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Special Committee on Electoral Reform

EVIDENCE

Thursday, July 28, 2016

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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (1000)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Order, please.

Colleagues, please take your places.

We appreciate all the witnesses being here today.

We have Professor Dennis Pilon, Department of Political Science, York University. We have Professor Jonathan Rose, associate professor, Department of Political Studies, Queen's University. From the Institut sur la gouvernance, we have Maryantonett Flumian, president.

We're sorry we're a bit late. We had some housekeeping matters we had to take care of, but we're very anxious to hear what you have to say.

The way it works is that you will each, as you know, be presenting for 10 minutes. Then we typically have two rounds of questioning, and in each round, every member gets a chance to ask questions. We'll figure out the timing of each round, but typically it's five minutes. The first round will be five minutes, I think. We'll figure out the math.

We're going to end at 12:15. We've extended our meeting by 15 minutes because we started late.

I would just like to mention one thing. The five minutes each member has covers questions and answers, so it's something everyone should keep in mind, the members and the witnesses. If there is a long preamble to a question, it leaves less time for answers. If you are not able to answer and there is a question hanging out there when somebody has asked a question and the five minutes are up, you can still address the issue the next time you have a chance to speak. It doesn't mean you can't follow up on the question, but it has to be at another opportunity, maybe when you're answering another question.

We'll start with Professor Pilon, for 10 minutes, please.

Professor Dennis Pilon (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, York University, As an Individual): Thanks for inviting me to come, and I want to begin by applauding the government for bringing this issue forward and by applauding the parties that are supporting it.

This is a little bit about me.

I've worked on this topic for almost three decades. I've written two books and many research papers on the topic. My research is focused on real-world experience and results with different voting systems, and the historical and contemporary processes of reforming political institutions such as voting systems. I've also researched related topics on voter registration, voter turnout, youth participation, and the representation of social diversity and Canadian democratization more broadly.

I also have some practical experience in organizing elections as a former deputy district electoral officer in British Columbia. I was second in charge of organizing a riding for the purposes of a provincial election, hiring 300 people and training them to do the election day stuff, so I have a bit of practical insight as well as academic insight into voting systems.

We've heard from many people that there is no perfect voting system, but that doesn't mean there aren't imperfect ones, like first past the post, particularly from a democratic point of view. We call our system a representative democracy, but first past the post fails to represent effectively. It misrepresents the popular support for parties. It leaves over half of the voters contributing to the election of no one. It typically results in a minority of voters dominating majorities. It limits political competition. I mean, with such lousy representation, how democratic can the system be?

The reason is that the system was not designed to be democratic. Its origins are in the pre-democratic era, and it has been kept in place for electoral self-interest. Canadians have struggled to make their system democratic despite these institutional barriers. Proportional representation systems, by contrast, were designed to represent voters effectively, even if the motives of reformers were not always democratic.

My brief, which I've submitted to the committee, argues that the way we talk about reform tends to structure the debate that follows, and we've seen three views emerge since this process started. One of them frames the question as an issue of the Constitution and the need for a referendum. Another one argues that voting systems are just a matter of taste: it depends what you like, what you prefer. The last one argues that voting systems are quintessentially a matter of democratic reform, and I argue that only the last view is really credible.

Now, I'm not going to go into all the details of the brief. I want to sketch out the broad themes, and I can certainly expand on any of these issues in the question-and-answer period.

With regard to the constitutional arguments, there is no merit to them. We have seen a range of views, from the uninformed to the ridiculous, and the rapidity with which they are appearing in the media signals a kind of desperation from the right-wing think tanks that are sponsoring them. The referendum arguments are often clothed in a veneer of democratic rhetoric, but they are also weak and contradictory. Normatively, referendums should be restricted to situations in which voters can become reasonably informed to be able to participate in the discussions. Canadian provincial referendums on voting systems have shown this not to be possible.

Referendum advocates would have us believe that referendums will lead to reasoned debates and decisions on this question, but evidence suggests otherwise. The research on referendums, both Canadian and comparative, shows that the way that voters deal with issue complexity is to reject the process entirely. When people have rejected different options, it's often because they have no clue as to what they're being asked. In many cases, they didn't even know a referendum was going on.

The referendum arguments are themselves internally inconsistent. We are led to believe we must have at least a majority to change our voting system, but a government that represents 39% of the population is okay to make all of the decisions in the interim. Why is there a majority for one question but not the other? It seems to me that if a majority is the ultimate test of decision-making, then it should be applied in all democratic situations.

Finally, as I will spell out in a moment, I think this issue is one of voter equality, and you don't put equality rights to a vote.

Now let us go on to the idea that voting systems are a matter of competing values and outcome preferences—a matter of taste.

There are two key problems with this argument. First of all, voters are not well informed about any of our political institutions and thus do not really have tastes about them. For instance, in two different surveys done 10 years apart, voters were asked if a majority government reflected a majority of the Canadian population, and they argued that it did. A majority of them said it does, when in fact I think everybody here knows that they almost never do.

Voters cope with political complexity through proxies, the parties that they support. When a party complains about something, then the public usually wants answers. If a party is fine with things, then the voters are usually fine. I think it's foolish to pretend otherwise. Voters have fairly informed views about the broad themes of politics that they prefer, but the details and the institutions are unavoidably an elite process.

● (1005)

The other problem with voting systems as a matter of taste is that it flattens out the values and makes them all equal, when in fact I think we should privilege democratic choices and disallow undemocratic ones. The problem with making a choice for majority governments as a value is that it suggests that's okay. It's okay for a minority of people to impose their views on the majority. I just don't see how you can make that a democratic argument. There are lots of arguments in favour of our system; they're just not democratic ones.

Therefore, instead of looking at voting systems as a matter of choice where all choices are equal, we need to judge our voting systems against what Canadians are trying to do with their voting system. In this case, I think the evidence suggests that they are trying to get their political views represented, so we need a system that will do that most effectively.

Voting systems as democratic reform start from a realistic sense of what voters are trying to do when they vote, and here we know from a mountain of evidence that voters vote party, as opposed to, say, voting for a local representative. Even when voters say they're voting for a local representative, we discover they're actually voting for the party, yet in trying to get those party results, our current voting system privileges geography, though geography is not the basis informing that vote. Thus proximate voters—voters who live close to each other—are privileged by our system, while dispersed voters are discriminated against.

This violates the voters' rights to have their votes count equally. This issue actually affects all parties. Voters of all parties find themselves marooned in different parts of the country, unable to make common cause with voters who agree with the kinds of things they would like to see represented. This leads to wasted votes, distorted representation of parties, and typically a legislative majority government that a majority of Canadians do not actually support.

This is wrong, because it's undemocratic, it's unrepresentative, and it violates some basic democratic notions of majority rule. Again, we do it this way not because of preferences or the Constitution, but because historically self-interested parties have kept it that way. Attempts to defend it involve contorted and convoluted arguments that frankly are unsupported by facts.

Let me conclude. I would argue that this committee's job is to move forward and just recommend that the government change our voting system to a proportional system. The only real barrier is political will. The government has a majority, and we have parties that represent a majority of Canadians whose parties supported this issue. I think there are plenty of reasons for the government to move forward, and here I would argue that the government shouldn't really worry about critics, because I think the critics' arguments are mostly politically self-interested. We've had a number of commentators suggest that there will be public outrage if there's not a referendum, but frankly, the only people who are outraged are the ones who are writing such editorials.

In moving forward, I think the government's voting system choice should be informed by facts, not speculation. This is key, because most discussion today is focused on myth, distortion, and outright speculative made-up nonsense. There is plenty of real-world experience with proportional representation to draw from for us to understand how this would affect Canadian politics, but comparisons should be with countries that are comparable to Canada—in other words, western Europe and New Zealand, not Italy and Israel, which are countries that have very distinct political histories and political situations that are very different from Canada's.

If we do that, if we take seriously an evidence-based approach, then just about every complaint about proportional representation can be shown to be without support. Whether we're talking about complexity, instability, too much stability, lack of local influence, etc., all these things can be shown to be without foundation.

Also, we could spend some time talking about the many good things that change would bring in moving to a proportional system. We could highlight how a change to any proportional system would immediately increase political competition. It would lead to changes in voter turnout. It would lead to improvements in the representation of our diversity, and it would end the policy lurch that we see presently with our alternation in government.

I'm happy to expand on all these things in the question-and-answer period.

Thank you.

●(1010)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Pilon.

We'll go now to Professor Rose for 10 minutes, please.

Professor Jonathan Rose (Associate Professor, Department of Political Studies, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for inviting me to this committee. Like many Canadians, I've been following your crash course on electoral systems with great interest. As a political scientist who finds the topic as fascinating as it is complex, I've been really impressed with the facility with which the committee has understood the nuances of electoral systems as well as methods of representation. As you're quickly realizing, it's complex, and a bit like doing a Rubik's cube, in that if you change one thing, the other things change as well. However, unlike a Rubik's cube, there is no right answer. This is important, because if I were to summarize electoral systems in one word, I would say "contingency".

Your steep learning curve in some ways makes sense, because you've heard from many of the experts on the subject. Therein lies an important conundrum. While I have no doubt you will master the details of electoral systems, I wonder about the Canadian public. How will they learn, and what is it they need to learn? I want to discuss the public learning component of electoral reform from my experience as academic director of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. I want to stress the importance of that in the overall strategy of engagement.

The other thing I want to do is briefly talk about the large electoral signposts and hope you keep that in mind so you're not distracted by the red herrings along the way.

Public learning is really the flip side of democratic engagement. This reform exercise has created an ideal opportunity for a national conversation. We all want citizens to be engaged, but true engagement cannot occur without a solid foundation of knowledge. We know that among citizens the variation is very high, and as Professor Pilon just mentioned, the average is very low. Discussions should be about rational reason-giving, not emotional position-taking, and the former requires knowledge. Rational reason-giving was the basis of both the Ontario and the B.C. citizens' assemblies. That's how they worked. They understood that you could not choose an appropriate system without first understanding what principles were important to them.

Canadians are not being asked to design a new electoral system, so I would humbly say there's no reason for them to argue for one or another. In my mind, that's the work of this committee. Where Canadians have an important role to play is to tell this committee and members of Parliament what values and principles are important to them and how these are evident in various systems.

Your committee has been given five guiding principles, which I think are instructive but not as clear as they might be. I might suggest refinement about what they mean, or at least to make sure you're using the language in the same way as others.

For example, some of the principles your committee is working under are about outcomes, things like "integrity" and "legitimacy". These are not created by a system but are a product of them. Others are goals that a system should embody, such as "effectiveness" and "inclusiveness", whereas others relate to the mechanics of the system, to how it works, such as "local representation". Your principle of "accessibility" suggests the principle of simplicity with its language that "the proposed measure would avoid undue complexity". Simplicity, I might add, was one of the principles chosen by the Ontario citizens' assembly. If I can paraphrase Albert Einstein, a good electoral system should be as simple as possible, but not simpler.

There are other principles not listed that have been used by other studies. Voter choice, chosen by both the Ontario and B.C. citizens' assembly, was an important one for citizens, but curiously does not appear as frequently in the academic literature as the others. This suggests that citizens think about electoral systems differently from experts. That's worth remembering as you hear from experts about their opinions on what's important.

Other studies have also refined what "effectiveness" really means. Does it mean effective parties, as British Columbia and Ontario defined it? Does it mean effective Parliament, as the Ontario assembly refined it? Or does it mean effective government, as defined by both the Law Reform Commission and the New Brunswick commission?

I would suggest that it will be really important for you to clarify these terms so that both MPs and citizens are clear on what it is they value and whether they're talking about the same thing.

In the Ontario citizens' assembly process, $6 million was devoted to educating voters. A strong, robust educational campaign is more than advertising, of course. This government has taken the useful first step of producing a consultation guide. I would take exception to one of your previous witnesses, who characterized your process as an "elite pleasure industry".

● (1015)

I actually think this matters. If so, surely more is needed, both to persuade the public and provide basic education about how these principles resonate and to inform citizens once this committee reports in December. Frankly, this will be even more significant if and when a referendum occurs.

Let me shift gears quickly and talk about electoral systems. You've heard a lot about them. I think one way to think about them is the big debate in which they occur. Scholars like to talk about whether they are causes—they create greater participation, they create more parties, they create different kinds of parties—or whether they are effects—they're a product of a political culture or a product of regionalism or perhaps an institutional context.

In reality, they are both. Electoral systems both illuminate and reflect.

In the literature, we classify electoral systems using these two large categories that might help in your deliberations: output and mechanics. For output, we're thinking about proportional versus non-proportional systems, the big categories. To determine what serves our needs best, we need to go back to our principles. Do we want a system that increases the chance of a strong majority government? Do we want increased diversity in Parliament? Do we want an increased number of political parties? Those are all questions that force us to go back to those principles.

The second approach is to think about mechanics. How does the electoral system work, and what is its relationship to the output? When scholars discuss mechanics, they're usually talking about three things.

The first is how voters would mark their preferences. Do they rank them or do they make a choice? Ranking offers greater choice, but it might surprise you that sometimes ranking doesn't affect the outcome of the choice. A categorical choice is simple but may not reflect preferences accurately.

The second issue you're facing in mechanics is how many representatives you want per district. One allows for simple accountability, but it can't be proportional. As you increase the number in each district, you increase, perhaps, proportionality, but you perhaps may sacrifice the connection between the representatives and constituents. Moreover, you may sacrifice local representation. These are trade-offs that need to be carefully weighed.

The third element of the mechanics is the formula, and you've talked about this in the last few days. The formula is basically how you decide who won. The plurality formula is simple, as you know. A majority formula ensures that there's legitimacy. A proportional system ensures that vote share equals seat share, but may sacrifice local representation. A mixed system offers what some might say is the best of both worlds, but it does create two classes of MPs.

I want to reinforce the model of the Ontario and B.C. citizens' assemblies. They were based on deliberation, not consultation. It's not enough to ask people for their opinions when doing so may only reinforce their existing beliefs. There needs to be an honest and robust public learning campaign that establishes connections between these principles and others and how they correspond to the kind of representation you want.

The conversation here and in the public has put, I would argue, the electoral cart before the horse. It has emphasized the product of those values, the electoral system, and not their trade-offs.

Let me leave you with a final thought. While Professor Pilon and others have argued that there is no one perfect system, I want to quote Richard Katz, who argued that there is a perfect system. He argued that the best electoral system, depends on "who you are, where you are, and where you want to go."

At this stage, rather than focusing on systems, I hope you give these three some significant thought.

Thank you.

● (1020)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Rose.

We'll now go to Ms. Maryantonett Flumian.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian (President, Institute on Governance): Thank you very much.

Good morning, distinguished Chair, Vice-Chairs, and members of the committee. I'd like to begin by saying a few words about the Institute on Governance and our work in advancing better governance in Canada and abroad.

The IOG, as we call ourselves, is an independent, not-for-profit, public interest institution that advances a better understanding of the practices of good governance in Canada at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels. We also work with indigenous governments and not-for-profit organizations, and over the last 26 years we've worked in 35 countries around the world.

For us, governance is concerned with the governance ecosystem: with the frameworks, the strategy, with how decisions important to a society, a community, and an organization are taken, and, fundamentally, how accountability is rendered. Our work is guided by five principles that mirror the ones that are guiding the work of this group.

We deal with legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability, and fairness, and as I said, these are mirrored in the work that you are doing.

This committee has been asked to identify and conduct a study of viable alternative voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system, as well as to examine mandatory voting and online voting. To assist you in addressing these areas, my remarks will address three broad domains: why voting matters, how votes are counted, and how citizens vote.

I'll discuss the governance considerations I believe this committee should assess as they move forward and I will talk about the first and the third domains—that is, why voting matters and how citizens vote in conjunction.

For the second part, I'd like to clarify that my comments will not be on the merits of a particular electoral system, as I will leave that to the experts in the field whom you have already invited to speak and who are speaking this morning.

[*Translation*]

To begin with the last point,

[*English*]

I would like to start with the issue of encouraging voter participation, specifically through such measures as mandatory voting and online voting. I propose this order because I think voter engagement is as big an issue for democratic legitimacy as the selection of a specific electoral process.

[*Translation*]

While in principle I am not opposed to mandatory voting, I think that such use of public authority should be considered only as a last resort to address low voter participation.

On political principle, relatively few people support mandatory voting. The electoral franchise implies an absolute civic duty to vote, which we must uphold to the full extent of the law.

In fact only twenty or so countries have mandatory voting, and of those only half strictly enforce this requirement by imposing penalties.

● (1025)

[*English*]

The public purpose pursued by many who advocate for mandatory voting is principally to raise voting participation and thereby improve the legitimacy of elected representatives, and a broadened legitimacy of elected representatives ensures a broadened legitimacy of government, which is a most laudable public objective.

There are also a number of other measures that could be implemented prior to mandatory voting in order to improve voter turnout over time. Taking the prescriptive that the administration of voting is simply another element of government service delivery to the citizen would, in my view, go a long way in bringing this design within a modern philosophy of citizen-centred government service.

Simply put, if voting is more user-friendly and highly accessible, more people may be likely to vote. Everything possible should be done to facilitate voting, from registration to the actual act of voting. With modern information technologies, many impediments to voting or things that make voting more difficult could be lifted or greatly reduced. For example, we have a permanent electronic national voters list; if only it were available at all polling stations across the country in real time. This is a no-brainer in this day and age.

We might have a vote-anywhere policy that would facilitate the exercise of the franchise, notably by students who leave their permanent place of residence to attend college or university just around election time, if we stick to the current cycle. People could vote wherever they were on polling day, rather than having to return to their place of registration or having to change their registration to their new residence in order to be able to vote on polling day.

The lifting of such administrative burdens might give a particular boost to voting in marginalized groups in Canada, who may benefit from an increase in accessibility to voting, and among youth, since it's critical to retain the large increase in first-time young voters in the last federal election so that they continue over their lives to perform their civic duty. I say this while well understanding that in rural and remote areas of this country, we do not yet have the standard of connectivity to be found in the rest of the country, but perfection should not be the enemy of the good. We can start to work at modern-day solutions in full recognition of this reality and hope that we can implement something in rural and remote Canada as well.

Another example is limiting vouching to one per person. This has brought an undue restriction on the administrative flexibility of the voting process that may have had an impact, in particular for elderly voters in seniors' residences, where it was customary for staff to vouch for several residents who lacked identification, as well as in indigenous communities. Stopping this practice may have been a remedy to a non-problem.

However, I would suggest more importantly that the ability to vote online would make a difference as well. We manage polling pretty much as we did 100 years ago. Except for the permanent voters list that is composed and updated electronically with data input from Canada Revenue Agency, our voting process is entirely paper-based and very similar to what is was in the early 20th century. Polling stations do not have electronic access to existing voters lists and have only a printed list of voters for their poll, on which they cross off names as people come in and vote. Voters are given a ballot.... You know the process; I don't need to go into it.

It's extremely slow, and with the new additions that have been added to the administrative process, it is slow and clumsy for our day and age. To paraphrase another Canadian, after all, this is 2016.

Many service providers at all levels of government and in the private sector—even banks, for heaven's sake—don't let their customers or their citizens wait in line, because they know that often this causes them to lose their patronage. They've taken the turn to modernity. The electoral process has not. People line up and wait to exercise their franchise at polling stations.

A survey commissioned by us at the Institute on Governance—not yet published, but I will make it available to the committee after my appearance—shows that Canadians widely endorse online voting. I believe that technology that could and must ensure both the confidentiality and the integrity of an online voting process must be aggressively explored now, while we still have a few years to go.

Citizens live their lives online through their mobile devices, and few remember life without Google. Google is just a decade old, yet antiquated paper-based electoral processes already feel like an aberration in this world. People live their lives online, do their banking online, and pay their taxes online, but they can't vote online. A younger generation does not understand this, and frankly neither do I. I say let Canada be at the vanguard of piloting, experimenting, and implementing online voting as quickly as possible.

By the way, under the the Fair Elections Act, this would require the authorization of Parliament, and I quote section 18.1 of the Canada Elections Act:

> The Chief Electoral Officer may carry out studies on voting, including studies respecting alternative voting processes, and may devise and test an alternative voting process for future use in a general election or a by-election. Such a process may not be used for an official vote without the prior approval of the committees of the Senate and of the House of Commons that normally consider electoral matters or, in the case of an alternative electronic voting process, without the prior approval of the Senate and the House of Commons.

This is a very, very high bar, which I have no doubt discourages the serious examination and investigation of these modern administrative matters that affect the democratic franchise.

Most importantly, because an increase in voter turnout can equate to government's legitimacy, methods to improve accessibility are but one of the viable alternatives. I'm talking specifically about civic education. Parliament has a duty to ensure that its citizens understand the importance of their participation in strengthening the principles of sound public governance. With a civic education strategy that starts by targeting grade schools and high schools, we can ensure that there are more first-time voters, regardless of the voting system we choose, and that many more will become voters for a lifetime, continuing to support the ongoing foundation of democratic governance. I believe that Elections Canada should be institutionally positioned to play a leadership role in this strategy.

In other countries, such as Australia, electoral commissions or agencies have the responsibility to not only administer elections but to objectively inform citizens of their civic duty by providing accessible tools and resources. Thus, I believe that this committee should consider recommending expansion of the mandate for Elections Canada to include providing foundational and objective education and awareness programs to young Canadians, marginalized Canadians, and new Canadians.

Now I come to the voting system, first past the post.

Some feel that this element of our electoral process would be the single most important reason for the long-term trend of voter apathy identified by scholars and experts. A major feature in our democratic system is the election of majority governments, with examples of minority governments being a more common feature in more recent times.

● (1030)

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Flumian; how much time would you have left in your—?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Could I take another two or three minutes?

The Chair: Not really. Maybe another 30 or 45 seconds. I can stretch it to a minute.

There will be time for questions.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I can do that, by all means.

The Chair: Thank you so much for your co-operation.

We will have five minutes per member in the first round for both questions and answers, and four minutes in the second round. We'll end at 12:15.

We'll start with Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): I would like to hear what you were about to get into. I thought you were about to talk some about first past the post.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I was going to talk about it, but I'm not going to come to a conclusion. I'll only tell you that in the same poll I was talking about earlier, there was interest in exploring other options. When you see the results, you can have a look at what you think of their interest. It's a broader study on governance.

My final comments were going to be all about constitutional conventions, which are also affected by our voting system. Our voting system is only one dimension of the way we manage our constitutional arrangements. It was about the implications of changes to the voting system, or the implications that you should have in mind as you propose changes to the voting system.

Mr. John Aldag: Maybe I'll leave that aspect for somebody else and move into something different.

Professor Rose, you were talking about trade-offs, and I've made a note that trade-offs need to be looked at. I'm finding that we've had excellent testimony so far, and all three of you have contributed strongly again this morning. We're getting a lot of the benefits. We've heard that proportional representation can do certain things, such as resulting in minority or coalition governments, but we're not talking about the trade-offs.

I believe that sometimes majority governments can do great things. We've heard from Mr. Cullen that some of these minority governments have also done great things. Majority Liberal governments have done great things and majority Conservative governments have done great things, but mostly Liberal governments have done great things.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Aldag: I'd like to know if you have any thoughts on some of the trade-offs we're seeing with minority and majority governments. I'd like to explore that a bit.

I'd like to start with you, Professor Rose.

● (1035)

Prof. Jonathan Rose: When we talk about trade-offs in Parliament, we're talking about what kind of parliament we want. Electoral systems produce a Parliament, and a Parliament looks a certain way based on the electoral system.

Imagine the electoral system as an engine. Depending on how you tune that engine or what kind of engine you have, you're going to get different results. It's really about the principles that guide you. Effectiveness is a great concept, but when we talk about effectiveness, we can talk about effectiveness being a large majority government. One would not disagree that a large majority government is very effective in getting legislation passed, but it sacrifices the effectiveness of Parliament, which is after all a talking place, and the ability of members on all sides to engage in discussion and to deliberate.

When we talk about effective parties, we can talk about large brokerage parties that command wide swaths of ideology as they do in Canada, or we can talk about effective parties as being small, regional, or specifics-based parties. The trade-offs are really around the kind of Parliament you want and the kind of government you want.

Mr. John Aldag: In Canada, we have a clear division of power. The provinces have their responsibilities and the federal government has theirs. If we moved into a system of more minority or coalition governments, would we be sacrificing anything in being able to deal with national issues? If we were move away from the kinds of majority systems we've had, would we be sacrificing strong national leadership and weakening federal jurisdiction?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I think it's really about how we think of our party system. Our party system is a brokerage party system, which is a big tent. Arguably, we are one of the few countries that has had such a broad group of people under one political party. If you think of it that way, political parties are coalitions now. We have coalitions, except that they're created within a party before the election. Brokering of interests between parties would occur after the election. It's the same thing.

The Chair: Thank you. Okay, we're good.

Mr. Reid is next.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I think he's good, too.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: I want to thank all the panellists for being here.

I wanted to start by asking Jonathan Rose a couple of questions, and this may take up all the time I have in the first round.

You are, of course, one of Canada's two or three leading experts on citizens' assemblies, and you've spoken very favourably of them based on your experience. I'm just quoting you here: "A citizens' assembly—where real learning, deliberation and consultation takes place—is actually a higher threshold for legitimacy than a referendum".

As someone who takes referendums very seriously, I'm impressed by that.

I wanted to ask this question. A year ago, you said, "I think it shouldn't be a blue-ribbon panel deciding this," meaning electoral reform, "or politicians. Whatever decision is reached, it should be put to a national referendum for approval."

Is it still the case that you would regard the gold standard for changing the electoral system and ensuring that it's legitimate as a citizens' assembly followed by a referendum on the decision arrived at through the assembly?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Thanks for the question.

I think the quote you're referring to is actually part of a quote in which I said that some would argue that a referendum would be a good thing. I think there are great reasons to have a referendum, the primary one being legitimacy, but I still maintain that the gold standard, as you say, is a citizens' assembly, in part because, unlike a referendum, a citizens' assembly has an opportunity for the public to learn. There is an opportunity for the public to deliberate, and there is an opportunity for the public to engage in the issue in ways that don't occur in a referendum.

I also would point out, after looking at and thinking about the referendum in the U.K. recently, that it has given me pause, I must confess. That referendum was hijacked by dominant personalities. It was hijacked by mudslinging and by improper characterization of the issues. More importantly, participation was around 72%. If 52% of people voted to leave the EU, 52% of 72% is about 38%. I don't understand how that's a mandate. On the legitimacy front, it seems to fail.

I acknowledge that the idea of having the public have input in a meaningful way is hugely significant. The question is how to achieve that.

●(1040)

Mr. Scott Reid: That's an interesting way of looking at things. In the case of the referendum in Ontario, I know that they had a 60% approval rate. Let's assume it was 52% and we had the same participation rate we actually had, which was lower than 72%, I believe. Would that have meant that the majority vote in favour of the MMP system that you and the citizens' assembly had worked on would have been illegitimate? Your own words indicate that you believe that it would have been an illegitimate mandate.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: No. I think a citizens' assembly is similar to a jury. What does a jury do? A jury looks at evidence, deliberates, comes to a decision, and then makes a recommendation to a judge. A judge doesn't second-guess a jury. A judge doesn't second-guess a jury, because the task has been given to the assembly to deliberate and to weigh the evidence before it.

Mr. Scott Reid: I have the quote from Reddit in which you said virtually the same thing:

> I used to think that a referendum was important. It is, after all, a way for the public to support an elite driven (citizen or political) initiative. But then again, we don't ask a judge to approve or comment on a jury's decision so maybe we need not ask the public to approve a citizens' assembly process.

May I take it, then, that your position is now that we should have a citizens' assembly, and its decision should effectively be binding upon the government, without the need to go to a referendum?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I don't think you need an either/or, but I do think a citizens' assembly or some kind of deep deliberative exercise would be useful. I'm happy to sketch out, if we have time later, how that might look, but you are absolutely the elected representative, and in some sense the buck stops with you. I recognize that, but I think there is an opportunity not to replace but to supplement the work you are doing with citizen engagement in a meaningful way.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

I think I'm out of time. I'll probably come back in the next round. Thank you.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Okay, thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Cullen is next.

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

It's really an honour to have you folks with us here today.

I'll start off with Professor Rose, and then I want to move to Mr. Pilon and maybe in the second round to Ms. Flumian.

You talked about deliberative versus consultative. Earlier the NDP had suggested to the government a form of citizens' assembly to work in parallel with what we're doing here, but it seems that with the timeline, that idea was not accepted by the government, and with the timeline we have now, it's hard for me to imagine. Maybe someone can make a suggestion on how we could incorporate more of a citizen engagement than we have.

You talked about being deliberative versus just consultative. In September-October this committee will get out on the road to talk to people. To be deliberative with Canadians, how would you recommend the committee present the question that we're asking of Canadians? What are we asking them to comment on?

You talked about the cart before the horse and about not putting a bunch of systems up. Is it about asking them what priorities matter most, such as direct geographic connection or more women in politics? Is it what they value most? Are those the types of questions and the answers we should be receiving back from Canadians, because it will then inform the system we suggest?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Exactly.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is that the process you would imagine?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I think that's exactly the process.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: But I think there is an opportunity for a citizens' assembly to provide a broad-based, evidence-based opinion about what values are important and how that informs your work.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Even with the timeline and the commitments we have to change the system prior to 2019?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I think so.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Perhaps not today, but with your expertise and the people you know, if you were able to provide the committee with some recommendations on what that would potentially look like under the time constraints we have, I think it could be something

we should consider. The question of legitimacy is important to all of us.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Absolutely.

●(1045)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: To Mr. Pilon, it's very disheartening, to all of us as elected people, that people vote for parties and not for our brilliance. I'm sure my colleagues and I are all dispirited today by that comment.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'll read you a quote. It's a little lengthy, but I'd like your comment on it. This is from *Hansard* a number of years ago, from one of the MPs:

> Does he care at all that Canada is now the only complex multiparty democracy in the developed world which still relies on a 15th century voting system designed for medieval England? Does he care at all that 60% of Canadians in the last election voted against his government's program and yet the government holds 100% of the political power?

> Does he have the capacity for one moment to transcend partisanship and his government's defence of the status quo to suggest that yes, perhaps this place, the voice of the people, the place where we speak, parliament, should consider an electoral system which allows the plurality and diversity of political views to be properly reflected in this, the people's House?

Would you agree with the general sentiment of that statement?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: It sounds like me talking.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It sounds like you talking?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: It sounds like me talking, yes. I wasn't there, but....

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Well, someone has to tweet our friend Jason Kenney, because that's Jason Kenney talking.

It's a view I also support—well, the view he held at that time—because there are a couple of notions in there. One is that when parties get in, they like the system that got them in. There is this barrier we have to overcome to consider another system. The second is just the basic unfairness to Canadians, to voters, of the system we currently have.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: You know, I tell my students, "Don't knock politicians. It's a hard job." It's a thankless job, in many ways. Weekends and evenings are spent talking to people and doing stuff. It's hard, hard work.

That doesn't mean your vote is a reflection of all that hard, hard work. In fact, it's just sort of an expected part of the job. You may not know this, but it was really only in the 1970s, fairly recently, that Parliament gave the funds to MPs to actually set up local offices and do the kind of work that we seem to think now is a historical legacy. There's all kinds of evidence, really clear evidence, that you are not the centre of the voter's universe.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Chair, I'd move to strike that testimony from the record, if I could.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Ultimately voters are not ideological in the sense that they wave left and right banners, but they are able to locate parties in terms of the values they hold—which party is the abortion party, which party is the party on law and order—and they make their choices on the basis of that. That is the most important thing we're talking about here.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Allow me this: is it not sometimes a mix, though? I'm not saying this to aggrandize politicians, yet we all door-knock. We all have constituencies and connections with voters. I prefer a voting system in which that connection is maintained.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: I'm not against having local representation, but your job is to try to work out the balance. Right now we have an overbalanced sense of the local. People use it to basically try to block every attempt at reform with these overblown ideas of the importance of the local.

You had André Blais here the other day. He did a great study in which he asked people what influences their vote and if they vote on the basis of a local member. Of the responses, 40% said that, yes, local is very important. When he asked a follow-up question on what if that local member wasn't a member of the party they supported, only 4% were now prepared to support that local member.

The Chair: We'll have to move on, but we get the point.

Mr. Thériault is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): I welcome the witnesses. Thank you for your very interesting presentations.

I would like to continue with this discussion, Mr. Pilon. In Quebec, studies showed that politicians, such as the member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, Louise Harel, made a difference of 3% to 5% during an election, even after thirty years or so in Parliament. In other words, if voters voted 50-50 for the parties, the Louise Harels and François Gendrons in the election would bring in an extra 3% to 5%.

Therefore, this means that the individual members themselves may not contribute too much, but their role is important. In other words, voters do not care all that much about the individuals themselves, but rather they value their connection with whoever will be the member representing them. In Quebec, this is a major problem. We came up against it when we tried to reduce the number of ridings from 125 to 75 to establish a mixed system. In Quebec, the services that the Quebec government provides to the public, in a state of public emergency, go through the constituency office. That is less true at the federal level, because there is a narrower range of files.

I would like to ask you how you see the role of political parties in a democracy.

● (1050)

[*English*]

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Well, your question of the role of a political party in a democracy is a very broad question, whereas the lead-up was all about the role of the individual member. I think that the results that you describe are perfectly in line with the research, in that someone who's been in the job for a very long time has been able to build up a public profile.

The studies of voter knowledge about individuals tend to flow from the prime minister to cabinet ministers in the press to people who have been in office for more than 25 or 30 years. That is clearly an important part of it. We have a high turnover of MPs, as you know, in our Parliament, but when we look at the average, the situations that you describe are not as common as we might see in the British Parliament, where people sit for a very long time.

I think the research suggests that the ability of a local member to do local work.... Again, I'm not against having a local member who does local work, but let's not overvalue the role that being local plays in a voter's choice. The bump that someone gets, the research suggests, is maybe 3% or 4% above or below the swing towards the party. The key thing is the swing towards the party.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: In fact, despite the weight of the party, a member who doesn't do a good job in his or her riding can be turfed out. We are aware we only have a very short time.

I will clarify my point. Because I was elected, I have a deep respect for the common sense and judgment of voters. Witnesses told us that citizens did not understand much about our current debates, that they didn't care about these issues, and that they felt political parties were too partisan.

Are the experts the ones who should decide on our voting system? If not, we need the means to do so, and that includes taking the time required to achieve our objectives.

Everyone is talking about civic education initiatives, but that is not feasible in eight weeks or even within a parliamentary session. That may not even be feasible within a single term in office.

I would like to hear your thoughts on this.

[*English*]

Prof. Dennis Pilon: I do think it's wrong-headed to look at this from a point of view of public education. What do people need to know about voting systems? I often tell people that selling a voting system is like selling a car. People need to know about the performance; they don't need to look under the hood. Very few people look under the hood when they buy a car.

We seem to have this idea that somehow voters need to be electoral officers who can explain the mechanics of a system. Certainly our media is obsessed about that, so I would say, yes, the evidence from previous referendums suggests that if you go the referendum route, you will basically be setting up a situation for it to fail because the evidence that we have from previous referendums is that voters will say, "I don't understand what you're asking me. I'm not an expert in this. I'm just going to say no because I haven't really a clue what's going on." That's what the results are.

The research shows that people didn't reject the other voting system reforms because they didn't like the options: they rejected them because they said they didn't even know a referendum was going on and they didn't really understand what the issues were.

I do think there is a role for expertise. I think that the combination of partisanship.... I don't have a problem with partisanship, frankly, because I think that in a democracy people are allowed to disagree, and that's a good thing, and parties play a crucial role in mobilizing the public around different issues. However, as I say, the public uses parties as a proxy for their own intimate knowledge. We can't expect them to be expert in all these things. They're busy. They have lives. What they do is they say, "Yes, I trust that party. They seem to be upset about this, so maybe I want some more answers." By contrast, if the parties are fine with the change, then the voters will be fine with the change too.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. May, please.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thanks.

I want to start with Professor Rose and I also want to start by thanking all three of you for being with us this morning. This panel will have heard from 20 witnesses by noon, and Madam Flumian is our first female witness since Maryam Monsef.

This is nobody's fault. I was on the steering committee; I helped pick the witnesses. It is what it is, but we're looking at a field in which apparently the experts are dominated by the Y chromosome.

Moving on, Professor Rose, what I wanted to ask is about citizens' assemblies. I'm not taking a knock at citizens' assemblies; I think the one in British Columbia and the one in Ontario have been fantastic. However, what I began to realize, as people didn't understand what the members of the citizens' assembly had learned, was that as a gold standard for public education, it was almost as though you had a group of randomly selected great Canadians who threw themselves into this and cared deeply—as your article suggested, meeting through the summer in closed rooms in beautiful hot parts of Ontario because they care about democracy—and I almost felt as if these wonderful citizens emerged to say, "We have the answer", and the rest of the public said, "What was the question?"

As a matter for public education, are there drawbacks to a citizens' assembly?

●(1055)

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I think you've put your finger on the fundamental tension, the relationship between the assembly and the work they do afterwards. We can, I think, learn a lot from what was done 15 years ago. We can use technology and media to ensure that there is a conversation happening at the same time as the assembly is learning. There are all sorts of technological tools we can use to encourage citizens to learn along with the assembly.

I don't think we did that well enough in Ontario. In British Columbia, of course, they had a reporter who was dedicated to covering the assembly, and it was no surprise that British Columbians knew more about their assembly than Ontarians did about theirs.

In Ontario we had a very difficult time getting attention in the provincial press, for a number of reasons. There's a real tension, because it is independent of government, so it doesn't get the kind of coverage that government does, but the work it's doing is significant to the work of government.

So is there a tension? Yes. Is it remediable? I think it is. I think the remedy is to make sure that the process has a public educational component at the same time.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I want to put this question to each of you, and I'll start with Professor Pilon.

This committee has been struck, with other parallel processes under way for public education. Each member of Parliament across Canada has been asked to hold town halls; the minister and the parliamentary secretary have said they are planning a tour across the country to listen to people, particularly from marginalized groups and groups that don't usually participate with adequate media coverage. This should encourage public education, I would think, even perhaps as much as or more than a citizens' assembly, depending on how much news coverage a citizens' assembly gets.

My question is this: can this committee become, and what could this committee do to become, a tool of legitimacy that could be a proxy for either such a citizens' assembly or some other method of engaging the Canadian public across the board?

We have only a minute and a half for all three of you to answer my question, starting with Professor Pilon.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: You already are a tool of legitimacy: you were elected, there were platforms, people broadly understood the different things that were being discussed. I think it is time now to act. There's a higher-order principle at stake.

It's lovely that you all want to chat and have a group hug with the public on this issue, despite the fact that you hardly do it on almost any other issue, but the higher-order principle here is democratic equality. Do you think every vote should count? Do you believe majority governments really should reflect a majority of Canadians? Those are basic democratic values, to my mind, and that is the business you should be focusing on.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I might gently disagree with Professor Pilon and say that I think the public do need to be involved in a substantial way. Your question, I think, is what that looks like, and it is not focused on systems and is not focused, as Professor Pilon mentioned, on the engine, but on the broad principles.

My fear is that as you tour and hear from Canadians, you're going to be hearing from stakeholders, not average Canadians. The challenge of this committee will be to ensure that average Canadians who don't have a vested interest are at those meetings.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: You shouldn't do anything that delegitimizes your role as individual members of Parliament. You are a very legitimate tool for having these conversations with Canadians.

In whatever you do, I would be careful, if some of the solutions that are being proposed actually add to fragmentation, that you do not create a bigger problem by adding more fragmentation. You have to get to the question of what the basic issues are and then deal with those, because it is a governance ecosystem. Changing one thing may or may not have an effect on other things. You need the broader perspective before you can home in on some of the individual aspects.

For example, we've heard some testimony, but I would say, from all the information I have, that Canadians strongly support attachment to their local MPs and to their constituencies. I would hazard a guess that if we checked your files, which I once did in another life, we would find that you have more than four percent of Canadians in your constituency phoning you about problems that they expect you to help them address. I would bet that for a fact. That is a better connection of the roles you play in that function.

By all means—

●(1100)

The Chair: Thank you. We'll have to go. We're way over time, but those are good points. Thank you.

Ms. Romanado is next.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): I think women should have equal time at the—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I'll share some with—

The Chair: The steering committee will examine this for sure.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I have to say this has been one of the most exciting panels we've had so far, and I want to thank you for your frank comments and excellent testimony today.

Professor Rose, we heard a little bit about the guiding principles, but more focused on a voter-centric approach rather than looking at it from the eyes of parliamentarians. I think, as committee members, that we need to be mindful of that when we're talking to Canadians, when we're talking about what those guiding principles are—for instance, effectiveness. Effectiveness from whose perspective? From our perspective or from their perspective? Is it simplicity from our perspective or from their perspective? I think there are going to be conflicting responses depending on who the audience is.

I liked to see if you could elaborate a little bit more on that, because I think that's one part we haven't actually touched on. We have conflicting ideas: parliamentarians versus voters. I'd like to get a little more understanding from your part on that, and then I have another question. Could you elaborate, please?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Sure. Thank you for the question.

I think that the guiding principles of the committee, and presumably the guiding principles that will help you in your cross-country tour, are very broad, and in some cases, as I mentioned, they are really about products of a system. You can't have a discussion about those because they're a consequence. In thinking about what citizens want, I'm trying to encourage you to think beyond those five principles that were given to the committee. Other studies have taken a broader approach to that. Things like simplicity, which is reflected in your accessibility principle, are important. Things like voter choice, which experts don't highly value, are important among citizens.

There was a great study by David Farrell and his colleagues that asked experts around the world to relate what principles are important and to link them to systems. They found that experts actually are not as good as the two assemblies in Canada at linking the principles to the systems. In other words, experts can tell you

what is important in terms of the final system, but they're not clear in relating those to those foundational things. I think if you want a system that does what you think it should do, then you need to have a good idea of what those fundamental values are.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Perfect. Thank you.

I'll go to my next question. We have Madam Flumian, who's talked a little bit about the importance of civic education, and then we have Professor Pilon, who said that Canadians don't want to see what's under the hood, so it's a little bit of conflict. We've heard from other testimony that we're not doing a good enough job in terms of educating Canadians about the importance of the civic process. Since we've been hearing testimony to the contrary, could you elaborate a little bit more on why you feel that Canadians don't need to know more?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Because they don't know anything anywhere, right? Do you think that the Irish voters know the weighted inclusive Gregory method? Do you think they can explain how STV allocates its representation? No, they can't. Neither can our voters explain to you how 39% of the vote turned into 60% of the seats. Just go out in the street and ask them. They're not going to be able to tell you. That's the simple system. We know they mistake actual legislative majority governments for other majority governments. The public's knowledge is low, and that's because they're busy. Your job is to be the experts and call in the experts as you need them.

The important thing is that the Irish, as an example, know how to use their system. How do we know that? Ballot spoilage in Ireland is actually lower than in our system. We could intuit that if they didn't understand the system or if it was too complicated, as the critics allege, then we would expect to see lots of spoiled ballots, but we don't. Therefore, they understand how the system works and they understand what to use it for, and that is the important thing. You're wasting people's time if you go into all the details, because they glaze over. You have to connect with them on why this issue matters. That's the broader question behind how a democracy should function.

I say majority rule and effective representation. Those are two pretty key values that I think any democratic theorist would get behind.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead. You have 45 seconds.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I don't get to rebut?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, Ms. Flumian.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Thank you.

Then I would say that the measure is not what the voting system is, it's what the effectiveness of the governance model is? The question is too narrowly asked when you're asking about this system or that system, because it's not a duelling battle about experts. If this committee can agree to a solution, the country will probably support you. That's the way our parliamentary system of governance works. It's imperfect at the best of times, but that's the way it's intended to work. It's as legitimate as my and your role, and there's nothing more important than the sanctity of this House for all of us. If you're an elite, it's because we chose to make you an elite. We accept that role in our system. It's a better use, a more legitimate use, of the respective roles that we all play in a governance cycle system. It is much broader than just the one aspect of how you cast that actual vote. It legitimizes all your roles—the role of governance, the role of the importance of Parliament, the role of our democratic institutions —and it also understands, as Westminster models of governance have over the many years we've been around, how you will help— and your daily work here is to help evolve that system for modern times. Therefore, your question about effectiveness has to broader.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Richards is next.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I want to reinforce something Ms. Romanado said in the very beginning of her question. I thought it was really important and I am simply summarizing what she said but, certainly the point was made very clearly that this needs to be about the interests of Canadians, the voters and the people, when this decision is being made, and not about the interests of politicians. I really wanted to congratulate her for raising that very important point, because I think it is an important one and it is the reason I believe it's so important for us to have a referendum prior to any changes being made.

Ms. Flumian, I have a couple of questions for you. You had written an article for iPolitics, I believe, or had made some comments in iPolitics about the Broadbent Institute survey, indicating the five identified goals for a voting system. Obviously those five goals were simplicity, strong and stable governments, allowing voters to directly elect an MP who represents their communities, ensuring that government has MPs from every region, and having a system that ensures a party's number of seats matches its level of support.

You indicated in your comments that it seems that only the existing single-member plurality system satisfies four of the five criteria, one through four, and that this situation shouldn't make reform impossible but it won't be easy either, especially with the tight timelines that will have to be met if everything is to be up and running at Elections Canada in time for 2019.

That brings a couple of questions to mind for me. First, could you elaborate for the committee on why the other models don't live up to those five standards?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I think there's hardly enough time here, but I could always provide you with an answer in writing for your deliberations.

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure, but if you could try to be as brief—

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I would come to the conclusion that there's enough pressure for some form of reform. It's your responsibility here to determine how much reform the system requires and how much it can tolerate over what period of time. I think that if I had to rest my case on any of those things as being the most important today, for the deliberations of the discussion today, it's maintaining that thing that is really important to Canadians, which I argue is the connection with the constituency. That isn't to say that we shouldn't be experimenting or looking at experimenting with some form of proportional representation on top of that, but I do think that's a very important connection.

Mr. Blake Richards: I certainly appreciate that and I would certainly share the view that it is a very important point as well.

I might come back to this if we have a bit of time at the end, but I wanted to ask you a second question that came to mind from your comments there as well.

With reference to the timelines necessary, do you think that the fixed hard deadline is unreasonable if we want to be able to do electoral reform properly? In other words, do you think the very tight timeline makes this process difficult and would make it unreasonable?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I think reasonable men and women can come to reasonable conclusions, so I think the first test of that will be how as a committee you work together and what you will present as a report—hopefully not a series of reports—to the rest of the Parliament of Canada, to the government, since they're only a proxy for the people of Canada. I think that's the first test.

How much unanimity or how much consideration will you give, what's the balance of your consideration, and what are you going to propose as a group? As I said, the purpose of this, I think, is to put you in the driver's seat, legitimize the role of parliamentarians who are our representatives in this holy House, and have you work in the fashion that our system currently requires you to work, which is to mediate those differences and try to come as close as possible to fashioning solutions that represent all Canadians' interests in this matter.

The Chair: You have 35 seconds.

● (1110)

Mr. Blake Richards: I wanted to try to return to that first question I had but I don't think we have much time, so maybe I'll thank you in the hope we can come back to it on the second round.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: If you come back early enough.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards. I appreciate the cooperation.

Mr. DeCourcey is next.

[Translation]

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all three witnesses for joining us today.

[English]

Ce matin, I will ask questions in English.

Professor Rose, I appreciated your channelling Dr. Seuss to tell us in what areas we should be thinking in passing perhaps a new system or electoral change for Canada, thinking about who we are, where we are, and where we want to go. I would submit that perhaps this is a potential title for our report, when the time comes. I also appreciated the focus on values and principles and the suggestion that those should guide the discussions we have with Canadians. Inevitably there will be tension there.

Ms. Flumian, you also highlighted another tension, which is whether we are valuing our conversation on the way we experience voting or on what type of Parliament we want reflected back toward Canadians.

I'd like to ask you both to expand a little bit on those conversations.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Thank you.

I think that in the discussions around electoral reform, many issues are being conflated, and if I leave you with any one idea, it is to try to disentangle these various threads. The threads are these: what we want out of Parliament, what we want Parliament to do, and then, relatedly, what role citizens should play.

I think that in an exercise that involves a fundamental thing—arguably a constitutional thing—such as a voting system, citizens need to be involved. We can have a reasonable discussion about what that involvement looks like, but I think they do need to be involved. If they are involved, I think the involvement needs to be based on education.

I'm not suggesting that citizens learn the mechanics of electoral systems, but my experience has demonstrated and shown me time after time that citizens, if asked, will rise to the task. We don't ask them enough. All citizens have opinions and ideas about what is important in elected representatives, and to me it's the goal of this committee to tap into that and to relate it to the work they do.

I'll leave it there.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Thank you.

I'll touch briefly on this, and you can see it in my written submission after this presentation.

I would think that, yes, citizens make the greatest connection with what all of this means to them in terms of outcomes. What is our parliamentary form of democracy, based on democratic principles that we hold dear in this country, meant to do? That's their litmus test for how this works: How well do we work together? What compromises do we come to? The mechanisms and modalities are important only insofar as they help us to achieve those outcomes. Here, I think, you have to step back a bit from the very particular questions and ask about those outcomes.

If you ask about those outcomes, I would also ask the committee to look at a few other things. If we change the way we elect parliamentarians and therefore the balances you are trying to create within the system, also give some thought to the implication this has, because Parliament in and of itself, without the functioning of government, does not end up in outcomes. Isn't that right? It's the combination of the two.

We have some parliamentary conventions you should look at. What does loss of confidence mean in a house that functions in a very different fashion? Explore that, because that may give you insights in the reverse order into what you're trying to achieve. Explore the issues of what dissolution means in a world in which loss of confidence may be explored in a very different fashion.

What does it mean? We know that historically, in our current system—and this doesn't mean we shouldn't change it—loss of confidence leads to dissolution. Is that what's going to happen in a world in which we may put other mechanisms in place? This is an important part of our governance fabric, which leads or doesn't lead to outcomes being achieved by the way we manage things.

We have a few of those conventions in place that we should be paying some attention to. If we make these changes, then let's not repeat some of our past behaviours. If we vote to make these changes, how do we put these things out, in terms of conventions and how they're to behave, in a most transparent fashion? Does an incumbent prime minister publish for the House and for all Canadians an understanding of what those things mean, so that the Governor General is instructed as to what the presumed wisdom is and so that Parliament knows how to behave, and also the various constituent components of cabinet?

What happens if we propose a system—and I could live with any of these systems, and God bless democracy—in which we have multi-party members of cabinet? The issues of cabinet solidarity have been fundamental to the way we function. How would we explore those? I'm not saying we shouldn't look at them.

●(1115)

The Chair: These are definitely interesting questions, but we'll go now to Ms. Benson. Welcome to the committee.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to direct my questions to Mr. Pilon and Mr. Rose. First, though, I'm going to give you a scenario. My background is in the non-profit sector. I worked in the community and spent a lot of time on committees and consultations. Actually, just last week I was part of a round table in Saskatoon on changing a government program.

Often when we're trying to generate information to help some group make a decision, the potential impact of our discussions is unclear. This group wanted to know more about the question we'd asked them to answer. We went back to what had happened before. We looked at what wasn't working and what we wanted to change. I'm interested in your comments about our need to hear from people in order to roll up this information into coherent data that can inform a decision.

I think there's a technical exercise here that we can use experts for, but what I want to know is how we, in the process we have now, can get citizens' input into this so that they feel they've had a say in improving the present system.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: It's very challenging. The democracy exercises we've had have been excellent. They've shown that the public, given a chance to become informed, can make good decisions. I'm not against that idea, but that is not the situation we face now. If you go out and ask people what they think, they're going to tell you stuff they already know, which privileges the status quo. You are privileging the status quo in your process if that's what you do.

What do people know? They know what they've experienced. They don't have any experience of other methods of doing things. That's why I hear from this committee an overvaluing of how much you're going to get out of the public in the feedback that they might give you. They don't know anything about our institutions. I don't say that as a criticism. I think people are busy and they look to you to lead. They have a sense of which side they're on, of the kind of politics they want to see. That is what determines these decisions more than any of the things you're talking about.

Let me give you one quick example. Vancouver uses an at-large voting system for its city elections, which was adopted in the 1930s. There have been six referendums on whether or not to get rid of that system. They've all failed. The public, which you claim is so focused on local matters, has chosen to keep an at-large system, and it is divided strictly on partisan lines. Supporters of the right-wing party have seen that this at-large system works for them, so they want to keep it. The left-wingers think it's really bad and want to move to a ward system, but because the right-wing voters are more likely to come out and vote, they win. The less privileged voters, who are less likely to come out and vote, lose.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Rose, would you comment?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: It is a challenging question. I appreciate where you're coming from and how it informs what interests you. I think you said it nicely when you asked what it is we want in an electoral system. To me, that's something that every Canadian has an opinion about. I agree with you that's there's also a technical exercise that comes later. For me, the role of the public at this stage is to help assess what Canadians want in a system. We have good ideas from public opinion surveys and other forms, but we haven't heard directly from Canadians.

I think the reason these exercises have not been successful is that they're merely consultation. When I say "merely", I mean they are letting people vent about what they already know. It's important to precede that with deliberation. It's important to educate people so they can assess what they think they know and change their opinions in light of what they've learned.

● (1120)

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Pilon and Mr. Rose have commented on what we need to talk to Canadians about. Where do the people come into the conversation? You both talked about how not knowing how your car works doesn't stop you from driving it. Could you say a bit more about how we can frame the conversation to make it more deliberative than consultative?

The Chair: Perhaps this could enter into another answer. Our time is up.

We'll go to Mr. Deltell now.

[*Translation*]

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

I welcome the witnesses to their provincial Parliament, or rather the federal Parliament. I apologize, it's an old habit of six years.

Ms. Flumian, I will start with you. I have been listening to you for a while and find your comments very interesting, of course. I understand from what you said that you truly value the work we do here. That's great and we appreciate it, but ultimately, the decision is not ours to make.

About a month ago, in this very room, at this table, on that chair by your side, the minister responsible came to testify. She was specifically asked whether her government would be bound to follow the committee's recommendation, if there happens to be one. As you know, this committee will be travelling across Canada to hear from experts and citizens like you.

This is a serious effort undertaken by all political parties in the House and normally it would lead to a recommendation. However, the minister told us that she would not be bound by it.

What does that mean, Ms. Flumian? Ultimately one person will make the decision, and that is the Prime Minister. He controls the executive, that is, the cabinet. He also controls the majority in the House. Therefore, it's not the entire population who will decide on our new electoral system, but rather one single person: the Prime Minister.

What are your thoughts on that?

[*English*]

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I think that your work is fundamentally important here. I think the greater amount of hard work in the public domain that will lead to discussions that may or may not result in unanimity will condition the discussion and the conditions that are made going forward. I think there's no escaping that. The only way you can escape that is if you shirk your responsibilities and place the consultation and the duty for the crucial questions on this issue elsewhere.

I think that's how you legitimize the role of parliamentarians and the role of Parliament. This is how you link the role of Parliament to the role of government. I think part of the bargain that's actually broken here, which is why we're having these conversations, is that historically parties have run on their party platforms, convincing their base and convincing a large enough number of Canadians to form government. Once they pivoted into government—because pivot is the word of the day these days—they then understood that they were here to represent all Canadians. They stayed in government as long as they understood that. The moment they forgot that, out they went.

Now we've gone through a period of time where Canadians have expressed great dissatisfaction at the way we were governed. That's the fundamental question here, and what are you going to do to affect that?

I think you have the primary role to play on this issue, in having that conversation with the minister and with her colleagues in cabinet, who are your colleagues in Parliament, and the function is supposed to be that Parliament is supreme in our system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I really appreciate that you value our work. We will be meeting with a lot of Canadians, but the minister said that she was not at all bound by the work of this committee. In the end, only one person will make the decision, and that is the Prime Minister.

What do you think would be the best way to ensure the legitimacy of the process, other than through a referendum?

[*English*]

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I'm glad someone asked me about a referendum.

The best way to ensure legitimacy is for you to home in on recommendations that will demonstrate how the narrow focus of your question improves the broader governance question. Put that to the Canadians you're consulting with and discussing these matters with, make that open and transparent—which, of course, by virtue of these committee meetings it is—and that will draw everybody in the country to conclusions about where this should be heading. If it takes more than one round of these committee meetings over the course of a life of any Parliament, so be it. That is the hard work of governing.

On the issue of referenda, if I have a moment...or will I pick it up in another question?

● (1125)

The Chair: You have about 45 seconds, so go ahead.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I don't know if I have 45 seconds, but here I go.

It's a very blunt instrument that leads to binary choices on very complicated matters when we haven't even figured out what the questions are yet in a governance ecosystem.

When I look around the room, I look at the age of this committee and at my own age. I am the generation, as you are the generation, of people who are the recipients of national referenda and referenda recovery in a world where our national referenda have tended to be extremely divisive, not leading to goodwill and greater understanding on the importance of the issue. This is why it's so important that all of you, as parliamentarians, take this role seriously in what you're going to be doing. There's nothing more important.

I have to say that for our whole governance ecosystem, as a former public servant—that's how I spent 30 years of my life—we have spent an entire time reflecting on the outcome of those referenda. However, here's the good news: we have evolved our models of government. In 1981, when I started working in the Department of Finance, it was a very different model of government than it is today. We have made it a far more decentralized system in every aspect of what we do.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: That's been your job. Thank you for it.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota is next.

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

I'm so delighted to have all of you here today. It's been a very enlightening panel. You guys have been very diverse in your views, which is nice to see.

We've been hearing a lot about what voters really know. What I'm hearing is that they don't know the system.

Mr. Rose, you were saying what they do know is what they value. From your experience with Ontario citizens' assemblies, you said that simplicity was one of the things that they highly valued.

Ms. Flumian, you said that the most important value is the connection between a parliamentarian and his or her constituency. We were talking a little about perspective. Is it our perspective? Is it the voters' perspective on what system we need to move forward with?

What I do know and what this committee knows is we need to make progress. You stated a little earlier, Mr. Pilon, that we haven't always had constituency offices. This is a new phenomenon, and now all of a sudden we're so caught up on that being important. Let me tell you, I do door-knocking. I do talk to constituents who walk into my office. I think that is part of the progress we have made in Canada. That is how we progress. I think it's been for the better, not for the worse.

My question to you is on that connection between constituents. I have constituents who don't just come from that Canadian perspective but who have immigrated from all over the world. They come from different systems and different perspectives. The one thing they pretty much unanimously tell me is they love Canada because they cannot connect with their member of Parliament in any other country the way they can here.

Not just for me do I value that connection with them, but for them. That's what I hear day after day. At the door during the election, I heard, "You're here now. What makes us think you'll be here later?" That connection and that availability are so important to them.

Whatever progress we make, would you say that's something we cannot risk losing at this point, now that we've made that progress?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Anything that connects voters to the political system in a cohesive way is a good thing, and I support it.

I realize I'm fighting an uphill battle perhaps with my audience in attempting to suggest that we just temper your enthusiasm for your local representative role. I've overstated the case, only because of course I think it's overstated generally in the other direction. In no way am I trying to suggest that I want a system where there is no connection. There should be a connection. In fact, I don't agree with my colleague's comment that PR would represent a trade-off on the local representation front.

As you heard from our Irish experts, the Irish have very strong opinions about the connection they should have, and local members who do not do their service are rapidly punished by their electorate. The beauty of the Irish system is that voters can punish a local representative who is slacking off and not doing the local job without sacrificing the support that they want to give to their party. That is a very sophisticated way to balance out these different interests. That's what I'm asking you to consider as you move forward: we can have our cake and eat it too on the local representation and effective representation for parties. I say that because I really do think the parties are so crucial.

When we take away parties, what happens? We have local representation. Voter turnout plummets, because without parties, voters find it very difficult to participate. What happens when you leave your party and you run as an independent? You lose, because that party label is a crucial part of the way that people participate in politics.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am in no way discrediting the hard work you're doing on the doorstep or the appreciation felt by that small group of people who come to see you. That is really meaningful to them, absolutely, but I say that we can have that and that the claims we hear about PR systems somehow wrecking it are false and unsubstantiated.

● (1130)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you have any comments, Mr. Rose?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I began by saying that the key word in this discussion was "contingency". I would say that in response to your question.

Local representation is important. As was just described, the Irish case is a great example of local representation. Because the geographical constituencies are reasonably small, they sacrifice proportionality. Most experts would suggest that in order to have true proportionality, you need about five representatives per district. If you have fewer than that, you give up some proportionality. In Ireland they clearly say, "We like the fact that there's local representation and we're willing to give up some of the proportionality." That's what I was referring to when I meant trade-offs.

When the Ontario citizens' assembly members mocked up an STV model for Ontario, they realized quickly that if they wanted proportionality, which is something they desired, either the ridings would have to be enormous or the legislature would have to be increased significantly. Those trade-offs were the things they played with. I'm not suggesting that's the domain of this conversation. I said to myself I didn't want to get into the mechanics here today, but in answer to your question, that's the way it sits.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We'll start the second round with Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Ms. Flumian, you were talking about referenda. Had you finished your thoughts on that? I wanted to make sure you had time to—

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I think you got the gist of my message.

Mr. John Aldag: I did, but in case there was anything further—

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I could go on, but it's wasting time.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay, perfect.

There's something I'd like to put to all three of you. We've seen attempts at electoral reform at the provincial level. We've talked about that. We've heard that citizen engagement was done in great ways in Ontario and B.C., yet it failed.

As we embark on this, you've given us some thoughts, but could each of you share with us your thoughts on what we need to do differently to come to a different result in the end than what we saw happen in the provinces?

Ms. Flumian, maybe you want to start on this one.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Thank you. It would be a pleasure.

This my fundamental message: whatever recommendations your deliberations take you to, rest them on our entire governance ecosystem. People want some change. People want evolution. Our system has to evolve in order to maintain that primordial connection directly with citizens, which I think is fundamental to our democratic system of governance, but understand the whole system.

In Ontario, when the work of the constituent assembly was done, the government essentially took a pass. That may have had an impact on the results of that reform. That's why I'm saying to look at the entire ecosystem and understand the role of all these folks, because you were challenging the status quo at all levels. You're not simply challenging your relationship or whose perception it is, citizen perception or parliamentary perception—quite frankly, those should overlap as often as possible—but look at the entire system in which you're going to nest your recommendations.

There is no magic bullet. The answer is not first past the post or proportional representation or some combination, because fundamental to all of this is reforming and evolving your roles as well. Whatever system we have, you're getting elected by some mechanism to help govern Canada.

In today's day and age, the more connection you have, whether it's through constituent assemblies, whether it's through other mechanisms.... The value of a constituent assembly is highly deliberative. The problem with the constituent assembly is that it is deliberative for the people who are in the room; the rest of us think they've drunk the Kool-Aid. They didn't go through the same process and they don't understand it.

I put much more value on your deliberative discussions—because that's what you're here to do every day—than I put on the value of others externally to it, especially when I'm a public administration expert myself, a governance expert myself.

The answer is to connect as much as possible, but connect on the questions that are going to matter, and nest the questions you're going to be asking Canadians in the aspects of the system, of which voting is only one dimension.

As I said earlier, the reason there's a malaise in the country is that there is a strong view that there was a big disconnection between those who governed us and the way we're governed and what we tried to say to those who are governing us, and that is Parliament. It's the government, and Parliament definitely is not composed of some amorphous...it's all of you individually and the roles you play.

What is the importance of the not-for-profit sector? Where does it find its voice? Does it find its voice through...? Those are fundamental questions that the way we exercise the vote are supposed to address. Therefore, nest your recommendations, your deliberations, within that broader governance ecosystem. If you change one, you'll change another.

I was a public administrator for 30 years. If we change minority government models—which I'm not arguing we shouldn't—and if the cabinet is composed of multiple types of parties, it changes the role of public service. Good. Good on us. Let's explore what that means. Let's not get into unintended consequences that are bigger than what we're trying to correct by not understanding the implications of this aspect of your questions and the implications they have on the broader democratic governance system.

Thank you.

● (1135)

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay. Does either of the others want to...?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Again, I think what you're going to see in your consultations is partisan types and a lot of advocacy groups, and they're going to reflect back some of the opinions that are already here in this room. In that sense, it's a bit of an echo chamber. However, some stragglers might come in who aren't committed, and for them I think you really have to get at what's at stake.

Okay, you like the local presentation. That's great, but there are these other things, and you have to recognize that having it will affect the other things you also say you want. It can't just be a freebie.

The Chair: Understood.

Mr. Reid is next, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you. We have four-minute rounds now, correct?

The Chair: Yes, they are four-minute rounds.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

I want to go back to you, Jonathan Rose, but not with the question I was going to ask earlier. You said something that made me want to inquire further. You discussed the Irish model.

I don't know if you heard the testimony from the two professors from Trinity University who appeared earlier. They noted—and this connects to your observation about proportionality in STV—that in that country, the fact that the government gets to control the law as to how their system is designed from one election to the next has resulted in the size of districts being decreased, the number of members. There's a three-person minimum, and the country has been drifting closer and closer to three. Regardless of whether it's Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael in power, because both of those two parties have a

communal interest in restricting proportionality, they're both likely, in a three-person electorate, to get one MP, whereas they can freeze out some of the smaller parties.

I guess I'm asking this question because you also raised the problem of the size of ridings. With this particular model, is there a fundamental problem in Canada that your riding either becomes too large in terms of geography or becomes too small in terms of members to be significantly proportional?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Yes, I think those are the trade-offs. If you look at the Australian system, where there is better proportionality in the STV model—

Mr. Scott Reid: This is the Australian upper house?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Yes, the Senate. The number of people per district is much larger, so you can achieve proportionality if you have at least five.

If you try to think about having at least five or more representatives per district, and you look at the country, and you try to maintain the principle of representation by population, something has to give. What has to give is either the size of the district or the proportionality.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. In Australia, I know it's 12 senators per state, but it's six per election typically, unless you have a double dissolution. Six achieves that goal at the cost of having, in the case of Western Australia, a single electorate or riding that is the size of Ontario and Quebec combined.

● (1140)

Prof. Jonathan Rose: That's right. That's the riding of Kargoorlie.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's the lower house, but the state of Western Australia is a single district for the purpose of Senate elections. You're right that Kalgoorlie is about 80% of that. I've seen the riding map.

At any rate, those are the trade-offs. The model that came out of the citizens' assembly that you were involved in was a different model. It was the MMP model. In your opinion, does that achieve a better result? I think in your case, you actually advocated adding some seats as well. Is that correct?

Prof. Jonathan Rose: That's right. With MMP, there are a number of different design variations. The big ones are the ratio between local representatives and the tier. The assembly members thought 70:30 was about right, with 25% on the tier about what you need. They wanted to return the legislature to pre-Mike Harris days, so it would have increased it from 103 to 129.

A number of other design decisions that the assembly members raised affect both proportionality and the values they wanted, including open and closed lists and the ballot structure. In Germany, in Saxony, you have an opportunity to rank your candidates in the local district. There's whether you want to have a threshold, and what the threshold would be. While the assembly members recognized that more parties might be better, they didn't want smaller obstreperous parties, shall we say, so they raised the floor at 5%.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will continue with Mr. Cullen.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I have two questions coming off Twitter from Lea Westlake.

I'll put this to you, I think, Mr. Pilon. Do mixed-member proportional systems maintain local representation?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Second, she asks if we could try proportional voting for a couple of elections and have a referendum; that way, the public would know.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Well, I guess some people have floated that idea. I think my views have come through fairly clearly. I don't accept that the current system meets the democratic standard of the 21st century. It's a pre-democratic holdover. It's been kept in place because it served the partisan interests of the parties that could change it, and it's time to change it. That's my view.

I would say that putting something like the equality of our voting rights to a referendum is fundamentally unsound in democratic terms. We don't do that. Switzerland had a vote on women's franchise; they didn't get the vote until 1972. We didn't do that because we believe women should have the vote as a matter of principle.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's a profound example.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: We still only have one out of 22.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Ah...yes.

You mentioned earlier about privileging the status quo in a referendum, that there's a certain natural momentum for voters to maintain what we have, particularly if the question is complex. The analogy I'm thinking of is, if this were a race, a 100-metre dash—the Olympics are coming—and the status quo was competing against a reform, the status quo starts at the 50-metre mark and everyone says it's fair. Ms. Flumian, do you get a similar impression when questions are put in referenda?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Probably true. Probably true.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

Mr. Pilon, would you comment?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: We want the result to reflect the reasoned opinions, the informed opinions. I don't think anyone would disagree with the idea that a legitimate outcome would be one in which we were confident the voters had the information and the capacity to participate, but I'm telling you that the evidence does not support that.

You can go forward, but it won't be an evidence-based decision. The evidence, I think, is quite clear. In Ontario, surveys that were done at the same time discovered that voters said a majority preferred a system that had a local member and proportionality in results. Those same voters then turned out and voted down a model that would have given them that. That is a perverse result, and it's perverse because, clearly, the referendum process was not one that the public could engage with effectively.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's particularly so if a government or parties then work against the passing of the referendum, as was the case with the Liberals in Ontario.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: That was fairly clear in all cases, in P.E.I., Ontario, and British Columbia. The governments were fairly hostile to the process and put a host of barriers in the way of the systems working.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We talk about the tension between local representation and people voting for parties, platforms, leaders. Under mixed systems, are voters enabled with a choice if they want to fire their local MP but still believe in the platform of the party they happen to represent, or is it the reverse?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Exactly, exactly. Both STV and MMP, the two models that are chosen most broadly around the world as alternatives, increase the power of the elector to see that their vote counts. In these cases 95% of the votes actually contribute to the election of someone, unlike our system, under which only 50% do. Also, voters are not forced into an either/or situation in which if they're unhappy with Party Left, they have to vote for Party Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Does AV allow that to happen, alternative voting?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: The alternative vote does not. The alternative vote has many of the same problems that first past the post has.

● (1145)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

How am I doing for time, Chair?

The Chair: You have 35 seconds.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Ms. Flumian, I have a question on conventions. You raised this point.

Hugo Cyr was in front of us yesterday talking about shifting some of the conventions around government shutting Parliament down through prorogation, dissolution, and all of those things. Could we imagine reforming those as well—updating them, making them more democratic—so that one party in power couldn't simply pull the fire alarm and get out of Dodge if they're threatened?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I think you have to. I think part of what you're commenting on here would also be about which ones in particular should be the subject of study immediately. By the way, it would also go a long way, I think, if the government were encouraged to put them up publicly in plain language so that all parliamentarians, who may not be constitutional experts on the subject of conventions, would understand them. They'd understand the rationale for them and the constraints they place, but also the possibilities that they offer.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Thériault has the floor.

Mr. Luc Thériault: I will try to be as brief as possible and then I would like to hear your comments.

Quebec history has shown us that ordinary citizens, beyond the insiders in political parties and elsewhere, believe in justice. They understand that value and it matters to them. The principle of fairness is what should guide deliberations in every way and in all areas of the country.

We hear a lot about deciding on governance but very little about a fundamental institution in a parliamentary democracy, specifically the legislative branch. In the Quebec experience there are two points that keep coming up in discussions, other than the mechanics of the electoral system: criticism of the way of doing things in politics and party lines.

In a democracy, the legislature is the cornerstone of parliamentary democracy. What clearly frustrates people is seeing their government members stay in their seats when they should be rising and defending the electoral platform on which they were elected. I do not mean my colleagues, here; this goes beyond your terms. We will agree that a government represents the entire population. The government was elected with 38% of votes. Therefore it should listen to the official opposition and amend its legislation. Moreover, the government was still elected on the premise that it would implement its platform.

There is very little mention of the fact that no system prevents people from voting for the representative of their choice. Under the current system, we would agree that the Green Party could form government if people voted for it. The problem would arise after that, specifically at the step of forming the executive, not at the time of election.

Beyond the executive, I would like you to comment on the legislative. Things need to change at that level as well.

[*English*]

Prof. Dennis Pilon: Who are you directing the question to?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: I would like to hear your thoughts on what I just said.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half left.

[*English*]

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Quickly, I think there are a couple of elements in what you said that need to be highlighted.

As I've said earlier, I think it's an ecosystem; therefore, conventions, which are constitutional in our world and evolve over time, play an important role, and people need to understand them. Legislation is important. The role of the three orders of government is important.

However, behaviour is equally important. That's what's driving Canadians nuts. A party system that controls and is almost oppressive, it seems, to those on the outside looking in, in forcing how people must vote is part of what people are trying to fix. If we think that the answer to that question is the electoral voting mechanism, then by all means address it. However, if you're asking me how you might structure a conversation with Canadians, and therefore a report, I'd go to here. I'd start with values.

You have to start with values because then you can have a conversation about whether they are or are not reflected in the system that we currently have. You have to deal somehow with the bias of incumbency of the system we currently have.

If you paint a picture of the fact that we should evolve, then your next question is going to be whether you evolve at warp speed or incrementally.

I think everybody agrees that there is something about this ecosystem that's not working, but I don't think the conversation with Canadians should be about the specific technicalities. It should be about what outcomes you want. If we all come to the conclusion that we want to increase voter turnout but we change a system in a way that confuses them overly much, it will drive down voter turnout and create greater apathy in the system. How do you combat that?

●(1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. May now.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

Again I thank all the panellists. As a committee, we won't be back together again for hearing witnesses until August 22, so I'd say that the three of you are taking us out with a bang of really good discussion.

I want to go back to something that's in your paper, Professor Pilon. We're talking about constitutional conventions, and we're talking about the actual Constitution. I'm grateful every day that I went to law school, which helps me.

I read the paragraph here about the British North America Act and the instruction we had from the mother ship that we were to use the voting system from Westminster, parliamentary democracy, and that the power was conveyed to Parliament to change our voting system. Then you say that because the matters in sections 40 and 41 of the original BNA Act have been superseded by other acts, they are therefore spent'. Could you just explain that?

We no longer have it in our Constitution, but what I understand you're saying is that when we got the British North America Act, Great Britain told us, "You are to have Parliament fix your voting system."

Prof. Dennis Pilon: I think that's a misreading of sections 40 and 41. I don't think that one aspect is spent.

For the parts of sections 40 and 41 that detail specific things that have been superseded, of course, those aspects are spent, but the intention of it clearly says that electoral matters are in the hands of Parliament, and that still stands, in my view, constitutionally.

You have to understand that Great Britain imposed various voting systems on different countries. Ireland is a good example. They imposed STV because they wanted to keep the different Irish groups apart, and then they would be weaker in resisting British rule. You see all those kinds of choices around the world. Now, it just turned out that it worked for the Irish and they liked it, so they kept it. It's one of those things that didn't work out.

However, in the Canadian context, Britain didn't do that. Probably the biggest influence on our voting system was the pre-Canadian voting systems that we'd already used in the united Province of Canada and the various colonies, so in that sense the politicians were just carrying on with what they did before.

Where people go wrong is in saying that our Constitution says that we should have a constitution similar to Britain's, so that means first past the post. Of course it doesn't, because while Britain used first past the post in 1867, they certainly weren't set on single-member ridings. There were multi-member ridings. They used the cumulative vote and the limited vote for different elections. They used STV for university elections, and all of this to the House of Commons.

If we're using the mother ship as our influence, then there are plenty of examples of their experimenting with different voting systems.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I sense that Maryantonett Flumian wants to join in this discussion, and I want to give you that.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I would support that description. Our model of governance has evolved from the model of responsible government that we evolved to before the BNA Act, and that system has evolved continuously. There are some provisions in the Constitution that speak to it. The rest is convention and how we choose to legislate—and behaviours.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Professor Rose, please feel free to jump in and disagree if you do, but it seems that the consensus of the three panellists is that the instructions we have in the Constitution of Canada are that it's for Parliament to choose a voting system, and that the one we were initially bequeathed is not cast in stone.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: You're going to hear from constitutional experts later, so I'll, in part, defer to them, but we do have evidence about the answer to that question, and that's the Senate reference case.

It said that section 44 of the Constitution, which allowed Parliament to make exclusive laws about the Senate and the House of Commons, was not sufficient to make a change, because it altered two things: it affected the fundamental nature and role of the Senate and it affected the constitutional architecture.

To answer your question, we need to know about whatever hypothetical voting system would change those two things.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

Madam Flumian, could you suggest the best way to implement a new voting system? You've mentioned that we are in an ecosystem, and if we change the voting system, it will affect other elements, whether it's online voting or increasing voter turnout. Could you walk us through how we might implement this?

● (1155)

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: It's hard to tell you how to implement something before you tell me what you're proposing to implement, but if I look at it as a conversation with Canadians that ends in implementation, I've given you some of the elements already. If one of the things we're trying to do is draw more people into the

act of democratic governance, and to use this drawing them in to make our democratic institutions more robust and resilient as they're evolving, then you have to come up with something about how you're going to position those trade-offs within a new voting system.

We would need to have one or two options to look at. Sometimes it's in playing out the options that you see what the effects, wanted or unappreciated, are going to be. I think that's a second conversation. We'd be happy to come back once you have that, but just to pick something out of the air would be hard to do. Understanding that, you also have to understand how quickly that could be turned into an administrative regime that could actually be implemented.

The Chair: Go ahead, Professor Pilon.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: We've had 10 successful voting system reforms at the provincial level. We have a lot of experience introducing different voting systems, and we've had experimentation at the local level. My book looks at 18 countries across 150 years, citing every instance of voting system reform in western industrialized countries, so we don't lack for models of implementation.

There definitely are some dos and don'ts. On the positive side, you have to recognize that there will be a bumpy road to implementation. There will be a learning curve. As a former election administrator, I can tell you to swamp the polls with people who can actually help voters. That's where you run into the problems. As people adjust to a new system, they are going to need help. To have bodies on the ground, ramp up the budget for the first couple of elections and hire people to help. This way, you will not have serious problems.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Let's not forget that we want to get them to the polls first.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Based on what you've been talking to us about today, I've started to map out two sections, outputs and mechanics, from a citizen's perspective.

We will be going on the road—we like to call it "The Road Show"—and when we're talking to Canadians, we want to come up with a framework of questions from a voter's perspective. I've separated them into outputs and the mechanics, thinking about choice. I've referred to all of the five principles in our mandate letter. Should we be asking them how much they currently know about the electoral system, and whether they want to know more?

I'm throwing this out there because I don't know if Canadians really want to look under the hood. Now you're making me wonder. Do they really want this, or are they just happy to have the status quo?

Prof. Dennis Pilon: The difficulty with that question is that people don't know what they don't know. What you get is a very "classed" response. Middle-class people often don't know anything more than poorer working-class people, but they have a stronger sense of entitlement. They think that you should want to listen to their uninformed opinions.

Poor people and working-class people tend to shy away from situations where their ignorance will be exposed. They self-select themselves out. When we look at the voter turnout problem, that is a big part of the equation. It's not an undifferentiated group that aren't showing up. They are very "classed" in their level of privilege. They realize they don't really know what's going on and they don't feel informed, and still less do they feel privileged, so they don't come. That's going to be one of your challenges in trying to gauge them.

I would recommend asking them some factual questions. That is where you will find out. Some of them will tell you they know everything, but when you ask them some factual questions, you'll find out what they really know.

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

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Flumian, I come back to you here again. I think in relation to our previous conversation, you had offered to give a written response to why the other systems don't maybe match those top five goals of a voting system.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I could give you a response on the degree to which they might match so that you can make the deliberation of where you want to go.

Mr. Blake Richards: Because you had indicated they don't match, I would ask if you could explain why you feel they wouldn't match.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I would be happy to do so. I'll do it for you in writing.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I wanted to come to another topic from another article that you wrote for iPolitics, and I think you've commented on it a little bit in your comments today as well. You certainly talked about the idea that you believe that somehow referenda don't lend themselves to deciding complex decisions.

In the iPolitics article you specifically wrote, and this is a quote: "The harder it is to reduce an issue to a single value judgment, the less apt a candidate it is for a referendum."

I'm wondering if you would agree with me that an election in fact is a type of referendum. It's a referendum on who should govern the country. Would you say that's a fair statement?

●(1200)

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I don't think there's a relationship. That's because of the nature of the complexity and the issues, and the multi-parties, and all of the issues that are associated with actually casting your franchise, so I'm not going to go there.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, that's fine, because I would agree with that statement. Elections are not a vote on a single question but

a vote on multiple and complex questions, much as you were indicating a referendum would be.

I guess what I want to sort of ask in relation to that.... I guess I find it hard, based on that logic, to see....

The question would be this. You're saying that the issues at play in an election are broad and multi-faceted and complex, which is sort of the same argument that you're making about a referendum. If elections are valid even though they're based on complex and multi-faceted issues, I guess I'm trying to understand why referenda are not then valid based on the same...?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I think I've made that clear, but I think the system works something like the following, Mr. Chair, through you to Mr. Richards.

We elect individuals who compose Parliament and we ask them the most complex questions for deliberation on our behalf. Your job is then to go out and ask all those constituents, to come back and check with all of your other colleagues in the party system that you belong to, and then in Parliament more broadly, and to then recommend to Canadians the best solution. That's the way our system works.

Mr. Blake Richards: I would say that the next step would then be to give Canadians the ultimate and final say on whether what we've come up with is something they believe is valid and acceptable to them, and I certainly—

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: In my judgment, you are a great proxy for that, as are the legislative and executive arms of government, and should the three of you be doing something wacko, the courts will be there to observe the view, and Canadians too.

Mr. Blake Richards: I appreciate your viewpoint, and I certainly have more faith in the voters than that.

The other question I would ask—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Blake Richards: Very quickly, then, I'll ask you this, Ms. Flumian, since there isn't time for the others. Do you not see some kind of inherent conflict of interest in a process whereby politicians are deciding how politicians should be elected or re-elected?

The Chair: Give a brief response, please.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Rose, it looks like you might have a comment on that as well.

The Chair: We don't have time. We're already up to the four minutes, so please answer briefly, Ms. Flumian.

Mr. Blake Richards: I just saw Mr. Rose shaking his head "yes".

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I would say we place a fundamental trust in our elected officials that they will rise above that and make the best call for all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you for that succinct—

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Rose indicated he wanted to make a point.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Mr. Rose.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: The line I use for that question is that it's like turkeys voting for Thanksgiving. You're absolutely right in saying there's a huge conflict of interest, and that's why I don't think politicians should be making that decision. In a perfect world, citizens would be making that decision.

The Chair: Got it. Okay, thanks.

Go ahead, Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thanks, Ms. Flumian, for that eloquent lesson in how elections provide us with a representative democracy in which we deliberate and pronounce on complex decisions in a way that I think leads all Canadians to understand the value of that system. I note as well, in reading your bio, that this view is based on decades of diverse experience at some of the highest levels of governance in the country.

I want to get back to the idea of values. Ken Carty spoke to us on Monday about the values that citizens reflected, I believe in the assembly in B.C., about fair representation, more preference in balloting, and the link between the elected and the electors, the issue of local representation in political culture.

We've talked about hoping that increasing voter turnout can help strengthen ideas around fair representation. Also, I think it could strengthen the link between elected and elector.

Dr. Pilon, you mentioned that inevitably PR will increase voter turnout. All the witness testimony we've received so far had led us to believe that there is at best an ambiguous link, and that was the word —

Prof. Dennis Pilon: I think what I said was that it would change voter turnout.

You're right that no voting system is going to change the problem of voter turnout, because the key thing to increase voter turnout is to increase direct contact between the political class and the individual. We know from studying voter turnout that if you have someone who is not already committed to vote, the key predictor of their turning out to vote is some sort of personal contact.

The old enumeration system was very good for putting people on the road and knocking on doors and alerting people that an election was coming. What I said about proportional systems was that there's evidence they will change voter turnout. In New Zealand, for instance, they discovered that the composition of the electorate changed, even though the rate didn't. People who were only motivated by "the ship is sinking; we could lose by one vote" weren't as motivated under PR, but those who felt under-represented—the less privileged voters, those who had traditionally been left out of our political system and by extension their political system—were more likely to turn out under PR.

From the point of view of equity—and I think this committee is very interested in that—there is evidence that a PR system would move significantly towards addressing some of those equity concerns about who is influencing what happens in our Parliament.

● (1205)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you for the clarification. Maybe we can consider the electoral system as one of a number of elements that could potentially help enhance voter turnout, thus strengthening the link between elected and elector within a larger ecosystem. Are we characterizing it properly?

Maybe we could have your views, Dr. Rose and Ms. Flumian.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I think absolutely. I think you've put it really well in saying that the electoral system is only one component of a larger thing. If you're looking for the electoral system to be a panacea for all your political woes, you ain't gonna find it.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I agree.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am happy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. DeCourcey.

Go ahead, Ms. Benson.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Thank you.

To follow up on the point brought up, I would like all three of you to quickly comment, because I have another question.

When you have an ecosystem, you can start somewhere, and I guess what I feel from this last election is that people have asked us to start somewhere. We are starting on the electoral system. You can sit around and talk about all the different pieces of the puzzle, and then people will just throw up their arms and say, well....

I'm just throwing that out for a comment. You have to start somewhere, so is this a good place to start?

How about that: a very simple question.

Mr. Pilon, Mr. Rose—

Prof. Dennis Pilon: I think you know my answer: yes.

Yes, it's absolutely the place to start, because the place to start is to rebuild the trust with the electorate, and one of the ways we do that is by registering their preferences accurately. By registering their preferences accurately, you will rebuild that trust. People will feel heard.

To me, a democratic process is a two-part thing. It starts with representation. Get people to the table. Let's not leave people out; let's get everybody to the table; let's hear the different views. Then we have to make decisions. Okay; then the majority rules.

There's lots of evidence to show that when people are missing from the table, so are their issues. To me it's crucial that we start with the voting system and that we get better at bringing people into the room so that we can hear what they have to say. We won't necessarily do everything they want, but they will be heard, and they have a much greater chance of influencing the events if they're here.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: Quickly, I agree that it's a great place to start, but it doesn't tell you where you want to go, and that to me is the more important question.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I have to agree fundamentally with that as well. It is an ecosystem. I'm not suggesting that you throw up your arms because it's complicated, because we know what its component pieces are.

Do we need some kind of change? Yes. Canadians are telling us that they want change. I would start with the changes to the administration of how we manage voting now. I signalled that strongly in my comments. Are we exploring every aspect around the e-dimension? Are we reaching out through educational components to marginalized groups? Are we making sure that we're doing as much as we can to squeeze all of the juice out of that lemon?

Then what you recommend as further changes is going to be important. However, I would be careful. When you recommend those changes, remind people that they're nested in a broader system and that they're not a panacea for all the other things that have to change: the role of parliamentarians, the importance we place on the role of individual members who come to Parliament, the role of the executive and how respectful it is of Parliament, and all of those issues.

That's all I would say.

Ms. Sheri Benson: I would like to pose my next question to the three of you.

This question came up during the election. Many people in my riding talked about the fact that all politicians just want to get re-elected and therefore the issues they deal with are four-year issues. In my riding, people said they wanted to talk about homelessness. They wanted me to work with other people and they wanted to get to a solution.

I would ask you to reflect on the value of a different system, a different way of governing, so that if we affected the voter system, those kinds of issues could actually be addressed and we'd get to solutions.

● (1210)

The Chair: We have about 10 seconds each, so please be concise.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: It's rooted in the frustration that people have that parties get elected and then they don't do the things they promised. Part of that is the accountability issue: that people have difficulty making Party Right accountable to Party Left, or vice versa.

Again, I think a move to a proportional system would allow for a different kind of accountability to occur.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I think what you're talking about is stability, and again it depends on what you mean by stability. Policy lurches that occur in a first-past-the-post system would not occur, or are less likely to occur, in PR systems. PR systems, if they are more centrist and govern for a longer period of time, are more likely to have that same kind of longer-term stability.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I would say that the issue is about behaviours, in addition to everything else we've talked about.

No complex issue, whether it's homelessness or any of the others you can point to, can be fixed by one minister, one ministry, one department, one anything. They're complex issues by their nature. It takes a collaborative approach to how we work together. That is the

heart of how our Parliament should work when it works at its best. That's why we have minority governments working in exceptional ways, because the premium is on behaviour that requires us to work together.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: Whatever voting system does that, fill your boots.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Deltell, over to you.

[*English*]

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

What we are talking about today is the heart of our democracy and one of the most important things we have to decide, because the way we elect people is the heart of everything. All of the rest belongs to the choices that we make to elect our members. Everything—budget, taxes, policies, international affairs, defence—belongs to those who have been elected. It is the heart of our country.

This is the heart of our democracy. As far as I'm concerned, the method we use to elect people is the most important institution. It is more important than the Governor General and the Prime Minister and anything else. This is why it's very touchy. When we talk about institutions, we must be sure of what we're doing when we make any move.

We think that the best way to be sure we are making the right choice is to ask the people what they think. I'm not the only one who thinks like that. Let me quote a famous senior minister of the Liberal cabinet, the Honourable Stéphane Dion, former Liberal leader, academic for 20 years, well recognized from coast to coast, who said:

[*Translation*]

> Precedent makes holding a referendum necessary in Canada: changing the voting system would require popular support.

[*English*]

It was not a Conservative who said that. It was a senior Liberal cabinet minister, the backbone of the government, who said that. I disagree with him on many issues, but I do respect the fact that he's an intellectual, an academic, well recognized, a Ph.D. On that issue, I can assure you that he's in the right place. In politics in a democracy, we are always in the right place when we ask people what they think about what is best for the future.

We all recognize, too, Mr. Chair, that our present electoral system is not perfect.

[*Translation*]

It certainly isn't, and woe to anyone who thinks otherwise. There is no perfect system. That is why you must be very sure of what you are doing if you want to change anything. Keep in mind that it took 11 years for New Zealand to complete its process.

Mr. Pilon, we do not agree on the referendum. You are quite right to think as you do. You're not the only one with this view. The same applies to us, as we are not alone in wanting a referendum. People from all walks of life do, including sovereignists in the Bloc Québecois, renowned great federalists like Stéphane Dion, and us, Conservatives. We believe that, if we have to change the electoral system, which is the most important institution in our democracy, we must do it by consulting Canadians.

Mr. Pilon, you do not think so. Do you think we should not hold a referendum? On what authority could you claim to know what is good for people if you don't ask them?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds to answer, Mr. Pilon.

[*English*]

Prof. Dennis Pilon: As I've suggested, the higher normative principle that votes should count is what authorizes me to make the claim I do. The fact is that votes should be equal. That is a fundamental democratic idea.

We use the voting system we do not because it was authorized by the people. Elections precede the democratic era by many centuries. Our challenge is how we change the original political institutions to embody the democratic values Canadians have. In 1867, we were not a democracy, right? Very few people could vote. There was open voting. There was violence at the polls. There followed a very long process of attempting to impose some democratic values on our political system.

I have to say, with all respect to Stéphane Dion, who is a brilliant man, that he's wrong about the precedent. We've had 10 voting system reforms that were successful and that were passed by simple majorities of their legislatures. Almost no voting systems in western countries have been introduced by referendum. This is a very recent phenomenon.

More to the point, the normative rationale behind the referendums was not any kind of belief or embrace that the people should be the authors of this; it was cynical political posturing by parties that were trying to avoid their commitments. That is as true in New Zealand as it was in Italy as it was in the three provinces that had referendums here, so—

●(1215)

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Sahota now to end the round.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I just want to go back to something that was touched on in the last question round about involving and engaging more young Canadians, marginalized Canadians, and new Canadians.

We heard some interesting testimony yesterday about perhaps lowering the voting age to get young Canadians at the age when they're probably more likely to come out to the polls because they live with their families or they're not in a time in their lives when they're away and maybe not thinking about elections.

What are your thoughts on that? I thought it was a very interesting idea.

Prof. Dennis Pilon: The youth voter issue is a complex one. The research on voter turnout has shown that actually the problem isn't

with university students—we've actually increased the voter turnout of university students—but with non-university students. We've seen a decline in youth voter turnout, but at the same time, we've seen an increase in university students coming out. The problem is that the gains have been erased by poor and working-class youth not participating. I think that is a very, very serious question from the point of view of equity. Why are these groups no longer participating? There are all kinds of complex reasons, which I go into in some of my research.

I think there are lots of things we could do in a kind of Captain Canada sort of way to involve our young people in politics more directly.

Norway—and Henry Milner has done work on this—has a mini-version of the Storting across the street, and all Norwegian students come there and participate in mock parliaments, where they try to get their stuff passed. They have people come over from the Storting. We could ramp that up and roll that out in this country. I think that would be a really major way of trying to help young people build their capacity to participate.

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I would ramp that up with a civics education program that restores civics in our educational systems, because the ignorance about the way our system works is amazing, probably even for some of you until you get here. That's why we're mixing models. Maybe we want to mix models, but we have to be conscious of the fact that as children of Westminster, if we end up with "Washminster," we do it by design.

Government by referendum is not my kind of government.

Prof. Jonathan Rose: I think lowering the voting age is a good thing, but I think it misses the symptom for the cause. Younger people aren't voting for a reason, and lowering the voting age to 16 encourages that habit at the heart. That's very important. We know that once people vote, they continue to vote, so that certainly would have a beneficial effect.

The other two things I would mention are things that have just been mentioned: increased civics education and empowering organizations like Student Vote, which does civics education in high schools at the grassroots level, to facilitate and encourage that conversation about youth engagement.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I find that fascinating. You're saying lowering the voting age may not necessarily be the only option and that there are a lot of other things we should be doing. I think civic engagement is most important.

Thank you.

Do I have more time?

The Chair: Yes, you have about one minute.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: How about new Canadians? Civics isn't necessarily going to answer that, though I think that is important. How do we deal with educating new Canadians?

Ms. Maryantonett Flumian: I think it's partially the same answer. Civic education for new Canadians is their opportunity. They even may have come to us because of our model of governance. We don't know that.

I was born in Italy, and when my parents emigrated from Italy, I was steeped in what the Canadian model would look like, but if you're not in search of it, you're not going to find it. Therefore, the state's desire to inform people as much as possible on these matters means that we need special civic outreach programs for people who come to us later in life, already at voting age, and become Canadian citizens and then are part of the fabric of what Canada becomes.

There's an educational and a civic component there. Again, it's not only about voting: it's how you participate in our democratic institutions. It is more than exercising the franchise, so we need a special outreach to those communities as well.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If I may add at this time, I'd like to do a shout-out to two high schools in my riding, St. Thomas High School and Lindsay Place High School, which hold model United Nations every year. It's really fascinating to see how keen the students are and how much they learn about world issues.

I also think that when MPs are invited into the classrooms to talk about their work, I've always found the students are extremely interested. They are riveted, in many cases.

I also believe it's very important for schools to come to Parliament and witness question period. They find it interesting, even exciting, and I think that dovetails with what you're all saying about the need for more civic education.

Thank you to the panellists. We had a great panel, a great debate. It clarified many points of view. Thank you for being here in the last week of July when you could be somewhere else, obviously.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

Mr. Reid, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Reid: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we had passed a motion that our subcommittee would be discussing Minister Dion's refusal of our invitation to come to this committee. When is that subcommittee scheduled to meet?

The Chair: I don't have a specific date, but we could set something up for when we come back on August 22.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'd have to make reference to something that happened in camera. Is there not a possibility of doing it earlier than that?

The Chair: Well, it's only that we don't meet again until August 22 as a committee, so members won't be here physically until the 22nd. I think that might be the best time, but....

Mr. Scott Reid: Could I make the request that you, as our chair, approach the minister between now and when the committee meets to inquire—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, that is not a point of order but a point of information.

The Chair: That's true. I think the first point was a point of order, but....

Mr. Scott Reid: Procedurally, I'm not sure what this is. I'm not sure if Ms. Romanado is trying to prevent me from saying something. If that's the case, she could articulate it that way.

What I wanted to say is that I wonder if you could write a letter on behalf of the committee asking Minister Dion if he could express to us what reasons have kept him from appearing. In particular, if a scheduling issue is the problem, then at our subcommittee meeting we could address the issue of trying to provide or recommend to the main committee an additional meeting at which he could be accommodated.

The Chair: I don't think it's a point of order, but I'll consider your request. We did invite the minister and he didn't provide a response, but I will consider your point and, as I say, we'll try to schedule a subcommittee meeting for August 22.

I think we'll also have to hold an in camera meeting of the whole committee to discuss another motion around August 22. Is that correct?

A Voice: Yes.

The Chair: Yes, so we'll start planning those meetings.

Thank you, everybody. Thank you to the committee members and witnesses. We'll see you soon.

The meeting is adjourned.