential. As Professor Carty pointed out, there's no way of knowing how things will work out, but I'd be fairly optimistic if you change the system.

In New Zealand after it was changed—and voters wanted the change, they voted in favour of it—they got the change and then they got very upset. Had we had another referendum, they would have reversed it because they felt that a small party was the tail wagging the dog. The smallest party joined with an unlikely—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Did they not have another referendum? They had a second one, whether to keep it or return to first past the post, and they chose to keep it, did they not?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: They did.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Yes, they did, because after that election now the politicians and the citizenry were adjusted to the system. It seems to be working there. I'm not an authority on New Zealand.

I think that would happen in Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

It's now Mr. Thériault's turn.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thank you very much for your input.

Mr. Wiseman, I quite appreciated your candour, even though I don't necessarily agree with what you said.

This is for all three witnesses. You talked about the political culture. I had the opportunity to travel across Quebec as part of the study carried out by the province's electoral reform commission. In every single region of the province, we frequently heard from people that, beyond the mechanics of the electoral and voting system, they were fed up with the conduct of politics, particularly when it came to party lines.

Political parties are ideological war machines. A compensatory mixed voting system would inevitably lead to coalition governments.

Would that necessarily make the public less cynical about governments? On the one hand, if the political culture does not follow, responsibility for the mandate is more or less clear come election time. I'm referring to the responsibility for the process. On the other hand, who makes the list? Even if it's voters casting the ballots and primaries are held, the list is still the choice of the top 15 members that the party has more or less given priority to.

Doesn't such a system strengthen the party line, when the government is made up of a coalition decided by the party apparatchiks after the fact, following an election?

I have to be critical, even though I am in favour of change.

Isn't the situation I described likely to make people even more cynical, if political parties don't adapt? What reason is there to think that parties would be able to adapt?

What value would election platforms have in 25 years if we ended up with coalition government after coalition government?

•(1455)

Mr. Brian Tanguay: As for whether the reform advocated by the Law Commission of Canada could lead to less cynicism among voters, I think the answer is partly yes. As Professor Carty mentioned, people are highly skeptical of political parties at the moment. That makes our jobs, as political scientists and members of a special committee on electoral reform, quite difficult. In some cases, that cynicism has simply become the reflex and is not necessarily based on the reality.

In my opinion—again, this is merely my opinion—a system in which the forming of a coalition government forced the political parties to work together could eliminate some of that cynicism. Confrontation-style politics, a key component of the Westminster system, reinforces the cynicism that Canadian voters have, in my view. I think voting systems based on proportional representation force political parties to co-operate, thereby eliminating some of that voter cynicism. That said, such a system would not be a cure-all.

Mr. Luc Thériault: And what about the issue of party lines?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: It depends on how candidates on the list are chosen. If the party machine or elite appear to have control over who is on the list, it will reinforce voters' cynicism. But if voters get to choose, for example, through primaries or completely open voting, I think it would be very hard to claim that party elite were controlling the process.

The Chair: Thank you.

That leaves about five seconds.

It's now over to Ms. May.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses today.

I noted that Nathan Cullen had intended half of his question to go to Professor Tanguay, so I'm just going to follow up.

You may have been ready to jump in and we ran out of time. The question that was being asked was whether we had any evidence of how consensus-based PR systems perform in terms of indicators of stability of governments, economic performance, and so on. If you had any comment on that, I wanted to give you a chance.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Thanks very much.

Again, I mentioned in my remarks the seminal study by Arend Lijphart, the Dutch political scientist, who divided up OECD countries into consensual versus majoritarian democracies. He found on a whole range of indicators that the consensus democracies, those that use some form of proportional representation, had happier, more content electorates, citizenry; performed better on a whole range of social indicators; and were certainly no worse, and in many cases better, than the majoritarian countries, such as the U.K., the U.S.A., and Canada, in economic performance. One of the key elements of consensus democracies is coalition government, which forces collaboration among parties, which leads to greater continuity of policy outputs. All of that leads, in a kind of beneficial feedback loop, to a happier electorate.

Ms. Elizabeth May: While I'm with you, Professor Tanguay, I wanted to ask you this. I've had this idea, and I think Scott Reid actually remembered that it's used in one state within Germany. The most open of lists that I can imagine would be if the proportionality to redress skewed results, which did not reflect how people had actually voted, would be just to take the top-performing candidates from those who'd run across the country under the party banners nominated through the usual way. Has that been an idea that, instead of your regional primary idea, would be sufficiently open? Are there flaws in that?

• (1500)

Mr. Brian Tanguay: It is a very good idea. I will say that Fair Vote Canada is currently drafting a kind of proposal that would be based on the best losers—the term that's sometimes used for that. I guess that's derogatory.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I think that won't catch on.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: That's right. We should say the best runners-up or something. The advantage there is that these are all candidates who have presented themselves before the electorate in one way or another, whereas some list candidates—whether they're chosen through a primary or an open ballot or a flexible list, whatever—would never have actually sought election on the hustings, as it were. That would be the great advantage of that particular system, and it is something that Fair Vote Canada is actively pursuing at the moment.

Ms. Elizabeth May: My next question is to Professor Carty. I was struck by your presentation because you said things and, with all due respect, I thought it was the opposite. I just want to put it to you. You said that a highly proportional political system will encourage regional and sectarian parties. Now I've always been of the view, with all due respect to my friend Luc, that the Bloc Québécois could never have become official opposition other than by first past the post. I mean how does a party that only runs in one province assemble enough seats to actually be the official opposition in our Parliament if not for first past the post? Maybe you were just contrasting highly proportional representation systems versus proportional representation that included mixed members. I was confused by the comment. Perhaps you could clarify.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I think my observation was that I believe under relatively highly proportional systems, even moderately proportional ones, the big national parties would be disadvantaged. In fact, it would be to the advantage of different parts of these national parties to kind of go their own way, as the Conservatives went three ways in 1993. Without first past the post, they would never have come back together. I think that over time we would have, in fact, the erosion of national parties because there would be electoral incentives in different regions, among different groups, to produce their own candidates and not be tied by a national platform. I believe the real risk of proportionality is the erosion of national parties, and I believe, national politics.

Mr. Thériault made the very wise observation that political parties are instruments of war; they're instruments of conflict. The question about electoral systems is this. Where does the conflict take place? Does it take place within the parties, between the parties, amongst the candidates? Every electoral system changes where the conflict takes place, both at the electoral level and at the governmental level.

What we're thinking about is how we organize conflict in our society—I mean that's what democracy is trying to do—and how it gets structured, and what the consequences are of different patterns of conflict. My observation was simply, I think, that proportionality would generate patterns of conflict that would be antithetical to the broad, national political parties that have been critical to our national development.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you for being here today. I'm quite enjoying your testimony today, because it's eye-opening and very blunt. I like that. I appreciate it.

We were talking a little earlier about education during the periods of referendums we have had in Ontario and in B.C.

Mr. Wiseman, you were saying that you didn't think Elections Canada should be involved in the education process. I feel that we have an ambitious agenda ahead of us, and we have been reassured by Elections Canada that once this committee comes up with a recommendation and it passes, we will be able to put a new system in place.

My concern, however, is how to educate the people about this new system. Are there any lessons that were learned from B.C. and Ontario about the education process in their referendums? Then, Mr. Wiseman, could you also comment on why you think Elections Canada shouldn't be involved in the education process? I know they're eager to make sure that we increase voter representation and voter turnout and that we educate voters on the new system.

• (1505)

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: The experience of the British Columbia exercise was not encouraging. The major paper in the province, the *Vancouver Sun*, assigned a full-time correspondent for the entire year, and the assembly and all its work was covered in enormous detail. The newspaper published the entire report in full in the newspaper, yet we know that when most people came to the polls, they really knew nothing about it.

I'm really loath to admit this, as a political scientist, but it turns out that most people don't go to bed at night thinking about electoral systems and dreaming about possibilities. It's the truth, so the challenge of educating would be enormous and I think most people would learn simply by doing, the first time.

If I had a simple-minded solution—this is one that Wiseman is really going to hate—it would be the power of compulsory voting, because I think that would produce enormous incentives for the political parties to get out and educate large numbers of voters.

Large parts of campaigns are spent now identifying the vote and getting people to the polls. You all know that; you live by that. If you have compulsory voting, parties don't need to spend nearly the same kind of time identifying voters and getting them to the polls, because they're going to get there. I think one of the experiences of Australia is with compulsory voting. It means the parties spend an awful lot of time trying to educate the people who are going to show up about what's at stake and what their policies are.

What you want to do is create a system in which parties and active participants who have something at stake are actively engaged in educational work.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Based on my experience in the Ontario referendum campaign, I would not be optimistic about the prospects for political education through the party organizations themselves. I think that kind of education is always going to be refracted through a partisan lens.

What we found in the referendum campaign is that the parties played a confusing role. They sent out confusing and mixed signals to their own voters. That was especially true of the Ontario Liberal Party of the time, which itself was conflicted over its initial recommendation to create a citizens' assembly to explore electoral reform. If that means a greater role played by Elections Canada in educating voters, I would be all for the bureaucratic overreach entailed in that system. I don't see it occurring through the parties themselves.

Another thing was that there was a lack of information in the Ontario referendum campaign. The citizens' assembly report was not published, as far as I know, by any newspaper. The copies disappeared very early in the referendum campaign. I remember going out to local farmers' markets and people asking for a copy of

the report, and I never had one to give them. I'd have to try to summarize it myself.

There was, then, a lack of education, a lack of information, confusing signals put out by the parties themselves, all of which led to a less than optimal context for the conduct of the referendum vote itself.

Again, just to confirm something Professor Carty said, what we found in Ontario was that the more people knew about the system being proposed, the more likely they were to support it, but that was a minority of the voters.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have to go to Mr. Kenney, but you have about five to 10 seconds left, and we'll make up for it on the next round.

Go ahead, Mr. Kenney.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all three of the witnesses.

One point that seems to be held in common by the three witnesses, if I'm not mistaken, is the view that the public, broadly speaking, does not follow in great detail questions about electoral systems, and as we just heard, perhaps wasn't even aware of this as an election debate.

Just as a matter of debate, it is the contention of the government that it has a mandate for potentially radical changes to the electoral system without reference to the people directly in a referendum because the commitment to end first past the post was a platform item in the last general election.

Do any of the three witnesses have any evidence that this was a top-of-mind consideration for voters in the last general election?

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I have none.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: No.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I am quite certain that it wasn't. There isn't a poll that mentioned it, but that doesn't take away from the fact that parties act on their platforms. That justification has been used by every party.

• (1510)

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Exactly.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Quite, but has it been used before for radical changes to the electoral system in Canada?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Nobody has proposed it.

Hon. Jason Kenney: But it has been, has it not, Professor Wiseman? In the Prince Edward Island, Ontario, and British Columbia instances, all three governments ran on a mandate to change the electoral system after consulting the public, either through citizens' assemblies, or referenda, or both. Is that not true?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: No, they simply ran on a platform that they'd have a referendum.

The story in Ontario—and I'm quite sure in British Columbia—is that the parties didn't take positions on it. In fact, if you read the media, you would have found it hard to know that when you went to vote you would have two ballots: one for whom to vote for, and one on the referendum. Indeed, 138,000 fewer ballots were cast on the referendum question in Ontario. They were left blank.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Wiseman, it was your contention that there is no convention in Canada for a referendum to be held prior to significant changes to the electoral system. But is it not true that those three referenda constitute a clear convention, and that in every modern effort to reform the electoral system it has been submitted to the people for their judgment?

I ask this of all three witness: does that not constitute a convention?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I don't think it does. It's not a constitution.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Not at all.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Indeed, does that mean it would have to be 60%?

Look, if the governing parties were interested in changing the electoral system, they would not have set a bar of 60%. That's a clear signal that you don't want it to change.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Now, Mr. Wiseman, you've said that a referendum is not necessary and it would be defeated; that is to say, a proposal to change from first past the post would be defeated.

As an advocate of changes in the system, are you not saying that it's unnecessary precisely because voters would choose something other than your preferred option?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: My position is that voters will adjust to whatever system is devised and they won't have any problem with it, as Mr. Carty said, after they do it once. They'll see what will happen after.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Tell me if you think this is a mischaracterization of your position: that potentially radical changes to the electoral system are supported by elite opinion, shall we call it—you said 600 or so of the 900 submissions to the Ontario citizens' assembly, for example—but that it is not supported by popular opinion.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: It's not supported because the public doesn't think about this issue. As Professor Carty said, they don't go to bed at night..., and changing the system doesn't take away from people's right to vote or their preference to vote.

It seems to me that the assumption in your question is that changing the system favours a certain kind of party, for example.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Professor Carty just indicated that it was the view of former Liberal premier Gordon Campbell that the electoral system did not belong to politicians, but to the people, and therefore they should be involved, initially through a citizens' assembly and ultimately through a referendum on any changes to it.

Professor Wiseman, you're now suggesting that not only should there not be a referendum, but there shouldn't even be a free vote in the House of Commons. The executive branch essentially ought to dictate a system.

Why do you reject former premier Campbell's contention that the system ultimately belongs to the people and that they should have the ultimate say?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I'm not opposed to free votes in the House of Commons. I just believe if you do have a free vote it will be defeated. I'm not saying the government should act without a free vote. That's up to the government. I don't have any problem.

With respect to Campbell, Campbell was interested in getting re-elected. One of the ways you get re-elected is that you tell people we're going to give you a referendum on a question. "Hey, I like referenda. Give me any question. I want to vote on it."

The Chair: Okay, that's it.

We'll have to move on now to Mr. Aldag for five minutes, please.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Thank you.

I'm going to turn my questioning to the issue of online voting.

Professor Wiseman, I think you indicated that you don't support online voting except, perhaps, for the housebound.

I would like to just get your thoughts on your hesitation or resistance to online voting and then move to our other two witnesses to get their thoughts or comments on the question of online voting.

● (1515)

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: In my limited reading in this area I've seen that the preponderance of experts are opposed to it because it's easy... well, not easy, but you can hack the system.

A few years ago three federal government departments were hacked. We have no idea of how extensive the information was that was lifted. Also, we just had the Democratic Party, the DNC, hacked.

At the University of Toronto the students decided—students are ahead of me, I don't even have a cellphone—that by having Internet voting it would increase participation because turnout was only 15% when students went to vote. They introduced Internet voting and turnout was 15%.

Two or three years ago, the University of Western Ontario had an election for their student council and president and it was hacked. The NDP had a convention to select the leader and snafus appeared. Can you imagine what will happen on election night?

The Internet is convenient, but incidentally it's not a social activity. It's social when you show up at the polls, you meet your neighbours, you get in line, and you talk to other people. Pressing these buttons at home is cocooning.

Mr. John Aldag: Thanks for sharing your concerns about that.

I would ask the other two if they have any thoughts on online voting.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: This isn't something that I have done research on, but like Professor Wiseman I would be worried about the security aspects of online voting. However, nonetheless I am intrigued by the prospect and believe that a number of studies at the municipal level here in Ontario are being conducted or will be conducted in the future, and ought to continue to be conducted. I think it's definitely something that should be explored.

All the while we should keep in mind that the Internet is not necessarily a secure environment for this kind of thing.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: Yes, I know nothing about the technicalities. I heard both the current and the past Chief Electoral Officer say they don't believe that the security concerns have been dealt with yet. I think this is an issue probably for the future.

Mr. John Aldag: The next one I would like to look at is the idea of a referendum, and we've talked about it and we're hearing some ideas, concerns.

I have particularly enjoyed, Professor Wiseman, your candid thoughts on this.

I would like to throw out to all three of you that we are, as a committee, trying to have meaningful consultation with Canadians and setting aside the question of whether or not there's a referendum. What advice would you have for us in terms of getting out and having meaningful discussions with Canadians on this work and the question about how to go forward on electoral reform in Canada?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I think this committee should continue to conduct the work that it is doing. The town halls are going to start taking place or already have started taking place.

This committee should conduct its work and issue its report and recommendations. The government should bring in legislation and there ought to be included in that legislation some provision for review in the future, which could include, if need be, a referendum. But I think at least one electoral cycle should take place, and maybe two, with the recommended system.

I think Professor Wiseman has made the case that the referendum on this is not needed and in fact might just muddy things. However, by all means include a provision for reviewing whatever new system is brought in after one or two electoral cycles.

Mr. John Aldag: So saving the—

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I have the experience of probably hundreds of public consultations on electoral boundaries, on different electoral systems across this country, and my experience is that they're not very helpful at all. Most people who come to them either come with their own very narrow agenda, with a line to push, or they really don't know very much about it.

Where they can be very helpful is if you have a concrete proposal you're seeking a response to. Certainly that's the lesson of electoral boundary commissions. We go out and hear ideas for boundaries and you get stuff that's not helpful to boundary commissions, but when you propose a map then you get really specific suggestions and reactions that can be enormously helpful.

I think that without a specific proposal saying, "Look, what do you think about this and how should we be thinking about it?", it's very difficult to get very coherent and cumulative opinion.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Mr. Blaikie, if that's all right.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much.

We've heard a fair bit from Mr. Carty concerning his views about the impact a proportional system might have on regionalism in Canadian politics.

I came of age in an era in which, under the first past the post system, Canadian politics was intensely regional. You had the Liberal Party, which was really the party of Ontario; you had the Bloc Québécois, representing Quebec; you had the Reform Party representing all of Alberta and much of western Canada. I'm therefore personally open to the idea of trying something different.

I know that regionalism in Canadian politics was one of the considerations of the law reform commission report in 2004. I wonder, Mr. Tanguay, whether you would share your views on how switching to some model of proportional representation might impact regionalism in Canadian politics.

• (1520)

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I'm not as convinced as Professor Carty that it would be the death knell for national political parties. I don't see Canada being as riven by what political scientists call cleavages, as, say, Belgium is. The model proposed by the law reform commission would have a built-in kind of threshold. You'd need, probably, at least 10% of votes in a region to get one of those list seats.

To me, the worry that there would be a proliferation of fringe or extremist parties and that the national parties would fall apart seems exaggerated. I just don't see—and I share, actually, your views so eloquently stated in the preamble to the question—that we grew up or lived through the near death of the country, all under first past the post. I don't think that a mixed member proportional system would exacerbate regionalism. I don't think it would be any worse than it is now.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: To the extent that it might help get regional voices inside national caucuses, it could actually have the effect of reducing regionalism in Canadian politics.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I would agree with that, yes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I think it's fair to say that critics of the first past the post system would say that one of the major issues is that, with a minority of votes, you get 100% of the power.

When we look at the two main streams you can choose as an alternative to that, you have the alternative vote system and you have some form of proportional system, and there are many configurations. Which of those two do you think is most likely to duplicate that problem of the first past the post system, and how?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I personally am not a fan of the alternative vote. Although it does give greater choice to the voters, it seems to replicate all the problems that we find in first past the post. The ranked ballot by itself would not address the issue that we certainly heard from citizens at the time of the law commission and at the time of the Ontario referendum. That system would not address the flaws in the current system that are so in need of resolution.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Maybe I'll put a more philosophical kind of question to the entire panel. For me, part of the question between trying to decide between an AV model and a proportional model of some kind, if there's agreement that we move away from the first past the post system, is whether we are electing just a rep from a local constituency or trying to elect a Parliament, and one that represents the diversity of views within the Canadian context; and whether we affirm the idea that Parliament, however many parties might be in it and however much they might have to compromise and negotiate, would be better if it represented that diversity of opinion.

Even Canadian voters are sometimes divided within themselves. They say, I really like that person and would like that person to represent my area, but I don't really like their party or I don't like their leader. They wish they could vote for party X and candidate Y, even though they don't belong to that party.

Do you see part of the point of an electoral system as being to represent a Parliament, or do you think it's really just about who the person is who is representing this particular point on the map that we've carved out?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I appreciate your concerns. I'll tell you what I think will happen.

Unlike Ms. May, I don't think it's the first past the post system that generated the Bloc Québécois. I think what will happen with a proportional system is that you'll get a "B.C. First" party, and people in British Columbia will appreciate, given the number of seats they have, that they're not going to become the official opposition but that in a minority Parliament they could be the difference between being part of keeping a coalition in power and not, and could end up driving the agenda of a federal government in favour of British Columbia. Then we'll get an "Alberta First" party.

Actually, the position of the Bloc would probably be reinforced. I think that's the danger. We saw, in Israel, a pensioners' party arise, but on vital issues of war and peace they had no position whatsoever. They were simply interested in securing the position of pensioners.

• (1525)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you. I have to stop you there to give the floor to Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, gentlemen, to your Parliament. It's always quite impressive to have such great minds at the table. Your contribution to Canadian democracy is greatly appreciated, as is your input into our study on this fine July day. While it may not be nice outside, here, in Ottawa, it certainly is pleasant in this room.

You've made numerous points, gentlemen. Although I may completely disagree with some of your views, I can definitely agree on one point.

[English]

Mr. Carty said at the beginning of his speech today that there is no perfect way. We have to understand that what we're talking about is

nothing but trying to get the best for Canadians because there is no perfect system. If we had one, well, we'd use it.

[Translation]

There's a commercial in Quebec that goes, "If it existed, we'd have it." If the perfect system was out there somewhere, we'd have it. We are well aware

[English]

that there is no perfect system on that.

[Translation]

Something really surprised me, and I'd like to discuss it further with you, Mr. Wiseman.

[English]

You talked about the free vote and you said you do not disagree with a free vote, but you said that if there is a free vote, no change will happen. I would like you to explain more about that. I want to hear about that. How can you come to this conclusion today?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I come to the conclusion.... Look, I'd love to be proved wrong, and I'm wrong 70% of the time, but I don't think that many people who ran as Liberal candidates stressed that bit of the Liberal platform or that it was vital to them. Most of the people right here, I think, were not elected on a majority vote. They look around and they know how they got elected. Now, they're taking a risk by having it.

You're going to be travelling around. I want to get back to this point about how we find out what Canadians think. Professor Carty talked about the limitation at town hall meetings. I have a suggestion. Every MP sends out householders. You'll find out. Ask them a specific question on this, and I think you'll find a lot of detachment about it. Again, it's self-selected who responds to these householders and the surveys, but you might be surprised about how few responses you get.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I totally disagree when you say that there is no free vote or if there is a free vote, well, we will lose. As far as I'm concerned, first of all, we are always free to vote. Whatever the vote, we are always free. But the most important thing is that we should let the people decide. I do agree with you when you said that the Liberals—and I will not talk on behalf of them, those people in front of me—didn't hear a lot of talk from their constituencies about this issue. I can quote for you. The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek said a few weeks ago:

It's not something I've heard anything about on the campaign trail.... I don't recall one conversation at the door that had to do with that.

It's clear, crystal clear. I can assure you it's exactly the same thing in my riding in the Louis-Saint-Laurent and Quebec City area. Since the beginning of this committee no one has talked to me about the issue, except those who are involved in politics.

But you know what we're talking about is very serious. We're talking about making a big move. This is why it's quite important, and at least if we follow your guidance, if we follow what you're saying to us, saying, don't have a free vote—

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: [*Inaudible—Editor*] free vote.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: But you said, don't try a free vote because you can lose.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: No, try it. I'm just speculating that it will be defeated. I support the free vote. I'm eager for you to have your free vote.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That's not exactly what you said at the beginning—

• (1530)

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Well, I'm sorry.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: —but I do appreciate your evolution.

The point is that if we don't have a free vote on that issue and if we don't have any referendum, at the end of the day, just one man will decide, the Prime Minister, and we know where he stands.

The Prime Minister said many times before he became leader, before he became Prime Minister, that he did strongly support, and he does strongly support the preference vote. That's his choice. I do respect that. But when you are the Prime Minister and, as you describe quite well, you hold the power as the Prime Minister holds the power, all the decisions belong to one person. Is that fair? Is that democratic? I don't think so. This is why we support a referendum. Don't you?

The Chair: I think this is more of a rhetorical question, and we're out of time.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

[*English*]

My question is for Professor Carty.

In your scholarly article entitled, "Political Turbulence in a Dominant Party System", you wrote that Canadian electoral politics is both regional and volatile and that the result of this volatile, multi-party contest in single-member districts is a high level of turnover in the House of Commons.

I have two questions for you.

Do you have a preferred electoral system that would remedy the volatility and reflect the regional and local political preference?

Second, in your opinion, how does the current electoral system reflect the many social cleavages of Canada in the House of Commons?

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I don't think I have a preferred system. I worked awfully hard for a decade not to have one, when I was working with the British Columbia citizens.

Frankly, I can see the advantages of an MMP system or an STV system, which you'll hear about, I guess, tomorrow morning, or a finished list system, which someone described as one in which every

candidate in the country is listed on the sheet, and you just pick the one and it's translated....

There are hundreds of possibilities and they all involve trade-offs. If you give a little bit more proportionality, you lose a little bit with less local representation, or if you give a little bit more voter choice, then you lose a little bit with less of the parties' capacity to discipline their members. They all involve trade-offs. I don't have my own preferred system.

The great success of the Canadian party system, in my judgment, has been in some sense preventing the enormous variation in the cleavages, in the divisions of Canada, from spilling into our Parliament in a way that would make us a dysfunctional country.

The New Democrats exist as a kind of coherent national party. I don't think we want to produce a system in which the Leap Manifesto New Democrats and the Notley New Democrats have been sentenced to run independently because they would see that they could get more votes in different parts of the country from different elements of their constituency. One of the strengths of the way our system has worked is that it has in fact forced the parties in some sense to work hard at preventing that expression of so much division, in a country that's constantly changing.

The Canadian political system has been a remarkable experience. Our electorate grew in the 20th century far more than any other electorate in the world, much more than that of the United States. We went from being a country of small rural people to the most multicultural urban place in the world. However you measure the transformation of Canada, our democratic social order has probably been transformed more than that of any other democracy, and somehow our big national parties have found ways to accommodate that. It was different in the First World War, in the Second World War, and in the sixties, and in the eighties. I think it gets high marks, frankly.

Our system of governance was just rated by the people in Davos as ranking second-highest in the world. We're at the top of the United Nations' political development indexes. I think by most comparative indexes we've done pretty well. The electoral system hasn't been responsible for all of that, but it has been one of the pieces. If you start undoing the pieces, you start undoing that system. That's a sort of "small c" conservative view, I guess.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: My next question is on something we touched on briefly, mandatory voting. Professor Wiseman, you mentioned in *The Hill Times* that if politicians were serious about increasing voter turnout, they would put mandatory voting in place. I know you mentioned earlier that you're not a supporter of it.

My question is to all three of you, actually. How would you see a Canadian mandatory voting system, if we were to implement one? What would we do to incentivize or penalize people? What would your suggestion be in that regard?

•(1535)

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: The system the Australians use works, I think, perfectly well. Simply, the law requires you to show up at the polls and cast a ballot. You can spoil the ballot, if you like. You can write anything on it you like, but you must attend and take a ballot. For those who don't attend and don't have an excuse, there's a modest fine.

The first time, there would probably be a number of people who didn't, but after a while people would start to obey the law in the way they stop at red lights and pay their taxes, and do all the other things they're required to do. It would probably be a bit sloppy the first time, but like any change—and we have talked about other kinds of changes—the public and the players would adapt, and the campaigns would run probably very differently. We'd end this mass-voter mobilization stuff, because the voters would get themselves to the polls themselves; you wouldn't spend money on that. Parties would be engaged in other kinds of activities.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

That concludes our first round. We'll start the second round with Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. DeCoursey, you have five minutes.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I want to get back the idea of more preference or more choice for electors. In the reflections that you've had from the different commissions, assemblies, research, is it likely to enhance voter turnout if electors could check more boxes, claim more preference in their votes? Relative to the ease in which people understand the system now versus the change towards more preference, where is the increased complexity? Thirdly, on election day, as the results are tabulated, what could electors expect for a return on a ballot where there was more than one check box or multiple choices, or two different streams of election?

I'll be happy to start with Professor Tanguay.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: In terms of what might happen on election day, it might take longer to tabulate the votes. If you have more choice that is one of the drawbacks. In, say, STV, it can take longer. The vote-counting process is much more complicated and time-consuming.

Will it increase turnout? Most comparative research seems to indicate that proportional systems provide a bump in turnout of about six to seven percentage points. That may be a reflection of the fact that, again, more currents of opinion are reflected in the resulting legislature, which brings more people to the polls, but it's not a social scientific law. If you want to look at the experience of New Zealand, voter turnout increased in the first elections using the new system, a mixed member proportional, from 1996 on, but afterwards it fell again. The constraints, the factors, the dynamics that are driving down voter turnout extend well beyond the electoral system. I think if you want to get a handle on what's happening, you have to look more and more at what young people are thinking and why they're

not coming to the polls in the numbers that we, older, aging boomers, think they ought to be coming to the polls in.

Personally, I do think that if we offer more choice to voters, and I'm just going to editorialize just a second.... I think that so far we've heard a lot about the fears of what might happen with a change: national parties would disintegrate, fringe parties would proliferate. The system has worked well as it is, but you have to ask for whom? I think the one group that consistently has been excluded is young people. I think by offering greater chances to newer parties, non-mainstream parties, you would mobilize more young voters and bring them into the system in a way that the status quo does not.

•(1540)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thanks very much.

With the time left maybe I'll go to Professor Carty.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I think the evidence on turnout is pretty complicated. You're going to hearing from André Blais later this week I believe. Nobody in the world knows more about the relationship between turnout and electoral systems than André, so I would recommend you listen to him.

The reason that the citizens' assembly in B.C. chose the single transferable vote, to the surprise of everyone, was that they believed it offered them more choices, because they could choose both candidates and parties in whatever order they liked. It's true that the counting process is a more complicated one. The Irish, who use it for their national elections, don't start counting until the next day, and in some of their districts it takes two or three days to count. A few years ago in a couple of ridings they actually instituted electronic counting of the ballots, which gave them instant results, and they hated it. They actually liked the one- or two-day kind of "who's ahead on the first count, who's ahead on the second count" process and they would crowd in and watch the process. So they sold all the machines, at a huge loss, and they're now out of the electronic machine-counting business.

However, they were recognizing that there was a social dimension to the electoral process that engaged them all, and the count was part of that, as well as the vote counting.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on now to Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

I don't know if you know the answer to this, Professor Carty. In Ireland, they have multi-member districts; I believe the boundaries conform with the traditional counties. For each party in the Irish system, when they have a number of candidates running in a single district, how are they chosen? Is it some sort of internal party process, or is it a more democratic process?

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: That's changed over time. The boundaries are less and less coterminous with county boundaries, as the population is becoming more mobile and they've been less and less successful at doing that. The parties vary in terms of how they choose their candidates. In, say, a five-member district, parties would not run a full slate of five candidates, because they know the result would be sort of proportional. If they thought they had a chance of getting maybe three elected, they would probably nominate three. They don't want spillover waste in the counting process. By-and-large the parties have now gone to a convention process—it's not unlike ours—to choose their candidates. They were organized differently in branches in the past; they now go to conventions.

That's been complicated in the last year by a new law that requires that 30% of the candidates be women. In the next election it will be 40%. Now, the parties can violate that regulation, but if they do so, they lose financial support from the system. In a number of ridings, to make sure the party got to its quota, they've had to go in and say, okay, you can have two candidates in this district, and one has to be a woman and one has to be a man, or things like that. So there's been shifting tension between locality and central party, as there are in any proportional systems, in terms of who gets to choose the candidates and how that process works.

That would be, in fact, one of the biggest changes—if we changed the electoral system here—that the parties would have to experience: the process of how to identify candidates, how they would be chosen. There would be a lot of conflict transferred into the parties in the first round or two.

Mr. Scott Reid: Professor Tanguay, returning to a comment you made earlier, and following on Professor Carty's remarks, you said that in 2007 one of the lessons of the referendum in Ontario was that the people tend to reject party-controlled lists. Is it the case, then, that some people were voting no in 2007 because they felt that the list side of the MMP system that was being proposed in Ontario was going to be too party controlled? Please elaborate on that, if you could.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: That is exactly what happened. I think that the two aspects of the proposal that came in for the most criticism were, first of all, increasing the size of the legislature—a lot of people were really upset about that—and second, the closed-list system. It was portrayed very negatively in the media as backroom individuals, usually men chomping on cigars, selecting their friends to be at the top of the list and guaranteeing them election in perpetuity. It was extremely easy for the media to portray the closed list as something inherently bad. Although, in defence of the citizens' assembly and the people who worked for it—I know Jonathan Rose is going to be appearing here before the committee—the closed list was always thought of as a means of promoting non-mainstream candidates, an easier way of increasing the chances of the election of women, minority candidates, or indigenous candidates. However, a large majority of voters who were voting on the merits of the system itself rejected that idea.

• (1545)

Mr. Scott Reid: That raises a tension that I think has existed for some time. I know one can design an MMP system in which the list is open, chosen through some sort of democratic process. On the other hand, that will almost certainly mean—and you can correct me

if I'm wrong here—that one of the chief selling points of MMP, that it will produce a larger range of the kinds of candidates who right now tend not to be presented and that they'll be at the top of the list where they're likely to be elected, is effectively cancelled out. I don't know if there's a way around that tension; you're the expert.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: You're quite right. The purely open lists would maybe not eliminate but reduce the opportunities for promoting non-mainstream candidates. That's why the law commission settled on a flexible list, which again is sort of the best of both worlds, part two, where you could have parties promoting a slate that would consist largely of non-mainstream candidates, and then the individual candidates for those voters who really are concerned about their capacity to reject elite control by the parties.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The Chair: We go to Mr. Cullen now.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It segues nicely from that conversation to another question from Twitter, where we're trending, by the way, Mr. Chair. I don't know if you know that. The committee is trending. There's lots going on, and we're near the top of the list.

This is from Charday B. What's the impact of having women and minorities better represented in the legislatures on the public policy produced?

Is there a connection between voting systems—I'm going to suppose in this—and the representation of traditionally under-represented groups?

Mr. Wiseman, you seem to want to come in on this.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I just wanted to relate what happened in New Zealand—this is my understanding—when they introduced MMP. More women got elected, no doubt about it, but guess what? Power does not lie in parliament. It lies in the cabinet. Fewer women ended up in the cabinet because you had a trade-off among the leaders about how many cabinet posts each party was going to get and they were going to get to decide who's in them.

Right now there's pressure on the Prime Minister to have a diverse cabinet, but the pressures will be completely different when you have horse-trading among the parties.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm trying to follow this. If someone says to me that having more women in Parliament is going to be bad for women in power... I understand this very explicit example you're using in this circumstance in New Zealand, but the other cases that we've studied here today show that the opposite is true, that more women end up running more things under proportional systems.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I don't know. I'm just saying the dynamic is different. It's parties that will want a lot of women or minorities at the top of their lists, but it will be party leaders who get together after the vote when there's a minority and say, okay—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right. I suppose, but it's 2016, after all. I imagine if party leaders cropped up and put a bunch of—no offence—old white guys into their cabinet and nobody else, there might be a natural consequence to that the next time voters get to vote.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: If we could—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I want to turn to Mr. Tanguay for a moment.

You've broken these down into two families of systems, voting systems. I'm trying to pull back from this a bit in terms of the details, to get the broad flavour. There are the consensus democracies and there are ones that use majoritarian systems. First past the post is in the second, the majoritarian. Where does AV, alternative vote, lie?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Majoritarian.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's in the same family as first past the post.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes, as with the French two rounds system.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right. That's the same thing. It's a winner-take-all type of approach.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The other families, the STVs, the mixed member, those are all the proportional, what you're calling "consensus democracies". Is that right?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I just wanted to clarify the groups. Sometimes they get confused.

You talked about the tension within the parties, if we went to a proportional system in which there were lists of some kind and there were nominations within parties to formulate those lists as we talked about, maybe regional runoffs or some sort of primary. But there are obvious tensions between parties and their memberships now on nominations. Is that fair to say?

• (1550)

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: Sure, and where those tensions get played out and by what rules will be governed by the new electoral system.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: The tensions will exist and different systems provide incentives for particular kinds of behaviours and they reward certain strategies and they disadvantage others. But when we're talking about changing electoral systems, we're not just talking about accounting rules, we're talking about nominations and finance, all aspects, because the rules change the incentives that govern the actors.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: My last question is for you, Mr. Tanguay. I went back a bit and now I want to go into some details.

Mr. Kingsley has made a proposal in which there was a mixed system, in which there would be larger ridings in the urban areas of Canada, in which four or five constituencies would be made one. There would be four or five representatives who would come out of that and there would be a more proportional reflection. The rural constituencies, he has argued, would remain essentially the same size, which would eliminate the need to go and redraw boundaries in any significant way.

Do you have any comments on that proposal?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: It's interesting. I think Professor Wiseman mentioned it as the system that was in use in some of the western provinces from the 1920s on. It's an interesting idea. I would suggest that people take a look at Fair Vote Canada, which is coming up with a similar kind of system but where there would be more attention paid to compensatory outcomes, in other words, where the results would be even more proportional than with the system you're describing.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

It's now Mr. Thériault's turn.

Mr. Luc Thériault: So much to say!

First, I have something to say to my fellow members Mr. Blaikie and Ms. May, who brought up the 1993 election and the fact that the Bloc Québécois became the official opposition. They shouldn't think of it as some sort of regional aberration. May I remind you I am a sovereignist, as everyone knows. Don't fall off your chair, now.

In paragraph 164 of the Figueroa decision, the Supreme Court justices said, and I quote:

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of the importance of political representation of regional interests in Canada is our federalist system.

They go on to cite the Fathers of Confederation:

...“any proposition which involved the absorption of the individuality of Lower Canada...would not be received with favor by her people” and in the Maritime provinces, although they shared a language and a system of law with Upper Canada, “there was as great a disinclination...to lose their individuality, as separate political organizations”...

It could always be said that, aside from the quantitative aspect, what happened in 1993 was simply the qualitative manifestation of the Canadian political dynamic, after two failed attempts to restore something at the national level. The nation made itself heard and chose the official opposition. There is no aberration in that. In 2011, the same thing happened: one region, Quebec, manifested its desire with the orange wave.

You said no system was perfect. What I'm concerned about is not the principles underlying it but, rather, the way it is being handled. Quebec's reform exercise began in 2003 and ended in 2007. When we spent a year travelling across the province, we already had a draft legislative proposal. So we had a model, and we were consulting the people on something specific. Here, we have nothing. We are going to consult the people in the 338 ridings, but to ask them what? Are we going to ask them which voting system they want?

You told us that no one is interested in the issue and that political education is necessary. That's fine, but it's complex. At the same time, how can we consider changing the rules of our society's democracy without letting the people have their say, in terms of the pros and cons, since there is no perfect voting system? I'd like you to answer that question.

If it's not debated by experts or politicians, how can simply conducting a months-long education campaign possibly justify changing the rules without even holding a referendum? The people voting in the next election won't even know how the voting system works.

• (1555)

[English]

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: The rules around elections are constantly changing, and we don't have referenda. The Fair Elections Act wasn't put to a referendum. The Election Expenses Act that took force in 1974, when for the first time parties' names were put on a ballot, wasn't subject to a referendum. The expansion of the House of Commons—and I think most Canadians are opposed to having more seats in the Parliament of Canada—wasn't put to a referendum.

That's why you're elected. You're elected to make public policy, not to stick your finger in the wind. That's why I'm actually surprised—or not surprised, but I'm cynical—about the creation of this committee and of your travelling around the country, because I thought that if the government were serious, they would introduce legislation, and if they really wanted to find out what parliamentarians think, give them a free vote.

Can I just say something about mandatory voting? I see voting more as a right than as a duty, but I'm not opposed to its being mandatory. I just don't think it's in the interests of most MPs to do it.

Instead of a penalty, as in Australia—where, incidentally, voter turnout isn't much above 80%, I think.... In New Zealand, where they don't have it, they've had elections in which turnout has been as high as 98%. Rather than a penalty, which I believe you can get out of if you have an excuse, offer them a carrot. Parliament has introduced so many boutique tax credits. Give them \$20 or \$30. Right now, it costs about \$30 for every vote that's cast.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. May now, please.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm going to start with a question from Twitter, so I don't forget to ask it.

It's to Professor Tanguay from Jennifer Ross, and she wants to know what you would think of minority governments who choose to work in an accord with another party, less than a formal coalition. Do you have any thoughts?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: We do have the experience of one in Ontario's history from 1985 to 1987. From the perspective of voters, I think it was a good thing, a two-year accord between the NDP and the governing Liberals in which the Liberals implemented a lot of the demands of the NDP, which were popular with voters, such as a ban on extra billing by physicians, a key issue at the time. The problem was that, in the subsequent vote that was called in 1987, the moment the accord ended, the NDP was massacred and the Liberals got all the credit for many of the policies that were thought up by the NDP.

The problem with that is in the nature of minority governments as they exist under the existing rules of the game. I mean the biggest prize is a majority government, so everyone has an interest in trying to undermine their opponents, not collaborate in real terms, so that they can win that magic prize in the next election.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That's certainly my observation in the brief time of my life that I've been in politics. There are incentives built into first past the post that discourage co-operation or even recognition that another party has a good idea.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: That's exactly it. From my personal experience, a lot of voters find that really frustrating.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm going to my own questions now.

Going back to the very provocative point made by Professor Wiseman, about what you can learn that is new and the question of public consultations, I did in fact do a householder to everyone in my riding. It was 100% a basic primer on electoral reform. I got back more than 300 individual responses, handwritten and mailed in, and 80% plus wanted to get rid of first past the post.

Then it broke down as you had imagined: some wanted STV, some wanted MMP, and some wanted a hybrid. Overwhelmingly they didn't like the idea of mandatory voting, interestingly enough. That's my riding, Saanich—Gulf Islands.

However, in terms of consultation with the public—and I believe in public consultation, by the way, and we're going to do everything we can as a committee—in looking back at the experience of the B. C. citizens' assembly, the Ontario citizens' assembly, and the 2004 law commission report, do you think we have lessons learned there and that there isn't really anything new under the sun, and that we should brush these off and learn their lessons?

I'll ask all three of you.

• (1600)

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I think you're going to be rehearsing and revisiting all the issues that were taken up by the law commission, the citizens' assemblies, the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy, the very large amount of work done in Quebec as it travelled the province, and by the royal commission in Prince Edward Island. All this is “been there, done that” in what we have to learn, and it's on the record, so it's there. I think you're going to perhaps have these hearings, but you're not going to hear anything that you couldn't find out from these various sources.

I think without going to the hearings with two or three specific proposals—here's an idea for this, this, this, or this; what do you think about these three; what are the pluses and minuses of the basic types that Mr. Cullen was referring to—it will be hard to hear anything that's cumulative or helpful.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I think I still have time to hear from Professor Tanguay and then Professor Wiseman. I'll just go in that order.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I think it's certainly possible to learn new things and that you will. A lot has happened in the world of electoral reform and in research about it since 2002 or 2003, when this whole process took off at the provincial level. I think those who spend their time designing electoral systems have learned lessons from the experience of New Zealand and from other countries that have changed their systems. I think that will lead to more interesting and more substantive proposals in the current round of consultations.

I'm optimistic about the prospects.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I learned from your report on your Saanich—Gulf Islands constituents, who are very atypical. Look, they elect a Green MP. Where else in the country does that happen? I don't know what it is they're smoking out there, but having said that—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Hang on, I also—

The Chair: We won't have time to find out, because the five minutes are up.

We'll now go on to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I wanted to follow up on my colleague Mr. DeCoursey's question.

Mr. Wiseman, you didn't get an opportunity to answer it. His question, just to remind you, was along the lines of asking, if more preferences are given on a ballot and more options are provided for, how that would affect voter turnout or election night results. You didn't get an opportunity to answer that question, so I want to pose it to you.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I'm not sure I heard.... Is it how, if you provide all these alternatives, it increases voter turnout?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's that and the question of how it affects election results.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: Well, it will affect election results because there will be all kinds of different strategies and calculations among the candidates. You're not going to badmouth somebody else if you want their second-choice vote, for example.

I don't think it has any effect on voter turnout. I look at New Zealand. From 1946 until 1996, turnouts in New Zealand were from 84% to 98%, according to a website I've looked at. Since 1996, only one election has had a turnout higher than 80%. It's been as low as 74%.

I don't really think, then, that there's going to be any impact on voter turnout, and here's where I really want to be provocative in this. I'm not as concerned about voter turnout as most are. Professor Tanguay taught me that voter turnout has been declining in western democracies since the seventies, so Canada is not exceptional. It could be, also, that lower voter turnout actually reflects the fact that people may think it doesn't matter who gets elected; that the quality of their life, their material well-being, is not going to change greatly.

Now, there's another factor. Although youth vote at a lower rate, I would say that youth are more involved in politics than ever, but the involvement is expressed in different ways. They join NGOs. They join Greenpeace. They do research for the Sierra Club. They're engaged in issues, and data studies by Elections Canada show this.

● (1605)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Now I want to turn to another question.

We talked a lot about Canadian values. I wanted to give all three of you an opportunity to express.... We have an idea of what you prefer, but if you could state it one more time, tell us what system you prefer, regardless of some of the shortcomings that all systems have, and what you absolutely think Canadians would just not go for and what would not work in Canada.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I don't think first past the post works, but I think Canadians prefer it because they know it. People would go with the devil they know rather than the devil they don't know, because they're not interested in electoral systems. Whenever I've lectured, not just to seniors' groups but in my own class, students say, I don't understand exactly how it will work. Well, I don't exactly understand how the income tax system works either, but I fill it out.

I like the system they had in Manitoba, maybe because I'm familiar with it. There, you had Winnipeg as one multi-member constituency of 10 people. The interests of people, let's say in Spadina—Fort York, are not that different from the interests of people next door in Davenport or where I live, University—Rosedale. Similarly, the interests of people who live in Papineau don't differ that much from what they are next door in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, but those collective interests are very different from those of people who live in Abitibi—Témiscamingue or in Kenora.

I suggest that the ranked ballot could make sense outside of large cities. In large cities, have one large constituency, or in a place such as Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver, have maybe three or four. That system seemed to work well in Manitoba. The one evaluation I saw, by Tom Peterson, said that he thought it worked out proportionally and didn't favour any particular party. But I have to say that at that time there were many acclamations in rural areas; there was a coalition government in power.

The other thing, which we can't replicate now, is that since 1974 you've put the names of parties on the ballot. That is the real elephant in the room, because now, when people go to vote, they may not know who you are, but if your name is next to "Liberal" and they know that Justin Trudeau is a Liberal, that's what they want. For many people, the first time they find out who they're voting for is when they actually go to the ballot box.

What I like is that in the past there was an onus on the elector to become educated, because two people could run, and one would say, "I'm the Conservative candidate," and the other one would say, "No, no, I was at a meeting and I'm the Conservative candidate." The people get to decide who the Conservative candidate is, if they want to vote Conservative. Right now, the party leader has the ultimate voice.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

It is now Mr. Kenney's turn.

[English]

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you.

I just wanted to follow up with Mr. Wiseman's recent suggestion, or effort, to draw an equivalence between ordinary routine amendments to elections statutes and a radical change to the system. Do you not find that a false equivalence? Is it not a bit disingenuous to suggest the kinds of ordinary amendments that every Parliament considers and adopts without anybody suggesting there ought to be a referendum are the equivalent to a radical change in the way that we choose our elected representatives to Parliament?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: It depends how radical... Yes, it is a change. It's a dramatic change. I believe in responsible government. That's what you were elected to do. I didn't hear anybody saying in the election, either a party or a candidate, vote for me and I'm going to give you a referendum on electoral reform. It's, hey, I voted for you so I don't have to go out to the polls again.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Actually, then, you didn't read the policy declaration of the Conservative Party, which calls for a referendum on these issues.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I didn't hear it mentioned once on the hustings.

Hon. Jason Kenney: About as often as the Liberal Party mentioned its commitment to change the system.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I agree.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you.

Mr. Tanguay, he's referred to the common distinction between consensual versus majoritarian democracies. Is it not true that, broadly speaking, the consensual democracies, as generally identified by academics, tend to be smaller and more homogeneous states than majoritarian democracies, which tend to be larger and more diverse?

•(1610)

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Not all of them, no.

Hon. Jason Kenney: No, my question was about a tendency. I didn't ask about all of them.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I don't—

Hon. Jason Kenney: Benelux and Scandinavian countries, etc., tend to be consensual; larger populations and federations tend to be

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Germany.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Right, there is your exception. I was asking about a rule, not for exceptions.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: France...no, not France.

It might be a tendency, yes. Certainly the Nordic model is reliant on a fairly homogeneous population, that is true.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Right.

You painted a bit of a picture of the consensual democracies being bucolic states, where everybody's happy—

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Again, we're talking about tendencies—

Hon. Jason Kenney: Tendencies. All right.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: —which Lijphart makes very clear.

Hon. Jason Kenney: You've indicated that's the tendency or that's the general rule. Is it not equally true that some of the most dysfunctional democracies in the world are in the consensual category? Right now Spain would be a relatively good example of that. I don't know if you've ever visited the Knesset but political discourse in that Israeli system, driven by proportional representation, is not exactly very civil.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: This is old hat, Mr. Kenney. The examples of Israel, or you should have mentioned the Weimar Republic electing Hitler, these are the examples trotted out—

Hon. Jason Kenney: For the record, you talked about that, Mr. Tanguay.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: —continually by those who are fearful of electoral reform, and it's not fair. It's not accurate. To cite Israel indicates that you're not serious about being open to a discussion about the merits of electoral reform, you're simply starting off opposed to the idea. That's abundantly clear.

Hon. Jason Kenney: So I'm not serious because I'm raising concerns about consensual democracies that don't function at the same level that you suggest they generally do...? Okay—

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes.

Hon. Jason Kenney: —thank you very much.

Is it not true that in the United Kingdom, I think it was four years ago, there was a referendum on changing the electoral system?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes, there was.

Hon. Jason Kenney: What was the result of that?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: They rejected it.

Hon. Jason Kenney: What was the result of the referenda in British Columbia, Ontario, and P.E.I.?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: One succeeded, in British Columbia, as you well know, although the 58%—

Hon. Jason Kenney: And the second one...?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: As I mentioned in my own remarks, the Ontario one failed quite spectacularly, as did the second one in British Columbia.

Hon. Jason Kenney: And in P.E.I. and Ontario.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: And in Prince Edward Island.

Hon. Jason Kenney: It's your position that the people were wrong. You just want to keep trying until they get it right.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I'm not saying that they were wrong, but the referendum campaign, as I was involved in it, did not allow for an educated debate about the system, about the alternatives, and, again, partisan posturing tended to pervert the debate.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I see. So the voters are easily misled, is that what you're saying?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Sometimes, not always.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I see. You want to keep trying until they get it right or just obviate the need for a referendum altogether.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Mr. Kenney, I believe that this is an important reform for democracy, and that's why I will continue to militate in favour of electoral reform.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Is it such an important reform for democracy that we cannot submit it to a democratic decision in a referendum?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: As I said, you can, after it's in place for one actual electoral session.

Hon. Jason Kenney: After it's—

The Chair: We have to move on now to Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

One of the items in our committee's terms of reference relates to effectiveness and legitimacy. When I was out door-knocking prior to the election, I actually heard from a number of my constituents that they wanted to see change. It wasn't necessarily in the terms we're talking about now, electoral reform, but there were concerns about the existing system and a kind of cynicism about whether their perspectives were being reflected and whether their vote was actually counting. That was one message I heard over and over again.

I also heard, though, that people did have trust in our existing system. What I'm struggling with and I'd like your thoughts on is, as we consider moving forward to change to achieve effectiveness and legitimacy as principles we're trying to achieve, and also looking at your comment that there is no perfect system, how do we design something moving forward?

I guess the question really relates to an issue of trust. How do we move into this dialogue on electoral reform knowing that many Canadians are actually looking for change, while they also have a sense of trust within the existing system? How do we move that barometer? How do we go to something different and maintain trust? What words of wisdom would you have for us as we try to shift on this very important part of our democracy?

•(1615)

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I don't pretend to know how to advise you on how you can persuade the public that they ought to trust. I think trust comes when they see that there's been a legitimate process, that there's been a fair and open conversation about it, and that there wasn't a kind of manipulation. I think there's likely only to be a kind of legitimacy awarded to the system after it's been tried a couple of times and people have decided that it works and it works fairly in terms of their expectations and values. They will come to see that it works differently.

It probably won't work very well the first time. There's a lot of evidence that, in the first election in New Zealand, most of the parties and many of the candidates operated in ways that were essentially irrational in terms of their own immediate interests because they hadn't quite worked out how it was going to work. It's an iterative process between politicians and voters, and they're going to have to learn how to work together in a whole different set of institutional incentives and constraints. There will be a lot of uncertainty. There will be questions about legitimacy and effectiveness, but that's inevitable in any fundamental institutional reform. I think the best you can hope for is a process that is open and that's as transparent as possible. I would think things like a free vote in Parliament would go a long way to sending a signal.

Questions about referendums are going to be difficult because there's a widespread view that this is important. Then there will be hard questions about what would count. Would a 50% majority in a referendum count? What if everybody east of the Ottawa River voted against a different electoral system and everybody west of the Ottawa River voted for it? Then you would have a kind of legitimacy problem.

That's why, of course, we had this extraordinary double standard in British Columbia. I don't know if it's the right one, but there was a perception that 50% wouldn't work if all Vancouver wanted one thing and all the rural areas wanted another thing. There are real challenges.

Again, you need openness, transparency, and working through a process that's understood to allow all those viewpoints to be somehow weighed and balanced in what inevitably will be a series of trade-offs. Nobody's going to get all of what they want in this process. There ought not to be a process in which everybody can get what they want, so what you want is a process in which the trade-offs are seen as fair and reasonable and in accord with what people understand to be decent.

Mr. John Aldag: Do either of the others have any thoughts on this?

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I think our system right now is very effective. One man holds a lot of power, as was pointed out by one of the members on the committee. I think our system is very legitimate, and I think if we change the voting system, it will probably remain effective and it will remain legitimate. There will be a transition. I think the words of Professor Carty are very wise, really wise, on this issue.

The issue of trust might be much more related to things such as, if all of a sudden the economy is booming, I have trust in the government, and if it's not, I lose a lot of trust. Right now there's a lot of trust in the government.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

As a non-regular member of this committee I'm going to take a little bit of liberty and ask whether in your opinion it would be better for this committee to come out with a general set of principles or guidelines about what a good system would look like or whether you think it would be more productive to have this committee come out with a more concrete proposal for what an electoral system would look like and then ask the government to either accept or reject that proposal. In your view, what would be better from a process point of view?

We started with Professor Wiseman last time. Maybe we'll start with Professor Carty and work back to him.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I think that if the committee came to the conclusion that a particular kind of system would be desirable, it would be very helpful if Parliament had a real debate—a kind of “second reading in principle” debate—about whether this is really where they wanted to go.

If you decided to go to an MMP system, it would be complicated to design. I remember that when the British Columbia citizens' assembly designed their MMP system, there were I think 17 separate decisions that had to be made about the fundamental pieces, and there were very subsidiary pieces. Every time you made one of those decisions, it impacted upon the other 17 parts of that MMP system.

I think, then, that having a preliminary debate about whether to have first past the post or the alternate vote or a compensatory system such as the law reform commission suggested or an STV system would get you a long way down the road. Then there could be a debate about the niceties, which is where the traffic is really going to hit the chickens in terms of MPs' interests, financial interests, funding, registration of local associations, etc. They're all going to be deeply affected by the details, but you have to get to that principle—what type of system to have—before you can get to that point.

•(1620)

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Essentially, I agree totally with what Professor Carty said. It would be better to indicate the broad models that are possible here. That ties in to the question Ms. Sahota asked earlier: what is not acceptable in Canada? Well, “list PR” is not acceptable. Also the Israeli system is not acceptable, nor that of the Netherlands. Anything that simply offers voters a single choice for a party is not acceptable.

The options are fairly clear: alternative vote in single-member ridings, some combination of alternative vote with STV in larger ridings, mixed member proportional, or no change. I think if you have the broad alternatives available to voters and discuss and debate them fairly and transparently, that will serve this committee and the government well.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: I have great confidence in you as committee members. I think, after you've been given a mandate to go out and listen, that you'll listen.

I think you have to meet. You can meet behind closed doors and work out whether you have a consensus or not. If you have, I think you should report it to the government and make your recommendations. It might be for a free vote, it might be for a referendum, it might be for a specific system. Let's get some action.

We've had a lot of talk about changing the electoral system in the last 20 years; I don't see any action. This is more talk.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: You all, of course, know that this is a different composition of committee. Do you believe that this committee should persist until such time as it can examine the legislation that the government puts forward? Otherwise, it would be referred to some other committee of the House, and we know that those committees are composed of a majority of government members. In your opinion, would it be good from the point of view of the legitimacy of the process to have a committee with this composition look at the legislation, once we have a concrete proposal, or to have an ordinary committee of Parliament?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: One of the great advantages of this committee is precisely how it's currently composed and how the voting rules are going to make votes take place. I would think it would be optimal for the process if it were to continue.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: If the committee is successful in moving the debate ahead, then it ought to continue. If it comes to a roadblock and finds that it's not able to recommend, then some other process may be necessary.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie, you have about 15 seconds. I don't know whether there's anything you want to say in that time.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: No, that's fine. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Your turn, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Tanguay, a few moments ago, you said a coalition government might be better for Canadian democracy because the parties would have to compromise and so forth.

Over the past one hundred years, Canada has seen 28 elections. Only once did the party that garnered the most votes end up in the opposition. It was in 1979. A historical footnote, the government lasted nine months. Conversely, only three governments received more than 50% of the votes.

That means our system has always operated on majority, or basically majority, governments that did not enjoy the absolute majority. And yet, they had 100% of the power, as you said earlier, despite not receiving 100% of the vote or even less than 50%.

Nevertheless, would you say our democracy has fared well over the past century?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes, clearly, our democracy has worked well.

From my experience with the Law Commission of Canada and the Ontario referendum, I would say that our system could be more effective, especially in terms of including representatives and the varying views of the electorate.

There is no doubt that Canada enjoys a successful democracy, but the system does have its problems or flaws, shall we say. Fixing them would simply involve reforming the electoral process to provide for more proportional representation. That is not to say Canada's system isn't working.

•(1625)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Do you think it's worth making such a radical change? You, yourself, said it was important to—

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I take issue with the word “radical”, which has been used repeatedly here today. Many countries have reformed their voting systems. It's not all that radical. It's merely a matter of adjusting the mechanics to convert the votes into seats. That's all.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: The current system has served us well, after all. Canada enjoys political stability and a solid economy. At the end of the day, things are going well, and that's not me saying so but actually Mr. Wiseman. On March 13, 2008, he told a Senate committee, and I quote:

[English]

I think the current system has served us well.... We have political stability, we have a thriving economy....

[Translation]

Would you agree with that?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes, but the question is who is it working for?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: It's working for Canadians, Mr. Tanguay. It's called democracy.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: It doesn't work for all Canadians. The very interest in electoral reform indicates that the current system isn't working for everyone.

Underlying my recommendations is the notion that a system based on proportional representation could serve a lot more people, particularly young people and those whose opinions don't fall in the middle of the political spectrum, such as those of the Green Party. The House of Commons should have more Green Party representatives.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: My goodness, we know who you're voting for in the next election. I have no problem with that; it's democracy in action.

The change being proposed to the electoral process represents a lot more than just an extra word on the ballot. It's a lot more significant than that. The government is asking us to make a radical change to the way Canadians vote.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: It's not radical.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Oh no?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: No.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: It's so far from radical, Mr. Tanguay, that the Chief Electoral Officer needs at least two years to prepare.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Over the years, it's been done numerous times in Canada, at the provincial level—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: He needs two years to explain to people how the process is going to work, and you don't see that as a radical change?

The Chair: Forgive me, Mr. Deltell, but you have to give Mr. Tanguay a chance to respond before asking a follow-up question.

Go ahead, Mr. Tanguay.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: In Canada, voting systems have been changed numerous times in the past, provincially, and it's been done without referendums.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Did those reforms entail changing how members are selected, as is being proposed?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Yes. That was the system Nelson Wiseman described.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: When the public was consulted, however, people rejected it.

I'm missing something, here. I don't understand why someone who is such a strong advocate of democracy is opposed to consulting the public on such a significant and radical change to our democratic process. I used the word “radical” just for you.

Mr. Brian Tanguay: I've answered that question multiple times.

The Chair: Yes.

We will therefore move on to Ms. Romanado, who will have the honour of asking the last question.

Go ahead, Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

[English]

Actually, Professor Tanguay, you didn't have a chance to answer my previous question regarding mandatory voting. I just wanted to give you the opportunity to answer that question. If we were to go that route, what would the Canadian model look like, and would it be a carrot or stick suggestion?

Mr. Brian Tanguay: Again, this isn't something that I've done a lot of research on, personally, and I would simply reiterate what Professor Carty said. The Australian system has a bit of a stick. I cannot take seriously the proposal to give people tax credits for showing up to vote. I think there should be a modest penalty if they don't show up to vote. Again, I think the Australian system is the one that recommends itself.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: My question is now to the three panellists. In your opinion, what electoral system should be implemented that would reflect the composition of Canadian society today? I believe it was Professor Tanguay who mentioned that we should be promoting demographic representation, and so on and so forth. What model, in the opinion of all three of you, would best make sure that we are reflecting the demographic of Canada today?

•(1630)

Mr. Brian Tanguay: It would be some version of the model that was described in the Law Commission of Canada's report. Some form of mixed member proportional would, I think, do the best job. Again, it's not going to be perfect. There are still going to be flaws in the electoral system, but I think it would do a better job than the current one of representing more sections of society, of producing a Parliament that had a greater variety of representatives drawn from a broader range of categories of society. On the whole I think that MMP is the system that recommends itself. It's not perfect, but it would be better.

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: The more I hear about MMP, the less I'm enamoured with it. One of the reasons is that I've been hearing that people's local MP is very important for them. But again, this is why I think the system I'm talking about makes the most sense. If you live in a large metropolitan area, it doesn't matter if the MP represents Davenport or Spadina—Fort York; the issues are similar. However, if you live outside of those cities, it's very vital. If you live in Dauphin, or Salmon Arm, you want to know who the MP is. The trouble, of course, with MMP is that you have two classes of MPs; one is tied down handling passport issues, immigration, vets issues, and the other is a prima donna who can just focus on foreign policy or defence policy.

One other thing is that if you're going to have a referendum, why does it cost \$300 million? Why does it take a year and a half or two years? Why does it take that long? Greece called a referendum on June 27, 2015, and had a vote on July 5. You've just made such elaborate and expensive rules around elections and referenda. No one thinks that the Greek vote was undemocratic.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Go ahead, Professor Carty.

Dr. R. Kenneth Carty: I don't know that I believe there is a system that will be better. Every system will be different. It will produce a different-looking House. Some of it comes down to how we think about elections. What are they and what are they for? Partly, they're to produce a representative assembly, but also they're about connecting citizens to governments. Are they a series of individual contests, or are they somehow more diffuse contests, and how do we think about it?

I used to say something like this to my students, "Who should win the Stanley Cup? Should it be the team that wins the most games or the team that scores the most goals over seven games?" They'd say, "The team that wins the most games." I would say, "What if we just changed it and played seven games? The team that scored the most goals should win." They would say that wouldn't be right, and I would ask why.

It's because that's how we think about it. We think about Stanley Cup series as winning games, and we now think about elections as

winning local contests. You win the most and you win. If we change the system, we're going to change how we think about elections, and what they are. We're going to go away from this most-games metaphor to something else. It won't be the total goals system, because that would be pure list PR on the national level à la Netherlands or Israel, but it would be something in between.

It's about how we think about what we're engaged in here. It's imagining a new way to think about it that you're charged with being involved in.

The Chair: As Canadians, it's only right and just that we end on hockey.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I would like to thank the witnesses and say how much we appreciate their appearing before our committee this last week of July.

Thank you for such a lively, pleasant, and frank discussion. I think I speak for all the committee members when I say it was very beneficial.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for a lively discussion. It really fleshed out the issues we have to consider. Again, thank you for being here in the last week of July.

I would just like to remind members that our meeting tomorrow starts at 9:30. It's not here, but at 1 Wellington Street.

Members of the steering committee, we'll be breaking for 15 minutes and will resume in camera.

Thank you again to members and witnesses. We'll see most of you tomorrow.

This meeting is adjourned.

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