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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (1400)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Hello, dear colleagues. Welcome to our meeting this afternoon.

We have three new witnesses. First, we have Mr. Louis Massicotte with us here. Ms. Melanee Thomas will be joining us by video conference from Calgary. We also have with us Ms. Katelynn Northam.

To begin, I will provide some biographical information about the witnesses.

Mr. Louis Massicotte is a professor in the political science department at Laval University. He is the first person to hold the Research Chair in Democracy and Parliamentary Institutions, which he held until January 2011. Professor Massicotte appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in 2001, providing testimony about seat distribution. He has actively participated in the democratic development of over a dozen countries, most of them in French-speaking Africa.

Welcome, Professor Massicotte.

[*English*]

Melanee Thomas is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Calgary. Prior to this, she was the Skelton-Clark post-doctoral fellow in Canadian affairs in the Department of Political Science at Queen's University. Dr. Thomas' focus is on political attitudes and behaviour, elections, and public opinion in Canada, with special emphasis on the effects that gender and policy have on these topics. Many of her current projects are funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Dr. Thomas is widely published, with some of her most recent works including a co-authored book chapter entitled “Women (Not) in Politics: Women's Electoral Participation”, a co-authored book entitled *Mothers and Others: The Impact of Parenthood on Politics*, and a journal article entitled “Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Canada”.

Welcome, Professor Thomas, from Calgary.

Last but not least, we have with us Katelynn Northam, who is a campaigner and organizer of electoral reform at leadnow.ca, a website dedicated to engaging and organizing Canadians on issues of national interest and concern. Ms. Northam has a master's degree in political science, with a focus on local government, youth engagement, and public policy, from Dalhousie University. She has participated as a youth advisory group member at the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, in addition to providing assistance and leadership with the Springtide Collective, which focuses on political renewal initiatives, and the Vote Smart Nova Scotia website, among other similar issues.

Welcome, everyone.

Each panellist will have 10 minutes to present, and then that will be followed by two rounds of questions.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

During each round of questions, each MP will have the opportunity to engage with the witnesses for five minutes. Once again, the five-minute question period includes both the questions and the answers. If the five minutes are up and you have not had time to reply or give a complete answer, you may continue the next time it is your turn to speak.

Professor Massicotte, please go ahead.

Dr. Louis Massicotte (Professor, Department of Political Science, Laval University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the committee, good afternoon.

[*Translation*]

I have published a book and several scholarly articles on electoral systems. When I worked for the Library of Parliament, here on the Hill, in 1983 and 1984, we were talking about implementing a proportional representation system to elect senators directly. As you can see, my interest in electoral reform is longstanding.

In the past 25 years, I have appeared numerous times before federal parliamentary committees and, as the chair indicated, also before special committees of Quebec's National Assembly.

From 2003 to 2005, the Quebec government required my professional services in connection with electoral reform, and my work influenced the design of the voting system set out in the government's draft bill.

I also served as secretary to the electoral systems committee of the International Political Science Association, and on the board of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group.

Finally, I would say in general that I am more of an electoral engineer than an advocate of the cause, in that I am used to analyzing electoral systems and their operational details, looking at all the methods available, and identifying their political consequences, all with a view to clarifying the political choices to be made by those with the mandate to make them.

[*English*]

I should have said I will make my presentation in French, but I am able to make an audible noise in this country's other official language, and I'll try to answer your questions in the language in which they are asked.

[*Translation*]

Rather than dwelling on the highly political issues of which system is best or what method should be used to make that choice, I will focus on the system that I know the best, the mixed-member proportional system, or MMP. It is the system in Germany and New Zealand, for instance. This system seeks to offer the best of both worlds, although it cannot please everyone simply because no system can do that.

Introducing MMP would have the following implications. I have identified 13, but there are certainly more.

First and foremost, because it is a proportional system, it would of course radically change the way politics works in Canada. It would make it very unlikely for a single party to win a majority in Parliament. I think governing coalitions will become increasingly inevitable. In Canada, as you know, we do not have a coalition culture. Coalitions are not viewed favourably by the political class and by part of the public. Political actors will probably adapt, but that adjustment will not necessarily be easy.

Second, introducing proportional representation will require painful adjustments in the established political parties, and strong resistance among your colleagues can be expected. To give you an example, a party that currently holds five out of five seats in a region would no longer win five out of five seats under a proportional system, but perhaps only two or three. For the five MPs in those seats, supporting electoral reform is almost an existential question because some of them will be left out, which will make the whole group rather nervous.

Third, designing the system will be very challenging, not only because it entails combining a proportional system with all its complexities, but also in terms of reconciling a majority system with a proportional system.

Someone has described it as the Mercedes of systems. That is a lovely metaphor, not only for geographical reasons, since the system originates in Germany, but for car lovers, it is so fitting.

Fourth, in Germany, Scotland and Wales, MMP was introduced in a vacuum, from scratch. That is often overlooked but I think it worth mentioning. At that time, there was no elected parliament. So the system was entirely new. This made for an easier transition, simply because those making the decision had no vested interest.

New Zealand—and this is important—is the only place, to my knowledge, where the system replaced a legislative assembly entirely made up of MPs elected as the sole representative in each riding. As you know, the system in New Zealand was not freely chosen by parliamentarians. It was imposed by referendums and parliament had to submit to the will of the people.

Fifth, MMP would be implemented in Canada where there are currently 338 MPs elected in 338 ridings. The total number of MPs to be elected will have to be decided, since there are two sets of representatives in this system.

Here are two scenarios.

Let us assume that the total number of MPs remains unchanged at 338. In order to make room for the list MPs, the number of ridings would have to be reduced to 160 or 200. As a result, none or almost none of the current ridings would be untouched by the redistribution. Almost every MP would have to accept that new voters would be added to their riding who might or might not support them; above all, they would have to accept that they would be representing much larger ridings in the future than what they currently represent.

Now another scenario.

To avoid these difficulties, you could decide to keep all 338 ridings as they currently are and to expand Parliament to make room for the list MPs. Depending on the ratio you choose, there would be 400 or 500 MPs. Without questioning the salesmanship of committee members, I don't think it would be easy to sell that to Canadians.

Moreover, the role and status of MPs will have to be defined. As you will note, reform proposals do not typically say much about that. They simply say that list MPs will help make Parliament more representative of parties' real strength, which is undeniable, and also more representative of demographic realities since there will be more women and aboriginal members, which is quite likely.

What is never spelled out since there is some uncertainty is exactly what the list MPs would do. Having studied various countries that have MMP, I can honestly say that there is no definite answer because it is not the same in every country. To simplify, I would say there are two different scenarios. The first scenario is the way it is in Germany, which is the same as in New Zealand. The second scenario is the way it is in Wales. Scotland is somewhere between those two.

The German scenario is preferable, in my view. The members are all equal in law because they represent the people as whole rather than a specific riding or party. There are not two classes of members, either in law or in fact. Some members are elected by different procedures, but they all have the same salary, the same status, and equal opportunities to join the council of ministers.

I will have to cut this short so as not to go over the allotted time.

The other possible scenario is the way things work in Wales, which is just the opposite. In Wales, a list member has virtually no chance of joining the council of ministers. Over the years, list members have truly become second-class members because the riding members refuse to accept them as equals. The seat assignment in Parliament is a real caricature: they are all relegated to the back benches, as though they were less important, so to speak.

I will now move on to the issue of lists.

Compensatory seats are based on the lists prepared by the parties. Nearly everywhere this system is in place, they are closed lists and people are elected based on their order on the lists. It is possible to have open lists where voters can change the election order decided by the party. I have noted that a number of you have expressed support for this. I could tell you about the implications of this system. Some are very attractive, while others, which you may not be familiar with, might be less appealing.

Double candidacy has been raised and will have to be considered. Under MMP, it is usually possible for a candidate to stand for a riding and to be on a list, for a very simple reason: the more successful a party is in a riding, the fewer names it has on the list. As a result, it is better to to try both avenues because when members declare their candidacy, the final outcome is not known. That is the beauty of democracy. Otherwise, if you think you will be very successful and run in a riding, but things change and you are defeated in the riding, you have lost the security that the list affords.

I must simply point out—as you have been told—that double candidacy is perfectly legitimate, although it will meet with a great deal of resistance among the public and among MPs. Mr. Benoit Pelletier also spoke about this.

● (1415)

The Chair: Mr. Massicotte, have you nearly finished?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Just another 10 seconds or so.

In conclusion, since this is a federal parliament, the compensatory seats will have to be allocated by province. Otherwise, a national list is not realistic.

In answering your questions, I can tell you about other technical aspects, such as “overhang”, or *überhang* in German, representation thresholds, the open party lists that I mentioned, and provincial or national lists.

Thank you for your patience.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Massicotte.

[*English*]

We'll go now to Professor Thomas of Calgary, for 10 minutes, please.

Professor Melanee Thomas (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation to present.

I am coming to you today as an expert in gender representation and politics as well as an expert in Canadian politics. Broadly speaking, there are four points I would like to convey to the committee.

First, there are arguably many good reasons that we might want to introduce proportionality into our existing federal electoral institutions. Many of my colleagues have already spoken directly to this point, so while I am happy to answer questions on that, I am going to restrict the bulk of my comments to other things.

Second, my professional interpretation of the current Canadian political context is such that I can't help but conclude that introducing more proportionality into our electoral institutions on its own will probably not meaningfully increase representational diversity in Canadian politics. By representational diversity I mean the representation of women, the representation of visible minorities, and the representation of indigenous peoples as defined by the Canadian Constitution.

Every single one of these groups is present in electoral institutions at a rate that is so much lower than their demographic weight that they would be better represented if we populated our electoral institutions by random chance. That this reality exists means there are powerful, informal barriers that work to keep women out of politics, people who are not white out of politics, and people who are indigenous out of politics. Simply changing the electoral system is not going to address any of these informal barriers that are in place. I think we actually do ourselves a disservice by suggesting that simply increasing proportionality actually does anything meaningful for these informal barriers.

Third, there is some evidence linking proportional representation to increased diversity and representation. I'll outline this evidence in a moment if I have time, but I will also outline why arguably it won't work in the Canadian case.

There is absolutely no evidence, or very little evidence, to support three things. First, there is no evidence to suggest that changing the electoral system leads to a corresponding change in the diversity of elected representatives. This is New Zealand's experience. There is no evidence to suggest that a preferential ballot—that is, the alternative vote, mandatory voting, or online voting—will have any effect on representational diversity. To be frank, my fear is that by focusing on such processes as preferential ballots, mandatory voting, and online voting, the committee is not committed to or especially interested in addressing our representational diversity shortfalls in a serious manner.

Fourth, and I think the point I want to make most forcefully, there is simply no good reason now that we cannot have a House of Commons that adequately represents the Canadian public closely. By that I mean that it would be 50% women, about 20% visible minorities, and at least 5% indigenous. When I say that, I also want to cue that in 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples suggested that indigenous Canadians ought to have their own Parliament. I would defer to that particular recommendation on that point.

To be frank, to suggest that somehow historically under-represented groups or groups that have been told in the past that they shouldn't participate in politics—this would be women, visible minorities, and indigenous peoples, again—somehow need proportional representation or need some kind of major institutional change to have representational fairness is deeply problematic.

When we talk about proportional representation, there are a few reasons that people seem to think that PR leads to better representation for such groups as women, minorities, and indigenous peoples.

One is that people just make an ecological fallacy. They look at places like Sweden, they look at Scandinavia, and they look at places that have a different electoral system, and they say overall those systems tend to elect more women, which means that if we had one of those systems we would elect more women too. This is asking the wrong question, essentially, because these are systems that haven't actually changed the system; they have different norms, and so on and so forth.

Another of the reasons that people say women do better under PR is that there are more political parties to choose from. The idea is that if you have more parties, you have more access points for historically under-represented groups. The difficulty with this argument in the Canadian case is that Canada has always had more political parties at the federal level than our electoral system would predict. Given our electoral system, we really ought to only have two parties, similar to what the Americans have. You don't need to know much about Canada's political history to know that we've always had more. I don't think this is an issue of not having enough access points or not having enough political parties to choose from.

● (1420)

Second, one of the arguments that is made is that in proportional systems, or in more proportional systems, there is usually a party that acts as a contagion. This is usually a smaller party, it's typically left-leaning, and it typically starts making its candidates' slate more diverse and more representative of the population. Once that small party does that, one of the things we see in places like Norway is that larger parties follow suit. It's that small party acting as a contagion that brings the larger parties that elect more representatives online with more women, more minorities, and so on and so forth.

This was studied a long time ago in Canada. There is a party that has had a nomination policy on the books since 1984 for gender parity in representation, and for ethnicity and indigeneity in representation as well. This is the NDP.

Because this nomination policy has been present for a while, we can say with confidence that there is no evidence to suggest that having one party in the system that's committed to representational diversity and equity does anything to any of the other parties, so there is no evidence to suggest that this contagion that we see in proportional systems would transfer over to the Canadian case, because thus far it hasn't.

The other thing that's unfortunate to note is that there is no evidence to suggest that parties that actually make a step to increase their representational diversity actually stay there. I don't want to necessarily call out every party, but in this particular case—the one case I can't help but comment on—it is the Conservative Party of Canada between 2006 and 2008. There was a considerable increase in the number of women who were nominated in 2008 for the Conservatives, and it seems as though that was deliberate, but this hasn't helped: in the most recent election, the number nominated for that particular party fell back below 20%.

We can make these representational gains, but in the Canadian case, one of the things that's clear is that there is no reason to expect that we will actually keep them and no reason to expect that it will change if we change the electoral formula.

A third reason that people say proportional representation is good for women and for diversity is that proportional representation facilitates the introduction of quota systems, or one of the things that is said is that our particular system—single-member plurality—makes applying a quota difficult. I'm happy to speak to this point in greater detail in the question-and-answer period, but based on a survey from spring 2016—so if there had been an election this summer, it might have changed things, though I doubt it—there is no reason to suggest that a proportional system with a quota does any better than a proportional system without a quota.

The one system that seems to actually do well with quotas and does best with quotas happens to be ours. The difference between a voluntary party quota and a single-member plurality system for women's representation is considerable, compared to our system without voluntary party quotas, but quotas in other systems don't necessarily move the marker very much at all.

I would like to speak to New Zealand, and I hope somebody asks me that in the question-and-answer period because I think their experience is illustrative.

What I want to finish on, though, is what it means for us to have representational equity now.

In the 2015 federal election there were three political parties that at one point were at the top of the polls, so I'm using three parties that could conceivably win a majority of seats in the Canadian system as my reference point.

Any political party that's fielding 338 candidates simply needs to recruit 169 women from coast to coast to coast to run a candidate slate that is gender balanced. I would challenge anybody to convince me that those 169 women don't exist at any point on the ideological spectrum, because I am deeply skeptical of that. That means those three parties would simply need to recruit 507 women across three political parties from coast to coast to coast.

The question that has to be asked is why this isn't happening now. If it sounds ludicrous to suggest that we somehow can't find those 507 women, it gets worse for other historically under-represented groups. In the case of visible minorities, I understand visible minorities are a very diverse bunch of Canadians, but if you just wanted to find candidates who are not white and are not indigenous, a party would simply need to find 68 to run a representative slate of candidates who roughly match the Canadian population. This is 203 across Canada for three major parties.

As I said, I would never suggest that indigenous Canadians ought to be satisfied with only 4% to 5% of the House of Commons when the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended their having their own parliament, but the one thing I would say is that if we're talking 4% to 5%, this would be 15 candidates out of 338. Why we can't find them I don't know. That's a mere 45 across three political parties.

● (1425)

I can't help but conclude that to suggest a change in electoral systems is needed to give women, Canadians who aren't white, and indigenous Canadians anything close to representational fairness—to suggest that we need electoral system reform for that—is giving the people who are recruiting candidates a pass.

The one thing I should be very clear about as well is that we have no evidence to suggest that voters discriminate against candidates on the grounds of gender or race. There's simply no evidence in the aggregate at the voter level for that, which suggests that those informal barriers that are really powerful happen somewhere else in the political process.

I don't think that political parties, the institution that's doing most of this recruitment, deserve a pass on this particular front.

I will conclude again by saying that the suggestion that Canadian women, Canadians who are not white, and indigenous Canadians need major institutional reform to achieve representation in anything close to fair numbers is completely indefensible from my professional point of view. As a Canadian woman, I find that assertion deeply troubling and borderline offensive.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Katelynn Northam (Campaigner-Electoral Reform, Leadnow.ca): Thank you to the committee for inviting me to be here today and for taking your summer to work on this important and challenging issue.

I'm the campaign lead for electoral reform at an organization called Leadnow. We represent hundreds of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and about 19,000 of our members live in one of your ridings. What our members have in common is that they want Canada to have a fair economy, a safe climate, and an open democracy.

Leadnow is a fundamentally member-driven organization, which is to say that we always start from what our community thinks is important and then we work to bring their voices to the people with the power to make an impact on those issues. I'm here today to do just that. I'm not speaking on my behalf; I'm speaking on behalf of the thousands of people who think it's absolutely vital that Canada replace our broken first-past-the-post voting system with some form of proportional representation.

To put together this presentation, we surveyed our community to make sure we were representing them accurately. Nearly 10,000 people responded within 48 hours to our call for input. They wanted us to share some key messages with you today.

I wanted to start by reminding us all what it is that we're solving.

The Leadnow community strongly believes that our first-past-the-post voting system is broken. It does not allow people to adequately and fairly express their preferences, and that, in turn, takes away power and choice from the voter.

It makes elections a game of riding-by-riding math and strategy. This is an issue that impacts our relationship with democracy. It impacts one of our most basic rights as Canadian citizens, and it shapes our relationship with our elected officials. It makes it difficult for people to accurately and fairly express what they really want at election time.

The fact that millions of people at each election cannot effectively exercise that right is not something to be taken lightly. It's not an unfortunate side effect, and it's something that affected nine million people in the last election.

Canada is, quite simply, behind the times when it comes to having a modern voting system. We're one of the few OECD countries that still use first past the post, and we are the only OECD country that uses it at all three levels of government. We are outliers, and we're using a fundamentally unfair and unjust way to run elections, and that needs to change.

As a little context, Leadnow's involvement in democratic reform didn't start with the election of this new government. We've been working hard to improve Canadian democracy since our founding in 2011. Over the years, we've held hundreds of events, meetings, and consultations where the topic of electoral reform has come up time and again. We've made thousands of phone calls, we've knocked on thousands of doors, and we've stood in the snow and canvassed until our pens froze. We were all waiting for this moment when we would have an opportunity for change.

Our campaign for proportional representation is called Vote Better, and so far over 24,000 people have signed on in support. About a third of those people have come from volunteers going to festivals, going out to street corners, and talking to people on their doorsteps, listening to their stories about why we need a fairer voting system.

The reason we've done this is simple. Our community believes, as I know everyone in this room also agrees, that having an open and transparent democracy is absolutely foundational to moving forward and addressing the really big, pressing issues of our time. We need a democracy that's fair, inclusive, and collaborative.

Some of you might be aware that we have, in the past, also run a strategic voting campaign, and that in the election before that, we advocated for inter-party co-operation. We did so because our community was frustrated by the distorted results produced by first past the post.

Our preference would be that people would not have to work around the pitfalls of first past the post in order to express what they want. Strategic voting, as you know, happens when voters vote for who they think can win instead of who they might truly want. It happens when people are afraid to vote for their first choice lest it split the vote and empower their least favourite choice. Canadians have been doing it for a long time. Without good local information, they're often guessing at what the most strategic choice actually is. Expressing their true preferences and seeing that preference reflected in an outcome should not require strategy or access to polling information.

We believe this frustration with first past the post is commonly felt. I personally have spent a lot of time going door to door for both our election campaign and this campaign in various ridings around Ontario, although my colleagues have done so in other provinces, including Manitoba, B.C., and the Maritimes. I did not encounter very many people who were unfamiliar with the tough choices that first past the post forces them to make: should they vote with their hearts and accept that it may split the vote in their riding, should they vote for the candidate they think is most likely to win, or should they just not bother to vote at all because the conclusion seems forgone?

● (1430)

We know that first past the post can lead to big changes in the power structure of Parliament, even when the popular vote doesn't change very much. You see situations in which parties increase their share of the popular vote only moderately, a couple of percentage of points, but actually make huge gains in seat count due to how those votes are concentrated in key ridings. This can have the impact of propelling parties into majority governments without a majority of the vote, as we know, which we know can also give a party a tremendous amount of power. It also means that voters in those key swing ridings may get more attention than voters in the safe ridings. These are symptoms of a broken voting system in action.

Democracy is not a finished product, but something that we have to constantly refine. Fortunately, one of the things we have going for us in Canada is that we're a country full of people who really believe in democracy. Leadnow is a community full of those people, and this room is full of such people. The question, then, becomes what to do as the next step.

When asked this question, the Leadnow community overwhelmingly told us that they want to see PR replace first past the post, with 85% saying it was their preference, because it's the only way to address the fundamental flaws with first past the post.

We prepared a brief—which I don't believe you have in front of you today, but which you will have shortly—that presents more detailed reasons for our preference for PR. I believe many of the other experts who have been before this panel have already summarized many of PR's benefits, but we'll summarize a couple of the things that we think are most important.

First, it's fundamentally more fair. First past the post is what's known as a winner-take-all system. It gives the people who did not vote for the winner no voice. It also creates wild distortions in seat count, to the point where governments often receive majorities without a majority of the popular vote. In contrast, PR would make every vote count and give voters greater choice, without having to resort to strategic voting. Whether you're a Conservative in downtown Toronto or an NDP voter in rural Manitoba, you deserve to have your voice heard.

Second, it is more inclusive. We have seen some evidence that it is more diverse, although I appreciated Professor Thomas' comments on that today. We feel that it would help to prevent parties from focusing only on the regions of the country that are seen as winnable and instead produce policy that considers the entire country.

Third, it's collaborative. It would make politics less of a zero-sum game and force parties to work together across party lines to address those big issues. Our community has told us that they're tired of adversarial politics and they want governments to take the time to compromise and craft solutions that will stand the test of time, rather than spending their time undoing or amending previous policy decisions by previous governments.

I will end by relaying our appreciation and thanks from our community for taking on this issue. As I said earlier, I believe we all share common values of appreciation for democracy and we want to do what we can to be more inclusive of everyone.

We know that changing our electoral system is a big step. You've been hearing a lot of different arguments over the last couple of weeks, and you will be hearing more as you go out on the road. The Leadnow community believes that this is a time to be bold. This process has opened an amazing window of opportunity to leave a lasting legacy and give Canada an improved electoral system. The truth is that we lag behind the rest of the world in using an unsophisticated voting system to try to represent a population that is growing increasingly more diverse. It isn't meeting the challenges of representing everyone's voice, and that has impacts on real people. It's not just an abstract question of which system is best, but a question of whether we want to be committed to ensuring that everyone is included in our democracy. There is clear evidence that PR is the best way to rectify that problem.

I want to end with a quote from one of our community members in Toronto, who wanted us to share this message with you:

> Political systems evolve. Let us not assume or be lulled into the belief that our system is a static and 'finished; done' project.

Rather, let us always and continually find ways—sometimes small, sometimes major—to better manifest democracy and representation. Let us never fear new ideas. Our current system has shown its flaws; it would be irresponsible to not try something new now.

Thank you.

● (1435)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have a feeling we're going to have a great discussion this afternoon.

We'll have Mr. Aldag lead off that discussion, please.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): I'd like to thank all of our guests today for the excellent testimony. I believe this is the first time we've had more women witnesses at a session, so that's great to see.

With that, I'm going to start a discussion with Professor Massicotte. I know that the questions are going to go around and there's been great information.

When I was reading your brief, three pieces jumped out at me. The first was your very first point, which was about not having “a culture of coalitions here in Canada”. As I've been out talking to constituents, the point that people are afraid of the idea of minority governments, and even more so of coalition governments, has really come up.

I would like your thoughts. You've identified it as an issue. How much of a barrier to moving forward to this kind of system in the Canadian culture would it pose?

● (1440)

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Thanks for your question.

Yes, I said that Canada does not have, indeed, a culture of coalitions. I will cite two examples.

In 1999 in Saskatchewan, the NDP government—the incumbents—were reduced to a minority status, and a few Liberal members decided to go into a coalition supporting the NDP government. These gentlemen were both expelled from their party and treated as traitors.

Of course some of you will have a recollection of the second one I will mention, the 2008 coalition dispute—or crisis, depending on the version—in which for some people the very idea of a coalition was something totally immoral.

I said we don't have a culture, but we had a practice of coalitions in the past. This is forgotten. I don't know if this has been mentioned in your proceedings, but Ontario had a coalition government under Ernest Drury in 1919-1923. It lasted a full term. Manitoba had a coalition, under Bracken and his successors, from 1932 to 1950 or 1951. British Columbia had a coalition from 1941 to 1952. Saskatchewan had a coalition government under Anderson from 1929 to 1934.

The interesting thing is that these coalitions were quite lasting. We have the impression, based on the experience of some European countries, that coalitions, by definition, are short-lasting. These coalitions lasted for the full duration of the legislative term. However, we haven't had such coalitions recently because there is seemingly an assumption, I'm afraid, that if a party goes into coalition with another presumably stronger party, they are absorbed by this other party, and no party, of course, wants to lose its individuality.

Mr. John Aldag: Perhaps I could make a comment.

We've heard a couple of things. One is that in the case of coalitions, the smaller party can actually have a disproportionate share of the power. The second is that I think there's a bit of a mix-up between coalition and minority governments.

It's true that we haven't seen coalition governments in recent decades. It's been more of minority governments, and people equate that to instability. In the conversations I'm having, there's unease that any change from a majority system may create more upheaval. I know we've seen evidence that says that's not the case, but as I say, we're up against this Canadian culture and these attitudes. How difficult of a sell is it going to be that this move is in the right direction?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: The standard reaction of Canadian politicians, when they are facing minority Parliaments, is to opt for a single-party minority government. I suspect this has to do with this being the way they are used to governing, with all fellows from the same party sitting around the cabinet table.

Second, these minority Parliaments are typically short-lasting; 18 months is the average duration. It is understood by most partners that the Parliament will not last its full term, and it is understood also that at the earliest possible opportunity, the government will push the button and get what they seem to believe is due to them, that being a majority.

The Chair: Thank you. We're at five minutes, so we'll move to Ms. Rempel.

Please, as I said, introduce your thoughts on the next round or at the next opportunity. That would be appreciated.

Ms. Rempel, welcome to the committee. We're happy to have you here today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Thomas, it's a pleasure to see you. I'm a big fan of your work, as you know, and I appreciate your introducing the concept of barriers today.

With regard to your work, there's one piece that I want to look at, and it's a paper you wrote called “Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Canada”. In it you note that at the federal level, regulating nomination and electoral campaign financing and spending limits through Elections Canada has mitigated some of the issues related to financing as a barrier to entry for women in politics.

Since we have a young woman here who's very passionate about the democratic system in Canada, I'm just wondering, Ms. Northam, if you would agree that fundraising can be a barrier to under-represented groups in Canada.

● (1445)

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Honestly, I'm not an expert on that topic, but, yes, absolutely, I can see that being an issue.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: One of the barriers I wanted to bring up today with regard to this committee's examination of changing our political system is the political financing situation in Canada.

Right now I think we have a very strong system, in that we have capped individual donations, we have banned corporate donations, and we have set spending limits. When we compare the Canadian system, especially to what's happening in the U.S., I would argue that our system is pretty good.

There's one thing that concerns me, in that there's a significant loophole in this process. In Canada an individual corporation or group can register as a third party for election advertising purposes and then make expenses to "oppose" the election of one or more candidates. As opposed to the laws for financing political parties or candidates, corporations can spend money on elections via this route, and corporations can therefore influence candidates.

There are also no limits on the donations that a group can receive from an individual, and individuals can therefore in effect exceed their political spending limits and influence candidates.

Further, a third party has to register with Elections Canada only once an election is called, which makes it difficult to track the activities of these groups with regard to their influence on our electoral process. Also, they only have to report donations that came in during the six-month period prior to the election, and there's no requirement to state which candidate a third party promoted or opposed, making it difficult for the public to know if members of Parliament are compliant with ethics guidelines on conflict of interest.

In the 2015 general election, over $6 million was spent by third parties on election advertising. To put this in perspective, the entire spend of the Green Party of Canada on the election was $3.9 million. There are examples in which individuals have given a large amount to an electoral district association registered as an individual third party and then spent considerably more on opposing or promoting a particular candidate in an electoral district. For me, this is a loophole of concern in this whole barrier situation.

I would ask both Dr. Thomas and Ms. Northam, given that there's agreement that this is a potential barrier, if they would agree that one of the recommendations from this committee should be that there should be tighter and more significant mirroring of federal election financing laws for political parties to third parties in order to reduce this barrier?

With the time I have, I'll go to Dr. Thomas first for a yes or a no.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Sort of.

When I look at barriers that specifically affect women, it strikes me as implausible that this third-party.... We call this third-party advertising in the literature. This third-party advertising is going to be directed primarily at political parties; I would be surprised to see it directed at any individual women.

If I were looking at how—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: If I could interject, I actually have a specific example.

In Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo there was only one woman candidate running. She gave $400 to a specific electoral district association, which didn't have the woman running, but then she registered as an individual for a third party and donated approximately $2,300 to her third-party entity, and then spent that entire amount promoting or opposing a candidate that wasn't her.

There is one example. I'm sure there are many more specific examples showing how that actually does impact a woman.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: That's going to be secondary.

Most third-party advertising is going to be directed at a national campaign that would be geared towards parties or party leaders.

This is why I'm skeptical that—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: If I can just interject—

The Chair: Let me interject for a moment—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have such little time.

The Chair: Actually, you do have a little time. Perhaps we could —

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I'd like to actually answer the question.

The Chair: Absolutely.

We're pausing. We're not going to count this as time.

I would also like to give Ms. Northam an opportunity. We'll be a bit generous and flexible.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have 10 seconds, right?

The Chair: We'll be generous and flexible. You'll probably get more than that, but not for—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay.

The Chair: Anyway, whatever. Let's just do it.

Please go ahead.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I would not say that this is the thing that keeps women out of politics.

That said, I am going to be broadly and enthusiastically supportive of many things that restrict or regulate campaign finance. With regard to the stuff that you're talking about, I would put my general elections hat on and say, sure, regulate that and I would support it. However, is this the thing? Is this the big and formal barrier that's keeping women and visible minorities out? No, it's not. I think that suggesting that this is somehow it is distracting from that 169 number. This is not the excuse. It's just not.

The Chair: Okay.

Do you want Ms. Northam to respond?

● (1450)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure.

I want to clarify that I don't think this is the be-all and end-all. I know that one of the barriers that often prohibits women from running is the fact that they perhaps don't have the same networks that their male counterparts do to raise funding. That's my concern.

With regard to the comment on most of the funding being directed toward general election campaign expenses, I spent the day yesterday—

The Chair: We're really running out of time here, Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Actually, it was close to $1.2 million out of that total that was spent on specific ridings, so it does make a difference.

Ms. Northam, could you comment?

The Chair: Ms. Northam, comment very quickly, please.

Ms. Katelynn Northam: I just have a quick comment.

It's that we're a member-driven organization and this is not an issue we've engaged our community on specifically, so I can't make a comment on behalf of them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Boulerice is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will begin with you, Mr. Massicotte.

Earlier today, when we were discussing alternative vote, I made the following analogy: imagine I want to buy an electric car but end up with a pick-up. So I am happy to hear you say that MMP is indeed a Mercedes. It is probably the best of both worlds and more accurately represents the reality of the parties. In fact, it is a standard, a value we in the NDP support.

You are an engineer of electoral systems and an expert on certain countries, including Germany. Change does of course give rise to much uncertainty, but I would like to demystify certain things.

Take for example a voter in Germany who goes to the poll. How does a person vote? Once the results are translated into seats in parliament, how do the parties function in general to form a stable government?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Thank you for your question, Mr. Boulerice.

As to the way a person votes, the ballot is similar to ours, except that there are two options. On the left side of the ballot, the voter can choose a candidate and, on the right, they can vote for a party, that is, the list created by a party. So the voter casts two votes instead of just one. It is possible, by the way, to use the same system with a single vote for a candidate, if the vote is counted both for the candidate and for the party the candidate represents.

As to forming a government, that is a bit more complicated. The results are known quickly. I follow German elections, which are held at noon on Sundays. It is almost a ritual, I have followed them for several years now. The results are available very quickly. Many countries—and I am not referring to Canada—would do well to proceed that way.

How is a government formed? The results are reviewed that night. Then the political parties begin their negotiations. Sometimes they have already indicated their affiliation, but that is not always the case, simply because the outcome is not known. In the last federal election, for example, it was not expected that the liberal democrats would be wiped out.

The political parties negotiate amongst themselves. The head of state is not involved in this process. After a month or two—and rarely more than two months—depending on the circumstances, a coalition agreement is reached. It is a long and complex document. Ultimately, it is the result of the negotiations that took place among the various political parties that were willing to form a coalition.

There are various types of coalitions. Typically, the Christian democrats have allied themselves with the liberal democrats and the greens with the social democrats. This has changed in the past few years though. In two places, I believe, the Christian democrats are now allied with the greens. This change was brought about by the circumstances. The socialists have aligned themselves with the liberals in the past. The extreme left was viewed in the past as an unsuitable coalition partner. In the *Länder* or states of the former East Germany, at least, it is now considered an acceptable partner.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

Ms. Thomas, as you know, we are concerned about the representation of women in the NDP. In the last election, we were very proud to be the party with the highest percentage of women candidates: 43%, which is quite high.

You are correct about the barriers outside the voting system. Some institutions make it very difficult for women to run. Having been involved in candidate recruitment myself, I can say that a number of socioeconomic or societal factors could improve the participation of women.

Our colleague Kennedy Stewart presented a bill to encourage or even force political parties to increase the representation of women in the candidates they put forward. That is not the only approach possible, but I would like to know if you think the type of incentive put forward by our colleague Mr. Stewart would be effective.

In your opinion, is there some other way we could increase the representation of women?

Right now, women represent just 26% of MPs in Canada. That means we rank 62nd in the world in this regard, which is not very impressive.

● (1455)

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I would always say at this point, because the numbers required to achieve parity are so small, that individual-level barriers are not the problem. This means that we actually have to have an institutional solution. I've spoken with Jeannette Ashe, who is a research colleague of mine in another institution, and I believe it's similar to this particular bill that you've mentioned.

I would support penalizing parties on their election reimbursements if they cannot field parity slates. As we know, a great deal of political parties' election-based financing comes from campaign reimbursements. You spend a certain amount, and then you can get 80% of it back. That should be, in my view, docked depending on how few women or visible minorities a party fields. Something tells me that if you tie diversity to the money, parties will solve the problem overnight. They just will.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Ste-Marie for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Massicotte, I really enjoyed your presentation, especially toward the end, when you explained that, if we had a mixed-member proportional system, the list system would have to work by province. I am very amenable to the idea of protecting the rights of the Quebec nation, since we do not have the same debates or the same references.

You said that we should go by province. In your opinion, would there be any other mechanisms to ensure the protection of the Quebec nation?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: At first glance, I don't think so. I actually don't think a national list was ever seriously considered. And it shouldn't be anyway. I will explain why.

Canada is a federation. Consider how federations proceed in such matters. In Germany, there is no national list. That has already been mentioned. Sections of parties in the *länder*—German federal states—have all insisted on preparing lists of candidates.

I think it is much more difficult to have a national list in a federal country.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: You think that, if we had such a system, the lists would have to be established in each province or in each region.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: That is the practice and it's fairly common.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

The committee is preparing to tour Canada. We will then submit a report in December. For the system to be modified in time for the next election, everything would have to be adopted by next May.

Considering our experience in Quebec, do you believe that's a realistic time frame?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Quebec did not adopt a reform. So it is difficult for me to say how quickly it could happen.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Could it be realistic?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: I believe that the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada is much more qualified than I am to answer this question, as he is familiar with all the required mechanisms, all the work that must be done in preparation. My understanding was that the current time frame was realistic, but I defer to him on this issue.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

I now have a hypothetical question. Let's assume that there was a second opposition party, that its platform indicated that it wanted to reform the voting system and that it obtained power with a large majority thanks to the current system. What do you think the chances would be of the party wanting to change the voting system? Let's say the party turned to another voting system, such as the preferential ballot system. What are your thoughts on the preferential ballot system as compared with the existing one?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: That is the option involving minimal change. That way, the ridings would remain the same. The voting ballot would be exactly the same as the one that already exists. All that would change would be the way the ballot paper is marked.

In addition, it would take longer for the results to be known. You may have heard about the Australian election. I believe you have spoken to the authorities. I was travelling at the time, but I felt that it took a very long time for the results to be known. So it would take a bit longer.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: What about the distortion between votes cast and the number of votes....

Prof. Louis Massicotte: There would be no change.

It is well established by political scientists that the single member majority system and the first-past-the-post system both contain distortions. Some studies even claim that the single member majority system is even more unstable than the first-past-the-post system. However—and this is important—the person who wins the riding obtains more than 50% of the votes.

● (1500)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: Yes, you have a bit of time left.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I would like to put the same question about the preferential voting system to you, ladies.

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Can you repeat that? Sorry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: What do you think about the preferential voting system?

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Our community has told us very clearly that proportional representation is the only system or family of systems that will address the core issues that they have, which is the distortion of the overall results. We do know that alternative vote or preferential ballots will not solve that problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: So you don't think that it's a worthwhile system.

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: That's not what we're advocating at this point, no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: What do you think, Ms. Thomas?

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I like preferential ballots with a large district magnitude. To me the idea that we would move from our current system, with just the X on the ballot, to a preferential rank that would simply elect one candidate is a big change for no payoff.

However, we have had scenarios in western Canadian provinces in which we've used something similar to single transferable vote. If your district magnitude is large enough, you can solve a number of problems potentially related to strength of party discipline and proportionality, but the kicker is introducing the preferential ballot alongside a larger number of representatives coming from a district. The drawback is that either those districts have to be so much larger than ours are now that it's unfeasible or that we need to do something like tripling the size of the House, which also strikes me as not feasible.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

In the first five minutes that I have, I want to zoom in on this issue of recruiting women candidates, because it's something about which I have a lot of personal experience. With the permission of Professor Thomas and Ms. Northam, I'd like to share my anecdotal experience and ask you if there's any academic literature to back up some of my intuitive observations about why proportional representation will help us have more women in Parliament.

My first anecdotal experience was that as a woman and as executive director of the Sierra Club of Canada, I was viewed as a desirable candidate by various parties. At different times I was flattered, yes. Leaders of the New Democratic Party, Liberal Party, and Progressive Conservative Party all, at one time or another, tried to woo me, and it was a very nice experience, but I said, “Oh, my gosh, I don't want to do that thing.” I'll tell you what my reasons were.

I've now gone through the experience of being at the other end of the phone, trying to convince really fantastic women candidates to put themselves forward and run in an election. I succeeded in the last election—not as well as the NDP, to give credit where credit's due, but 39% of our candidates were women. That's 131 women out of 336 candidates.

Here's something that I'm wondering may be an informal barrier or at least a factor that I can't find in the academic literature. Women say, “I'm prepared to work hard and I want to make a difference, but I don't want to jump into a pond full of snapping crocodiles. I don't like the culture of politics.”

I think Ms. Northam said earlier that the Leadnow community is tired of adversarial politics. My observation, particularly from consulting with Green Party members of parliaments around the world who deal with proportional representation systems, for the most part, is that when you change your voting system toward a proportional representation/consensual system, you change the culture of politics. It becomes less nasty. You do away with what Susan Delacourt describes in great detail in her book *Shopping for Votes*. You do away with targeted dog-whistle wedge issues and you create incentives for consensus and working together.

I would suggest as my last point—and then I'll ask for your comments, starting with Professor Thomas—that this may explain why, in looking for elected women in Canadian politics, there are proportionately far more at the municipal level, where for the most part we don't have political parties.

You're shaking your head. Do we not have more women elected in municipal governments? We always had, traditionally.

In any case, I'll turn to you now. Personally, I think this is a factor that won't come up in the reasons. You're right that if you just change your voting system and that's all you're looking at, you're not going to get more women. As a point of fact, democracies with proportional representation have more women. Personally, from my experience, this could be a factor. I'd like to know if there's any research on that.

I'll go to you, Professor Thomas.

● (1505)

Prof. Melanee Thomas: There is some, but it's not necessarily in the direction that people assume that it is.

The first thing I would say is that the snapping crocodiles—I like phrasing it that way—may or may not keep women out of politics. I've never seen that as a particularly gendered thing. The nastiness that some people see in politics keeps a lot of sensible people out of politics, women and men alike.

What's more likely to affect women, and this is something—

The Chair: Was that a...? I don't know how to take that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Anyway, go ahead.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Sorry.

Some people just like the cut and thrust of politics and are prepared to deal with that context, whereas other people are more more likely to say, “I'm doing important work here and I don't necessarily want to.”

What bothers women more now—and this comes up routinely in my classes, which is why I say we're on it when we're studying this—is what the Internet and social media do, because this gives a lot of misogynistic, really gross voices a very large microphone. It's very unpleasant and it's very violent. It's one of the things that is emerging because we have more women in executive positions, especially as premiers at the provincial level, so that's giving us the data that we need to work on this issue more systematically.

One of the things I will say about consensus politics, though, is there is an excellent study done by Tali Mendelberg and her colleagues at Princeton that notes that if you operate under consensus rules, women's voices never actually achieve parity in terms of men. They look at things like perceived competence, perceived leadership, actual numbers of speaking times, and number of times they were rudely interrupted by the men in the group. It doesn't matter how many women you have under consensus rules; you don't actually hit parity there. Where you actually do hit parity is when you have majoritarian rules with a supermajority of women. This is an experimental study, so generalizing from that into an existing set of political institutions is something I would not do.

One of the things I would also say is about the local politics myth. There's this idea that local politics is really friendly for women. I live in Calgary. Calgary City Council is not a friendly place for women. It hasn't been for quite some time, and I don't think it will be any time soon either.

This idea about local politics is a myth. Consensus isn't necessarily the thing that solves the sexist problem either. It seems nice, but I don't think it solves the problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado now.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank my esteemed colleagues for their presence here today.

Professor Massicotte, we heard from the Broadbent Institute yesterday. They did a study with respect to what people thought about the voting systems and what was important to them in terms of their values. Of those polled, 51% said that a stable majority government was important to them.

In your brief you talked about the fact that it's very unlikely that in the future we'd see a party with a parliamentary majority on its own if we were to adopt an MMP policy. My concern would be that instead of Canadians having a voice prior to an election, backroom deals would end up happening after the election to create these coalition governments. There's a concern that this is directly in conflict with the needs of Canadians.

You also mentioned a little about the changes to constituencies or ridings. Either the capacity of MPs to actually serve their constituents would drop when they have that much more than they currently do, and/or we would have to increase the size of the House to between 500 and 675 members, which I think Canadians would not agree with.

I'm just a little concerned. You've been very honest about some of the pitfalls of MMP and your thoughts on dual candidacy. If somebody loses an election but still ends up being a member of Parliament, I think that is completely unacceptable. I'd like you to talk a little bit about that.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chairman?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm happy to give you my next five minutes, if you like.

The Chair: You have plenty of time. We're not even at the two-minute mark yet.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Yes.

I think—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: You can answer in French.

● (1510)

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Okay, thanks.

I am rather under the impression that people have a preference for majority governments. With a proportional system, regardless of the type, there would probably not be any majority governments, for a very simple reason. In our electoral history since 1921, you can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times a party managed to go over the 50% threshold. Mr. Mulroney, in 1984, is the last such case to date. So it has been quite a while.

So we should get used to coalitions. Can those coalitions be stable? I think so. They are simply made up of several political parties. The Prime Minister's authority within the political system would not be as strong, as he would have to deal with cabinet ministers from another party who would have a certain power over him. It would be different from the current situation, where the Prime Minister is extremely powerful. As you know, some are portraying him as a monarch. So that would be quite a change.

I wanted to clarify something here. Although I have listed all the potential complications of a mixed-member proportional model, my intention was not at all to criticize or discredit that system. I have studied it in theory, but I have also used the experience of consultations that were held in Quebec and in other provinces. What seemed to us brilliant from a technical standpoint—the idea of dual candidacy—was viewed by some people as an abomination. As the old expression goes, if the front door has been closed, try to get in through the back door.

I think that's very unfair. I can tell you that this has not been seen as a problem in a number of countries. New Zealand and Germany have integrated and understood the system well. I did not have time to mention this, but Chancellor Kohl is the longest serving German chancellor to date. There is some competition with the current chancellor, Ms. Merkel, but he served for a long time. He was defeated twice in his riding, but thanks to the list, he was able to remain a member. I looked at his biography to see whether anyone had made a big deal out of that in Germany, but no one had. Perhaps we would be able to prove it here.

As for dual candidacy, we have noted something, especially in Quebec. Mr. Pelletier actually talked about this. Many members, starting with Mr. Pelletier himself, were terrified of seeing someone they had defeated in their riding end up in front of them, as they saw this as a threat to their grip on the riding.

That is not seen in Germany. That's all I can say. There is a tradition of collaboration and consensus dating back to the post-war period, prior to which, it was not a pretty sight. That much I can guarantee, as they say. The country went through difficult times and experienced the consequences of hate ad nauseam. Prior to the war, in the 1920s and the 1930s, German politics were extraordinarily polarized. Germany has now become a country of consensus, and things like these work.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Reid, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

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

My first question is for Professor Thomas.

Professor, back in February you were quoted in a newspaper article indicating that you thought that it would be inadvisable for the government to move forward with a new electoral system unless it had been approved in a referendum. Is that still your position?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: My position remains that we have a map outlined from several provincial governments, British Columbia and Ontario being the notable standouts, where citizens have been actively involved in the process. I would expect that anything dealing this closely with a democratic institution would follow that kind of citizen engagement model very closely.

Mr. Scott Reid: The model used in Ontario and B.C. was a citizens' assembly, which chose and designed a model that was then submitted to the people in a referendum.

Do you think that two-step model would be the best thing to do?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Not as it proceeded in British Columbia and Ontario. I liked the citizens' assembly part of those procedures, but there were problems with those referenda. I don't see the point of subjecting the Canadian public to a referendum when the rules would be stacked against it to fail.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: In that sense, I'm not going to sit here and endorse referendum versus not. I'm going to be honest about what I thought about those processes, and in both those cases I thought the citizens' assembly and that kind of engagement process was great and exactly what I would like to see in a democracy. However, those referenda were certainly open to critique on a number of democratic grounds, so I wouldn't give a blanket endorsement to that kind of thing in this particular context. No.

● (1515)

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

Back when the British Columbia one, the former of the two, was under way, I remember writing on the subject of the way the referendum had been structured and the difficulty of essentially a first-past-the-post choice on something for which multiple options were available. There was certainly strategic voting in that referendum. The leaders of the Green and the NDP parties, for example, both voted against the STV model because they favoured MMP and thought they'd have a second kick at the cat if they just rejected the proposal.

An alternative model used in New Zealand put multiple models before the people, and that did result in a change to the system. I think there's some evidence that the initial referendum in New Zealand was also designed to produce a different result, but it was unsuccessful, and the change did occur.

What do you think of that kind of model?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I like the New Zealand model in which the initial reform gave voters more than a yes/no option. I like that.

What I like more about New Zealand is that they followed it up with several other referenda to see if people actually like the change now that they've used it. In New Zealand they've consistently said that they support the change and they're liking it more over time.

There was a second question involved in that. It asked whether, if you do want change, what you would like to revert to. The single-member plurality system is the choice. They said that if they were going to change again, they wanted to go back to the old way.

My main problem with what happened in British Columbia and Ontario—and this is not reflected simply by just endorsing New Zealand—is the requirement for a supermajority. This is a question that I think Canadians often ask in any number of contexts on questions that are put to referenda. How much of a majority is enough? Is 58% enough? I would have said so, and in that case both British Columbia and Ontario would have probably changed their electoral systems had that threshold been okay.

Certianly part of the question is how you ask the question, but the other question is how much of a majority you need. That's an open question that ought to be subject to political debate in each context where the public is going to be asked a question like that.

Mr. Scott Reid: If you asked me, I would have said 50% plus one, but you're saying 60% was too much. I think that's why you said it was set up to fail, but I think I'm hearing you say that you may think that 50% plus one is too low. Is that correct?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: As Canadians we had already decided, coming out of the 1995 referendum, that 50% plus one was something that we didn't endorse in some contexts, so we can't have our cake and eat it too, right?

This is the thing: the thresholds required for referenda are going to be political and are going to be structured by the context in each particular one. The generalities I can draw from the Canadian political process are that in 1995, under a very particular question, there were people in the Canadian federation who said that 50% plus one was simply inadequate. Then the flip side is that 58% was also seen to be simply inadequate as well.

My only point is that having a proper and complete discussion about where we want to draw the line is something that I would advise in the context of referenda in general.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. DeCourcey.

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

Thank you to our three presenters. I hope to have time for all three to answer my comment here.

I'll start with Ms. Northam, because the quote you cited from one of your members to end your testimony struck me as one of modesty and of encouragement to everybody here to be mindful of the process that we can undertake as a Parliament to continue to improve our democratic processes.

One of the things I've been challenged with in some testimony over the last number of weeks is someone who in one breath claims that Parliament is undemocratic as it is right now, and therefore illegitimate, and in the very next breath expresses their desire to see this Parliament exact its democratic legitimacy to enact reform. I think that rhetoric and hyperbole are a bit overblown.

I wonder if you can comment on that, and then I'll ask some of our other witnesses to comment as well. Do we, as a Parliament, have the democratic legitimacy to enact reform, and should we put some water in our wine when we're talking about how undemocratic Parliament is right now?

● (1520)

Ms. Katelynn Northam: I think it's probably quite difficult to go into this process as members of Parliament. It's not as if you don't have any skin in the game, right? I think it's in some ways admirable that you are going through this process knowing it will have implications on the way you do your work.

In many instances, people do feel they are well represented by their members, but we are speaking on behalf of our members who don't have that opportunity to feel represented by their members of Parliament. They've for voted their entire lives, for 20, 40, or 50 years, and have never had a representative they've voted for, or they have continually watched the vote split in their ridings.

That's what we're really speaking to. There is that element present in the Canadian electoral system, and we are looking to improve upon it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: What do you think, Mr. Massicotte?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Legitimacy is not a scientific concept; it is a normative concept. As a saying goes, legitimacy is in the eye of the beholder. In order words, legitimacy depends on an individual's perspective.

Let's look at our system's history lesson, which is something more solid. In Canadian history, a number of electoral reforms have been carried out. They began in 1920 in Manitoba and ended in 1956 in Alberta.

I have looked at the circumstances in which every one of those reforms was adopted. In each case—so in Alberta, in Manitoba and in British Columbia—the provincial Parliament implemented a reform without a referendum. At that time, holding a referendum was not even considered. Based on the customs of the time, it seems fine that it happened this way.

Those are the indications I can give regarding whether Parliament currently has the democratic legitimacy to proceed. Ours is a system of representative democracy. There is no legal obligation to hold a referendum, but it may occasionally happen that what can be done legally is perceived as illegitimate by a good portion of the population.

When it comes to that, I would like to emphasize that I am deeply troubled by the fact that, according to the four surveys I have looked at, many Canadians feel, rightly or wrongly, that a referendum should be held.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Professor Thomas, with the time remaining, do you have any comment as to the way Parliament can proceed with this reform conversation?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: My understanding is that even if there were a referendum, any change would have to be legislative, which means.... It strikes me as a bit silly to suggest that Parliament can't do it, because Parliament certainly can. Parliament has the legislative power to do what it would like to do in a representative democracy, as my colleague Dr. Massicotte has noted.

That said, I think what people are trying to tap into is the process by which the reforms are informed, and that's a different question. That's a much more fundamental question. It speaks to who we are as Canadians, what we want, and how we're talking about the scope of the problem. If we're talking about that, this is less about Parliament's legitimacy to write a law to change an institution, because Parliament certainly has the power, and that's that. Fair enough.

The thing that concerns me is that the definition of the problem seems to be rather limited in scope, which restricts the conversation we're having. I think there is also this populist element that comes through. Coming from western Canada, our politics is defined very much by populism, and that's going to colour how any decisions, recommendations, or processes transpire in a regional and a geographical kind of way.

These are things to be sensitive to, certainly. However, I'm not surprised that there are critiques of the process, because there are now norms and there is historical precedent for Canadians to be much more active in processes like these that have been conducted in the past.

● (1525)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen is next.

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

Thank you all for being here.

I'll start with Ms. Northam and then I'll go to Professor Thomas.

It was interesting to hear in your opening remarks how your testimony today came from canvassing your members. I'm not sure we've had witnesses yet who have legitimized what they're going to say with their membership before they got here, so that's good.

I want to take a look at the question of so-called safe ridings versus swing ridings and the attention given them. If you're a Canadian living in a riding that has historically voted overwhelmingly one way for one party, the discouragement to get involved is very high. There's been some contention about this.

My question is about the so-called wasted vote.

In the last election we had in Canada, nine million votes were cast that are not represented in any discernible way in Parliament, although some have argued that those nine million votes have influence.

Power belongs to the people and is passed through us. Why would, say, a transferable vote system, whereby people are getting choices, not be considered as a way to do that by your membership?

Ms. Katelynn Northam: As in a single transferable vote?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, in terms of the ranked ballots.

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Yes, the ranked ballots. Sorry.

I think there are a couple of different elements to it and there are a few different pieces as to why our members find first past the post problematic. I think one of the reasons is that we are concerned, as an issue-driven organization, about big issues.

We often look at Parliament as a whole and how it's composed and how the parties are working together to address those issues. One of the major flaws that we are seeing is a Parliament that doesn't look like the makeup of the country and the people who voted across the country for those specific parties. It's a bit of a macro-level issue with the way Parliament is composed. I think that's really where we get to the issue with alternative votes. Even if you have 51% or 52% of people voting for a member, you're still not representing 48% of people in that riding.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I guess the challenge—and we put this to a witness earlier—is that the 51% comprises not just a first choice, but there may be second or third choices. I don't know how I'd feel more satisfied about my third choice having some sort of influence.

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Exactly.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Professor Massicotte, this triggered something about the power of the Prime Minister under different results. We've known that proportional systems lead to more power-sharing, coalitions, or co-operative governments, and you said that diminishes the power—I believe it was your term—of the prime minister and by extension the prime minister's office. I see that as a wonderful thing. If I think back not just to the context in other countries but to the Canadian context, in those minority governments when a prime minister's power is diminished, and when parliament's power therefore is enhanced, we've had some really great policy as a result.

Am I mistaken in this observation?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: That's a normative question.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: By great policy let me be more clear: public health care, pensions, post-secondary education support, the flag. These all came out of times when the Prime Minister and his office —always his—had to share power.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Great—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I wonder if we would actually have reform of the National Energy Board right now if the Prime Minister's Office was not allowed to just do as they say rather than listen to other voices at the table.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: The absence of a majority does not equal, as you say, bad policies. I wouldn't be sure if the absence of a majority guarantees that at all times—not at all.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We're talking about chances.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Yes.

I've been particularly impressed by the work of Arend Lijphart on this point. I don't believe that countries with PR systems are necessarily Edens of harmony, except that it's not hell either.

It's very important, because I think we all tend to assume instinctively—and I must say that I had exactly the same attitude—that things will go better if we have majority governments. Lijphart had the wonderful idea of looking at the indicators of good governance and found, as I'm sure he told you, that there wasn't such a big difference between countries with majority governments and countries with coalition governments, and perceptive people had seen that before.

● (1530)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This will happen. Fear-mongering will be done in politics from time to time, especially when change is proposed. There is fear of this, that, and the other.

The Chair: I think we're at five minutes, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: All right. I'll wait for the next round.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Rayes, go ahead.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Massicotte, I have here two quotes from statements you have made in interviews with the media. As you know, politicians are also quoted regularly.

Your opinions may have changed since then, but I would like to know a bit more about these issues.

In an interview with *The Prince Arthur Herald* last February, you said that it would be very risky for the Prime Minister to go ahead with an electoral reform without the public opinion on his side.

Last March or May, in Radio-Canada's program *24/60*—and you referred to this earlier when speaking with my colleague from across the table—you also said that you did not feel that people were tired of the current system and they would like to be consulted through a referendum.

Is that indeed what you said?

I would like to know whether you still feel that way or whether you have changed your opinion in the meantime.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: I see you are keeping tabs on me.

Regarding your second statement, about the surveys I referred to, my comments were based on the first survey carried out on this issue. I believe that it was conducted by Insight. The survey indicated that two-thirds of people were satisfied with the system and that three-quarters wanted a referendum. That is indeed what the survey seemed to indicate. The three other surveys that were done later, including by Ekos, indicated that the Canadian public was more divided on that issue. I did not have the time to talk about the reason, which is the following.

In some cases, the question asked was extremely loaded, if I may say so. People were asked whether they agreed with the government party, specified in the question, implementing the reform on its own. Of course, that kind of a question produces a more predictable result than the other one asking them whether they thought there should be a referendum on such a reform.

The picture is a bit more nuanced than I am painting it, but I still don't feel that Canadians are horrified or disgusted by the voting system they are using. They may be wrong, or they may be right. Based on the facts and the surveys I have read, and intuitively, when I talk to my students or colleagues, I do not feel that passion for reform.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I agree, no one was talking about it in my riding this summer.

On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rank voters' interest in changing the voting method now?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: That is hard to say because surveys ...

Mr. Alain Rayes: Can you give an estimate?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: I would not say it is a priority, that is quite evident.

I would make one point about how the questions are worded. When we ask people whether they think the electoral system should be changed, we often forget to consider what the electoral system represents to them. Does it mean the voting method? I don't really like that term, by the way. Does it represent the right to vote as a whole? Both terms are probably used. A number of specialists might hesitate if we asked them the question.

I am not sure there is a very strong desire for electoral reform or that our fellow citizens consider it a priority, but perhaps the committee will come to different conclusions because you will have the privilege of meeting citizens.

Mr. Alain Rayes: In the same interview with *The Prince Arthur Herald*, you said that you have always been in favour of changing the voting method but that, at the federal level, it is not really necessary at this time.

Considering all the warnings and explanations about proportional representation, which you are more familiar with than I am, it is hard for us to say as well. The Prime Minister has already taken somewhat of a position by saying he favours ranked ballots. A number of people who want to change the system, including the other parties, are more inclined toward proportional representation.

Do you still maintain that, at the federal level, it is not necessary to completely change the system or that the benefits would not be as great as suggested?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: The reasons for reform are not as strong at the federal level as I have seen in other jurisdictions, such as in Quebec.

First, there has never been an election in which the opposition was completely crushed and shut out of Parliament. I remember, when I was a student, we saw in the 1973 election that it could happen.

Second, and this is very important, there has been a series of results in Quebec that produced the wrong winner. Mr. Boulerice has already stated that this is completely unacceptable. I find his assessment quite moderate. I do not want to become overly emotional, but I must say I found it absolutely horrible and scandalous.

Federally, the elections produced a wrong winner on two occasions, in 1957 and 1979, as you know. In each case, however, the result was a minority government. So the winners did not have full power. In Quebec, however, on three historic occasions, the party that did not even win the plurality of the votes gained 100% of the power.

● (1535)

Mr. Alain Rayes: I understand there is no urgency.

I will return to that later.

The Chair: You have five minutes, Ms. Sahota.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you. We've definitely been having some interesting conversations.

I want to preface my questions with a comment.

I think from all the testimony that we've gathered, it's quite hard to say that good policy only comes from a certain type of government and not from another type of government. We've had some great things from majority governments and we've had good things from minority governments. We've had failures from minority governments as well. However, we do know that in Canada at least they all came under the first-past-the-post system. I don't know if you can necessarily make the direct link that changing the electoral system is always going to automatically result in all good policies and collaboration, because we've also had witnesses come before us who have said some disastrous policies and platforms are coming out of PR countries and European countries right now.

I want to move on to Professor Thomas. I'm really intrigued by a lot of the research that you've presented to us here today. I believe you were speaking of Norway earlier when you were talking about women being elected. I was wondering if you could elaborate a little bit about that. You quickly passed over it, and I wasn't able to get the facts that you were pointing to.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Thank you for your question.

This was a study that was done in the nineties by two Americans, Richard Matland and Donley Studlar, comparing Norway and Canadian provinces to see whether or not small parties that introduce a greater number of women in their candidate lists or as part of their candidate profile act as a contagion to force bigger parties to diversify the kinds of candidates they offer the voting public. In Norway, under that particular system, under those constraints, they did find evidence of that particular effect, but they didn't find similar evidence in Canada.

What this means is that Canada can have smaller parties that arguably aren't contesting for government because they're not able to win a plurality of seats or a plurality of votes that gets manufactured into a majority of seats. What it shows in the Canadian case is that the contagion effect we saw in Norway does not exist in Canada.

The reason I cited it in this particular context is to suggest that when people say proportional representation is good for women because it gives women greater access points, we can speak to studies that have looked at this function in an established proportional representation system and found it, but it takes a lot of logical leaps to suggest that we would be able to manufacture that same kind of effect in Canada simply by changing the electoral system.

I think the argument that's more plausible is to say that we have had parties that have been pushing for greater diversity in terms of who gets presented as a candidate to voters, but that this doesn't necessarily push other parties to do the same. For me that's the point. I don't see that changing how we translate votes to seats would actually change that particular part of Canadian elections at all.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's interesting that you point to Norway as well. Norway was also brought up by a previous witness earlier today, Mr. Loewen. It's quite scary when you look at the chart that he presented to us. Norway also seems to be a country that has a very large anti-legal immigration platform in the party that's been elected there, so bad policies, bad thoughts, can also come out of these PR systems.

It was very interesting when you said that perhaps we're asking the wrong question, perhaps especially when it comes to the issue of women. There are other things that you've said. You were saying there were other informal barriers. I like your link between finances and getting women elected. I think that's interesting.

Are there other informal barriers that you haven't been able to speak about that you think we should look at?

● (1540)

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Yes. The general truism is that every electoral system manufactures a majority somehow, so this is the thing: we need to think about how we want to best manufacture our majorities when it comes to electoral systems.

The one that concerns me most in terms of informal barriers for electoral reform is implicit assumptions about what makes a good candidate and who's the best candidate. I think built into recruitment policies and into how we approach the political system is a lot of latent sexism and latent racism, this idea that a good candidate or a good politician looks a certain way.

This is why New Zealand's experience is important. They switched in 1996 and saw an immediate bump in the number of women who were elected, but 45% of them were from party lists. A very small number came from districts, about 15%. That allowed people to speak what they had always thought, that women just aren't good at winning in the districts. The only thing that's changed in New Zealand is that you've seen pretty minor variations in the overall number of women who have been elected. Instead, what we've seen equalized is the number of women elected from the list seats and the number of women elected in the districts.

Part of the informal barriers is that because the numbers required for parity are so low, at 169, it's just inconceivable to me that people who wanted to recruit and nominate 169 women couldn't do it if they wanted to. The numbers are not on anyone's side there.

For me what gets loaded into this—because we know that voters aren't discriminating—is that when people are doing the recruiting and deciding when they're going to ask and when they're going to recruit, what are they thinking that they don't want to say about who's a good candidate? To me this is the important, fundamental thing that is not going to change.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Aldag now.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

Professor Thomas, in your opening comments you noted in passing that you would like to talk about the New Zealand experience during the question-and-answer period. You touched on it a couple of times, once in response to Mr. Reid's questions and now in response to my colleague's. I don't know if there is anything else you wanted to draw from or to share on the New Zealand experience. We have heard a lot of it. If you have additional thoughts, I'd like to give you the floor to do that.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

As I'm sure you have heard, New Zealand switched to mixed member proportional in 1996. They also had dedicated seats for their indigenous population. For Canada, I think New Zealand's experience will be much more useful as a road map than anybody else's who's used mixed member proportional or any other system without making the change to it. This is why I think New Zealand is the most important comparison case.

People will say, as I know I said when I was a younger student, that in 1996 there was a jump immediately from 21% women in the New Zealand legislature to 35%. Since then, though, it's remained pretty stagnant. They go between 34% and 41%. It currently sits at 38% after the 2014 election. This just suggests that although we've moved the bar, New Zealand is still stalled.

The reason, I think, has to do with where the women are. If you just dump the women into the party list seats that are meant to be top-ups, New Zealand shows that most women came from that. People actually said that New Zealand shows that women can't win in the districts. We know from places like Canada and Britain, and especially from Canadian voters, that Canadian voters certainly don't discriminate on the basis of sex, yet in the New Zealand experience you saw it, and then people actually started to articulate that women can't win in the seats.

The difference between 1996 and 2014, when they had their last election, is that women were about 30% of members from both district seats and from list seats. What we've not seen is parity. New Zealand switched their electoral system, and it gave a certain kind of access point for women. I'll concede that when they made that particular system more proportional, women got into the legislature through those list seats, but they've not hit 50%. What it enabled people to do was to explicitly say something sexist about women's abilities to win elections, which we know from other cases isn't true. What we end up seeing now is an equalization between women in the districts and women on the list, but they're still 20 points away from parity, so there are still informal barriers.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay. Thank you.

Do I still have time left?

The Chair: You have a couple of minutes, yes.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

I have one other question, but I will only take a minute. If you have anything else, go ahead.

● (1545)

Prof. Melanee Thomas: The only thing I'll say is that electoral reform in New Zealand did not remove the informal barriers that keep women from achieving representational parity. That's the point. I think that gets lost in a lot of the discussion about PR being good for women.

Mr. John Aldag: There was another point of clarification I was looking for or hoping to get from you. My note-taking is bad, so you might have to give me the context again, but at one point you were talking about district magnitude and the large size. Perhaps you could remind me as to whether that was in connection with trying to get greater proportionality. If we were to go to a different system, how large do you think the size should be? We've heard for multi-member ridings that it should be five. Some have said 12. Are you thinking of something larger? What are you thinking in that context?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: In the context of what I think about preferential ballots, I would have said that a preferential ballot on a district magnitude of one—i.e., just changing the ballot structure—for me is a change that's not really worth doing. I would be more supportive of a preferential ballot if we moved to something like the single transferable vote, where you would need a district magnitude of at least three, preferably five.

The difficulty there is that Canada already has very large districts, both in terms of population and in terms of geography, depending on which one you're looking at. How do you draw those boundaries in a way that preserves local representation in a meaningful way? The difficulty there is that if you increase district magnitude like that, you also have to increase the number of seats to keep that strong local link, because we are so geographically dispersed.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay. Perfect. I'm out of time, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Ms. Rempel for five minutes, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Thomas, just going back to my previous comments, I don't think financing reform is the panacea to see more under-represented groups, and I want to be clear about that, but I do think it's important to talk about it.

From my own experience and from trying to encourage other women to run, financing is something that comes up. I think sometimes women will say, “Well, I don't have the same networks as my male colleagues do to raise money.”

I was trying to introduce a new topic and I wanted to give you a little more time to expand upon that. I do think very strongly that third party financing reform could tighten things up and perhaps level the playing field for some women, or under-represented groups in general, or groups with differing political thought. The last thing I'd want to see—and I think all political parties are guilty of this practice—is the use of third parties as proxies to get around electoral financing rules.

I'm wondering if you could expand on this topic in some of the time I have left to see if I could get some support. Could you give some of your thoughts on that particular aspect? I don't think it has been discussed in Parliament or in the context of this committee yet.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I think money matters most for women at the nomination stage. This is one of the things you talked about. Regulating how much people can spend on nominations does a lot for historically under-represented groups.

Something that should be noted for the record is that networks matter. They matter for money, but they matter as much for recruitment. Electoral district associations that have women on their executives, especially women as their EDA presidents, are much more likely to run women as candidates, simply because you have somebody with a network who knows a woman and can do that kind of recruitment.

Women tell us that money becomes a barrier also at that nomination stage, and it matters in ways that don't matter for men. It's not just about getting money for getting on the ballot and mounting a campaign, but for things like after-hours child care. It's for things like hair and clothes and the whole presentation in which women are required to engage in ways that men aren't.

This comes into the third party financing side of things. I can imagine a scenario, as you see happening south of the border, in which a third party that doesn't like a particular kind of candidate decides that they will engage in a very targeted kind of campaign on grounds that we would say would be undemocratic and problematic. In that sense, I would always say that this kind of campaign finance regulation would be good. Money matters in that particular context, so having a control on it is important.

When it comes to actually helping women's numbers, though, being able to regulate and have clear pathways for things like nominations and recruitment is where the money really matters for gender parity in terms of elections.

● (1550)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: To continue with this thought, you talked a little about how PR isn't necessarily a panacea in removing some of these barriers. Just thinking forward, I would think that third party financing would have quite an impact in terms of how candidates would be selected on a list or how candidates would be chosen in a PR system, given that there might be—I'm just theorizing—more individual distinction, depending on how the system was set out.

If there was a change to the electoral system, do you think third party financing could have even more impact and therefore require perhaps stronger legislation mirroring the kind we have with federal political parties right now?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I would say that introducing any kind of a party vote would be a change from what we do now, which is vote for a local candidate. If you were to move to a mixed member proportional system, under which you vote in the district and then you also vote for your party overall, or if you were to move to a list PR system where the vote is simply cast for a party, then third-party voices, as you've described, would become very important. They could direct their campaigns at an actual ballot or an actual ballot decision that doesn't have any kind of link to that local sense. That kind of set-up would be something that would need to be addressed.

What I would say about list construction is that I'm less concerned about third party financing in how the lists are constructed and more concerned about the informal barriers that already exist inside political parties, because parties draft the lists.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Yes.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: It means that in places like Sweden, where we know they've been able to elect a gender-equal parliament, it's because you had parties that voluntarily zippered their lists and alternated between women and men.

In the Canadian context, I identify that most of the informal barriers that block women's candidacies or put women into districts they can't win and all these other sorts of things are in the black box of political parties, and it cuts across the spectrum. The problems are with the parties.

Third party finance matters in terms of how you might persuade somebody to vote for a party, certainly, but there are other powerful barriers that exist inside Canada's political parties that would come into play on list construction and any other kind of candidate nomination.

The Chair: Thank you.

I should mention that Professor Massicotte has to leave at 4:00, so when he does leave, it's not because of something we said.

We'll go to Mr. Boulerice, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To begin, I have a brief comment. Professor Thomas, I am sure my colleague Kennedy Stewart would agree with you and would be very happy to hear you say that, if there were financial consequences for political parties that do not field an equal number of men and women as candidates, the problem would be solved overnight, because that is exactly what he proposed in his bill.

Ms. Northam, I would like to hear your thoughts on the radical idea that a voter could vote for their first choice, for the candidate they would like to see in Parliament, and get what they want. This is in fact the case in the majority of democracies and Western countries. In Canada, we have a system that creates systematic injustices.

I'll give you two examples and I would like to hear your reaction.

On Vancouver Island in the last election, the NDP won 33% of the vote, the Green Party, 25%, the Liberals, 21%, and the Conservatives, 21%. Yet five NDP MPs, who are all excellent and who I like very much, and one Green MP, were elected, but no Liberals or Conservatives. Even though Liberal and Conservative voters account for 42% of the votes cast on Vancouver Island, they have no representation in Parliament whatsoever.

The same could be said of my NDP friends in the heart of Toronto. They are there and account for a considerable vote share, but they are not represented either.

The same is true for Conservative voters on the Island of Montreal. They are there, represent a percentage of voters, but they have no representation.

In your opinion, what should we do to ensure that NDP voters in the heart of Toronto, Conservative voters in Montreal, and Liberal voters on Vancouver Island have a voice in Parliament?

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Well, have PR would be the short answer.

I was thinking back to what we were discussing earlier regarding whether this is a thing that people are really asking for. Is this a thing that people want?

It was really interesting for me as I was going door to door a lot in the last election and speaking to people specifically about this problem. I think the way you ask people about it is very interesting. If you come to someone and ask if things are working for them right now, they might say yes. If you then show them a pie chart that shows how many people in their riding voted for a different candidate from the one who was elected, they'd say it's not fair. People do understand this intrinsically.

One thing we should keep in mind, as I said earlier, is that Canada is the only OECD country that uses first past the post at every level of government, which means that Canadians don't have a reference point of another system. If we were to start seeing other types of electoral systems at different levels of government, which could be the case in the next municipal elections in Ontario, we would maybe begin to see a bit of a culture change.

As an organization, we are not endorsing a specific type of proportional representation, but something that gets us much closer to a system under which people can at least say they see themselves reflected in the House of Commons would be a big improvement.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much.

I heard Mr. DeCourcey's objections, who is concerned about NDP and Conservative voters in the Maritimes. Thank you, Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Massicotte, there are four minutes left before you leave. I would like to clarify something.

In Germany, do the list members work with citizens? Do they work on constituency files?

In Canada, one of our roles is to guide citizens through the public administration.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Thank you for your question, Mr. Boulerice. I did not have time to speak to that earlier.

One of my German colleagues surveyed members of the *Bundestag*. He asked them how important constituency files were in their work. Most of the riding members said it took up 87% of their time, while the list members, who we imagine watching television or doing something else, said 72%. In other words, list members do work on constituency files.

Members usually become list members in ridings where they ran unsuccessfully. Double candidacy is the best way to prevent differences from developing between the two types of members. It is often said that the "fat pack" list members do not have to work very hard, leaving the poor riding members to do all the work themselves. The system is not well understood, I would say. Double candidacy is a very good way of oiling the system.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have the floor, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Massicotte, we will take advantage of your expertise right to the last minute.

You mentioned earlier that there had been a few surveys in Canada about the need for a referendum on reform. I believe you said that some surveys were conclusive while others showed bias.

Prof. Louis Massicotte: When the question is phrased in a fairly neutral way, it is half and half, but it can be as much as 63%, as I recall. If the question is more difficult, the percentages are very high.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Okay.

If the government decides to go ahead with electoral reform and hold a referendum to consult Canadians, should the 50% plus one rule apply?

Prof. Louis Massicotte: Here is a clever answer.

Referendums are consultative. As Mr. Burns' white book on sovereignty indicated in 1978, there is no need to establish a threshold for victory since referendums are consultative.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I see. That is very interesting.

It gave me a start earlier when Ms. Thomas recalled that, following the events in 1995, the 50% plus one rule was no longer to apply. Quebec's National Assembly objected to this and it was determined that that was the rule. I think my colleagues in the NDP agree that the 50% plus one rule must apply. Thank you.

That is a problem. In British Columbia, they can not even adopt a 60% plus one rule. I think we are putting the bar too high and that is an obstacle. Thank you.

If there is time left, I have a question for the three witnesses.

In the Figueroa case, the Supreme Court pointed out that party financing is an essential component of the plurality of opinions.

Should a future reform of the voting system be linked to a reform of party financing, or should these two things be considered separately?

Should party financing be reformed? Is that essential or not?

● (1600)

Prof. Louis Massicotte: I would argue that these are two separate issues. I think public financing of parties is very legitimate and could be maintained.

That said, as omnipotent as Parliament is, it cannot stop planes from taking off, so I have to leave you now.

Thank you.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you for joining us.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Massicotte.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I will ask Ms. Northam and then Ms. Thomas the same question. I am referring to the decision in Figueroa and party financing, which is an essential component of the plurality of opinions.

If the voting system is reformed, should party financing also be reformed, or would you rather keep these two issues separate?

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: I honestly can't speak on behalf of the Leadnow community on this issue either. We haven't consulted our members on it. We're broadly supportive of anything that would help smaller parties or more voices be represented in the House, but we'd have to see more. It's already a big question on its own.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

What do you think, Ms. Thomas.

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Just as a point of clarification, are you asking about public financing for political parties, such as the per-vote subsidy or something along that line?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Yes.

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I'm inclined to agree with my colleague Dr. Massicotte that these questions are distinct, but I also think they are linked.

In the literature on party and campaign finance internationally, most countries do have some form of public financing. It's broadly seen to be a good thing, because the political party is a key institution linking representative institutions and the voting public. I will happily own to being a fan of the per-vote subsidy. It struck me as a democratic way of doing party financing. It also struck me as a way of being able to tell people who thought their votes were wasted because they weren't necessarily voting for the winner that their vote was actually contributing to something.

I think it would be worthwhile to re-engage in this kind of discussion about what kind of public financing the parties need. The context around the past way we did it is less than sparkling, but I do think it's worth having a discussion. I know I have colleagues who disagree with me because they don't necessarily like either the per-vote subsidy or the idea of public financing, but I would broadly endorse it as a good thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May is next.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm so sorry I didn't get to ask Professor Massicotte my question. I would love to have known what he thought about STV.

Following up on this, Professor Thomas, I want to be sure I'm presenting a fair summary of your view of the New Zealand experience. Let me just try it out. You would agree that the New Zealand shift from first past the post to mixed member proportional resulted in an increase of women elected to Parliament, but that by itself it has proven to be an insufficient way of addressing the informal barriers that continue to apply.

Is that fair?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: As long as it's not phrased as "the shift was necessary but insufficient", because I don't think the shift was necessary; but it certainly has been insufficient, yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: To Katelynn Northam, in terms of what your surveys of the Fair Vote community have told you, I think about 85% of the Fair Vote community wants to see proportional representation. Have you made inquiries about specific types of PR, and is there a general preference in your surveys for mixed member proportional versus single transferable vote?

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Yes, we have asked that question—and we're from Leadnow. Fair Vote is a different—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Oh, I'm so sorry. I don't know how I made that mistake.

Ms. Katelynn Northam: I just don't want to take credit for their work.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Of course; I'm very familiar with Leadnow.

Ms. Katelynn Northam: No worries.

We have been doing some internal surveys of our members, and opinion is really quite divided. A lot of people would say that they don't mind the system as long as the principle is there. We see slightly more people in favour of MMP than STV. I think part of that comes from the fact that the local representation factor seems very familiar and similar to what they know with the current first-past-the-post system. It feels relatively simple and accessible on the ballot. I think a lot of members would also argue that STV is a strong system.

That's something we'll be doing going forward as we see more concrete proposals come forward.

● (1605)

Ms. Elizabeth May: This may be a question beyond what you have at your fingertips, but I'm curious to know this.

Given that we had a citizens' assembly in Ontario that recommended mixed member proportional and a citizens' assembly in British Columbia that recommended single transferable vote, have you a sense within your Leadnow community of whether there's greater support for MMP in Ontario and greater support for single transferable vote in B.C.? I'm wondering how much the work of those citizens' assemblies continues to inform public opinion in the two different provinces.

Ms. Katelynn Northam: It's a great question. I could pull that data apart and take a look at it, because we did ask people which province they were from. I could see who answered what. I would not be surprised if MMP were more popular in Ontario for that reason.

I think it just speaks to the importance of having really deliberative processes around these things. The citizens' assemblies are certainly good examples of that. They were a really good way for the provinces to have a good conversation about it and to educate more people in the community about different options for voting systems. As I mentioned earlier, we do not have a lot of experience with other types of voting systems in Canada.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Pursuing that, and I don't know if you've done this, but have you asked the thousands of people you talked to through online communication about any of the questions that are before this committee about online voting and mandatory voting, and one that isn't squarely before us—which I'd be very interested in, because I know you have a lot of youth members—about changing the voting age?

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Yes, we did ask those questions, and the results are in the brief. The brief is still with translation, but you should have it shortly. We did ask those questions. I wish I could be more helpful on this point, as opinion was quite divided. I think we haven't been talking about these issues as much with our community as we have on other issues, such as PR.

We did see that opinion was quite divided on the question of mandatory voting. People were concerned that it might be a blunt instrument, but they also felt it could increase representation and the voices of people who don't traditionally vote or participate.

With online voting, again there were a lot of concerns about security, but there was also some interest in seeing whether it would help with accessibility.

The youth voting was less popular. However, when we pulled it apart by age and asked only the people who were under 30 on our list, youth voting was very popular. I think that's something you should keep in mind.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I have one last thing that I think I can squeeze in to ask you.

Given that one of your other priorities is climate, do you find there is any relationship between our voting system and Canada's climate action?

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Yes, we do, and I think it really speaks to the heart of why we care about this issue.

We're a very broad organization. We have members from every political party. People are interested in transcending those boundaries and in addressing the big issues like climate change, which really do require inter-party co-operation in order to be addressed, so yes, I think that's part of where this is coming from. We're tired of seeing this narrow election-to-election policy work that's being done right now under first past the post. We want to see policy that's going to be done collaboratively and that will stand the test of time and not be changed between elections.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's an interesting point.

Ms. Romanado is next.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much.

Dr. Thomas, I want to mention that I think you're bang on. I have been listening to testimony for the last couple of weeks on all the reasons that women don't want to pursue politics, and I can guarantee you that my decision had absolutely nothing to do with what voting system was in place.

I think you're right. There are informal barriers, and I don't think there are informal barriers only at the point of deciding to get the nomination or deciding to run and then the actual election campaign; I think there are also barriers post-election, when you actually get elected.

I don't think that's the case only for women; it's for our youth who are contemplating running for office and getting involved. I know this may sound a little off, but that generation that is searching for a work-life balance doesn't want to be living for half the time in Ottawa and half the time in their home province.

I want to let you elaborate a little more on some of those barriers that have nothing to do with an electoral system and that are preventing our youth, women, and visible minorities from getting involved in politics.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Thank you for the question. This links very closely to a project I have with my co-editor, Amanda Bittner, who's at Memorial University, and an international panel of scholars looking at the impact of gender and parental status in politics. A number of things come through very clearly from that work and from other research.

First, something that will always be an issue in Canada is the commute. That sounds really quite trite, except I'm in Alberta, and a weekly commute to Ottawa is something that I, and I imagine a number of people, simply would not do. It's just not on. The people who are doing it know how difficult it is. For people who are considering it, this is one of these things that become problematic.

The idea that local politics is good for women comes from a lot of research in the United States that shows that women who actually get into politics say something along the lines of "I want to do it at the local level, because I want to be able to drive to where I work as opposed to flying to the state capital or to Capitol Hill." In other words, there isn't necessarily something about local politics per se that makes it friendly for women; it's because there is a work-life balance and things like commuting are addressed.

The other thing that comes through pretty clearly is the nature of political work and what this means for children. In the province of Alberta, where I reside, we have some interesting things happening. We went from having a legislature that hadn't even addressed maternity leave and pregnancy and small infants to having two major changes, with maternity leave programs not only in the legislature but in cabinet. One thing that's come through very clearly from the last Parliament is that the nature of political work itself doesn't lend itself to maternity or parental leave, which is challenging, especially when care facilities don't exist in that particular workplace or close to that workplace for the care of infants, for example.

When we look at places like Australia and Great Britain as well as historical evidence from British Columbia, we see that it also becomes problematic whether individual members can do such things as job-share on committees or even bring a breastfeeding infant into committee work. In British Columbia, in the British House of Lords, and in Australia individual members have actually been barred because their infants were seen to be strangers. When that gets presented as being ridiculous, my example from the British House of Lords is that they then said that breast milk was a refreshment, and refreshments were not permitted in the committee. That's why the breastfeeding mother couldn't be brought in.

I wish I were joking about that, but I'm not. If you're looking at women who are my age, in their thirties, and thinking about how they want to balance their professional life with other aspects of life in general, these are considerations that definitely kick us out of the pool.

It will be interesting to see how many young fathers are prepared to participate in these sorts of things as well. I want to say that these things certainly do hit women in a particularly gendered kind of way, but I don't think it's helpful to phrase them exclusively as women's issues. It's just that being a parent in politics is very different. What this means in the U.K. is that the majority of members of Parliament who are men are parents, and the majority of women who are members of Parliament are not. My British colleagues have identified that as a problem.

● (1610)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Do you have any research on younger Canadians, female or male, who are contemplating running for office? We want to engage them not only to actually vote but also to contemplate a career in politics. What are some of the barriers?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: The research we have is in progress, so I don't want to make a strong "research says" kind of conclusion. In addition to everything I've already stated, however, one thing that's becoming clear is that the nature of the Internet, and particularly one's online past, has had a chilling effect. We've had candidates in the city of Calgary in the federal election who were dropped because of things that were posted on the Internet when they were children. This would be about the age of 15 or 16 or somewhere along those lines.

This is where there is an interesting intersection between youth voting and standing for office. If somebody is the age of majority at enfranchisement, at 18, does this mean that things we can dig up about them online are onside if they choose to be a candidate at 22? I'm on the record as saying that I think what people do in their private lives—and even in their professional lives, to be honest—decades or years before they choose to seek elected office are maybe things that we ought to consider as.... I'm skeptical that they're good indicators of what kind of representative somebody would be. Other people will feel differently about that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Ms. Northam, you say your organization encourages public participation and consults people. You said you support proportional representation, in whatever form.

Do you agree that all Canadians should be consulted by referendum once the committee has decided on a voting method in order to legitimize that choice?

● (1615)

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: Our community is really just interested in seeing reforms happen, to be perfectly frank. We believe that a referendum is not the be-all and end-all of democracy. It can be quite divisive, as we've seen in other instances.

It's not a politically neutral process, as other witnesses have pointed out. We're open to other processes that would be deliberative, such as a citizens' assembly, but a referendum is not necessarily a good way to test whether or not there should be a reform. Our community, as I said, wants to see this change go through.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: On your organization's website, it says that your organization pledges to actively defend referendums as a way of increasing public participation and that your organization regularly consults its supporters on various issues. Your organization's own website, which promotes your organization, says that it defends referendums as a consultation method. Now you are telling us that, in your consultations, your members said they were not necessarily in favour of referendums because they consider them to be too dangerous.

Would it be dangerous to consult Canadians?

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: I'm sorry, but I'm not familiar with the section of the website you're referring to. I've worked on this issue for a year now, and the position I've given you is our official position on a referendum as it pertains to electoral reform.

We do deliberative processes and engagement and consultative processes with our own community, both online and offline. We use all kinds of methodologies to do that. I'm not aware of being on the record at any point as being in support of a referendum, but I'd be happy to see the passage you're referring to.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I will give you a copy at the end, but it is under the "open democracy" section on your website. What I just said can be found there verbatim.

I would go even further. You said our electoral system is unfair. That is a very strong statement, in my view. Various experts have told us that our system is perhaps not as unfair as some suggest. They are valuable sources, experts who hold doctorates who offered their considered opinions.

You said that 85% of your members want to change the system to a proportional one. You cite a survey you conducted among your members.

Other surveys conducted across Canada have shown that over 70% of Canadians want a referendum.

You say the surveys conducted by your organization would be a valid basis for making a proposal to the committee. In that case, why wouldn't a survey of Canadians also be a credible justification for consulting the entire population to confirm, not whether they want a new voting method, but whether they support the proposed change?

Why are you saying two different things?

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: It's a very different context. Leadnow is not Parliament. We're a community of people with similar sorts of interests in pursuing issues of open democracy and improving our democracy. We do these processes internally in order to give us direction when we come to situations like this.

I believe that's a very different context from asking an entire country about this question, especially when multiple parties with different political interests are involved. We're not in the same situation as this committee. I don't believe those opinions are at odds with each other.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Don't you find that a bit unusual? Organizations like yours or the one represented by the witness here this morning say you are in favour of public participation. That witness said that the voting method should be changed because the current method is not representative enough and that citizens should have more of a voice. Yet your organization does not support the ultimate consultation method, which could be used on such a fundamental issue. It would be a way of validating a proposal put forward by a parliamentary committee.

Do you agree with that approach?

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: The characterization of a referendum as the ultimate way to ask people their opinion is not true. We would encourage many other ways of engaging in this process. We see the referendum process as very open to politics, and it's not a neutral process. That's all that we have to say about it.

● (1620)

The Chair: Mr. DeCourcey is next.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Dr. Thomas, I want to pursue this notion of representational equity, which I understand—and correct me if I'm wrong—to be finding a Parliament that represents the ethnocultural diversity of the country. Is that a proper understanding?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Not quite. I would say the argument that I am picking up on is one from Hanna Pitkin, which is sometimes colloquially referred to as "mirror representation." This is the idea that every group in a society ought to be as present in its representative institutions as its demographic weight permits.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Right. Then it would be even broader than that and include gender and age demographics. Representational equity would comprise all these different considerations.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Yes. Socio-demographics are the easiest ones to identify, and to be frank, women are the easiest socio-demographic group to capture as this big umbrella, on the understanding that all of these groups are going to be very diverse in their own policy-relevant viewpoints.

Some will extend the idea further to ideological groups and to different ways of thinking, but the bulk of the research in terms of equity is looking at groups such as women, visible minorities, and indigenous peoples in Canada. It is anybody who has been historically barred from participating in electoral politics for some reason, and things like that.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you.

To borrow from a phrase used this morning, I think that would represent an unalloyed good in our democracy, in our Parliament, and I would understand that to be different from the pursuit of a Parliament that represented the partisan divisions of the country. Would that be clear as well?

The second part of that question is this. From your testimony I got the sense that pursuing representation of the different political parties in Parliament is not necessarily the way that we should be pursuing representational equity in Parliament, and if that's true, what would you then advise us to pursue as tactics, as policies, as recommendations from this committee that would help increase the representational equity of Parliament?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I would say that the distribution of votes and how that maps on to the distribution of seats is a different question from what the population looks like and what the representatives look like. Those things ought to be seen as distinct.

Of course, since I have indicated that I think political parties across the spectrum are part of the representational problem when it comes to representational equity, I can't say that partisan equity is a way of getting at representational equity.

The reason we talk about demographic weight is important. It's because we know that women are going to be ideologically diverse and they're going to have a diverse set of policy preferences and a diverse set of policy-relevant experiences that will cut across a number of partisan preferences and partisan boundaries. The same holds for visible minorities and the same holds for indigenous peoples. As a result, the kinds of questions that need to be asked for the solutions would be what you actually want the representatives to look like.

For women I think this is easier, because we can say women are 50% of the population and therefore ought to be 50% of the representatives, or you can make the argument that this should happen. What we need to avoid, though, is the idea of replicating other forms of inequity. Having 50% of the representatives made up of white, wealthy, educated professional women does not solve the problem.

What we also want to see is diversity within communities. Right now, when you look at visible minorities and indigenous Canadians by demographic weight, you see they're more present in the current House of Commons than women are, but they're disproportionately masculine, older, and all these other sorts of things.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Do you have a—

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Therefore the question has to come—

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Sorry.

I was going to ask how we simplify this question when we go abroad and consult with Canadians, because I think it's an important question to put before them.

Do we ask if they want to see demographic representation in their Parliament and if they understand that it's different from partisan representation? Do we ask what value they place in higher regard?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I know what the public is probably going to tell you, because we've asked it in the Canadian election study.

Politically engaged Canadians tend to be older and whiter and more wealthy and more masculine than the Canadian population as a whole, and they're going to be disproportionately the ones who will testify when you go on the road show. When you ask them about representational diversity, they're going to say representational diversity isn't a problem. Men don't think women's under-representation is a problem, but women do. White people tend not to think that visible minorities' under-representation is a problem, but visible minority communities do.

Therefore the discussion that needs to take place is on whether or not you want equity in representation, because it actually matters for the information that gets put forward in policy. If you put that question to the majority, you're probably not going to get “Yes, we think that's a good idea.” You're going to have a lot of people who say that the status quo benefits them, so they like it. In that sense, I think putting this kind of question to the engaged public is probably.... I know the kind of answer you're going to get, and they're not going to say there should be more women or more visible minorities or indigenous peoples.

The decision to solve those representational inequities and the solutions to those inequities go back to political parties because they do the recruitment. When you've got people who are tasked with recruiting people to stand as candidates and then getting them nominated and then getting them elected, that's where targeting and identifying people you think would be good representatives comes down.

● (1625)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Cullen is next.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll stay with you, Professor Thomas, and maybe Ms. Northam has a comment as well.

You've cited political parties. I know you meant to say “with the exception of the NDP”, which has done an okay job—not perfect, but a better job, I'd say—yet we haven't been a “contagion”, as you called it earlier. Can we seek a better word, perhaps—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —when talking about trying to improve the representation of women? I've been on a number of NDP committees as we sought to talk about those barriers, as Ms. Romanado mentioned, and it was not just to talk about them but to then remove them. We have a proposal in Parliament right now to do that, to, as you said earlier, connect the money. If parties had a financial disincentive to having a low number of nominated women, then parties would do more.

Am I connecting the dots fairly from your comments? I don't want to exaggerate or misrepresent.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I think so.

Where the mechanism applies for me is that we know no one gets to be a candidate for a political party without the leader signing the nomination policy, so I would backstop this idea by saying that if leaders wanted their candidates to look a certain way, they wouldn't sign nomination papers until they had candidates who looked the way they wanted them to.

To be frank, and this is where—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's if there was a financial hit, right? The connection would be that the reimbursement would be lessened.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Yes, exactly. This is the thing. I understand that particular policy and I am deeply cynical when I endorse it, but no party leader is going to set up a scenario in which they're not going to get their full reimbursement. They'll direct their people to find the candidates to maximize the money. It is a really cynical approach, but I'm not the only one among my colleagues who thinks that if this were tied to the money, the problem would be solved overnight.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I can understand the cynical view, but if Canada is sitting 62nd in the world right now, we need concrete mechanisms, not gestures, not symbolism, not tweets. We need things that help guide parties and party leaders in how we construct ourselves to offer Canadians a choice that more fairly represents Canadians, as radical as that notion sounds.

I don't know, Ms. Northam, if you had any comments on this particular mechanism or anything that was just said by Professor Thomas.

Ms. Katelynn Northam: I think we're broadly supportive and would agree with the fact that there are multiple barriers to women's participation and that we have to look at all of them. We had suggested PR as one possible way to do that, but I acknowledge, obviously, that it's not the main solution.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is again for both of our witnesses.

We were given a study of 60 years of the Australian experience. Under the winner-take-all ranked ballot, two and a half times fewer women were elected to the Australian legislature than what was done under the same election conditions, the same political culture, under a proportional system. It was two and a half times more women. While we don't offer it as the silver bullet to the question that we're trying to solve here, the evidence we've been given by a number of esteemed academics says that this is something we should take note of.

Ms. Katelynn Northam: That's the evidence that we've seen also. As I said, we're looking at all the solutions, and the experience of countries with PR does seem to show that there is improvement in that area. I think we have a lot of work to do on improving the participation of women in politics, so we have to look at all the solutions.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Professor Thomas, is your argument then that there's correlation, but not causation? Is that the general sentiment around proportional systems?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: One of the things, when it comes to empirical models, is that the type of electoral system stands in as a blunt indicator. You can't say the system causes a bunch of things, because you don't know what is actually working as the causal mechanism.

In the case of Australia, I would note that you spoil your ballot for the Senate if you don't rank order every single candidate, which means that most Australians are simply checking the box and saying "I'm going with the party's order", and the party determines the structure of the list.

It goes back to my main point, which is that if parties wanted parity on their lists for STV in the Senate, they would structure their lists accordingly. The same thing holds with the alternative vote. This is the sexist idea that women might not be able to win in the districts in the same way that men would be able to by looking like the good candidate or the best candidate to win.

This goes back to the nomination of candidates. In the Canadian context, we can tell you that every single political party in the lead-up to the 2008 and 2011 federal elections disproportionately nominated women in ridings where they knew their party wasn't going to win. That held for open seats as much as it did for incumbents.

I don't think I'm making such a strong assumption in suggesting that parties have a rough idea about where they're actually going to win, and they nominate candidates accordingly.

● (1630)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Nevertheless, we have never, in this country, broken through even the 30% glass ceiling by having 30% women on the ballot in our elections—

Prof. Melanee Thomas: That is not true.

At the provincial level, we have a government caucus that is 47% —

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I mean federally.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Yes, but the provinces tell you that parties can do it differently if they wanted to.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I will defer to my own premier when she says that these spaces for women and for other historically under-represented groups do not happen organically. They are not going to happen organically under our system and they are not going to happen organically just because you change to PR. You need to make space for them.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We can do both. I guess that is the point of the exercise. It is not an either/or situation.

The Chair: We are going to Mr. Rayes now. He is going to ask some questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

Ms. Thomas, I will let you continue. I would like to pursue this further.

In the whole electoral reform debate, we hear big pronouncements by various people, but it really seems that people are being led to believe that changing the electoral system would solve many of the representation and voter turnout issues.

From what you are saying, it seems that political parties could take concrete steps and work together to change the culture within Parliament in order to produce results, without necessarily changing the voting method.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Yes.

In terms of achieving representational equity, I see no good reason why it is not happening now, other than things that simply cannot be defended. It is literally 169 women. This is all somebody would need to recruit. It boggles my mind that we can't find them. It boggles my mind even more, to be honest, when we are talking about people who aren't white and about indigenous Canadians.

I am sympathetic to the idea of having both, of having a more proportionate system that better reflects partisan preferences from the electorate into representatives. Sure, we can do both, but it is clear to me, based on my research-based reading of the Canadian political landscape, that the majority of our representational problems could be solved right now without an institutional change. I have little faith that if parties and other political actors aren't prepared to solve those problems now—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Ms. Thomas ...

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: —then why would they under a different electoral system? That is the point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Ms. Thomas, so if we took all the energy that this committee is devoting to the issue, all the financial resources allocated to it, and all of our prime minister's political will, and if each of the political parties used them to take concrete steps to field 169 women candidates in the next elections, we would solve the problem much more quickly.

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: No. My question is to every political party. Why aren't you doing it now? I don't see any good reason.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Exactly.

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I think this current process that allows me to ask every single political party "Why aren't you doing it now?" is certainly worthwhile, simply because that question is now in the public record.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

[*English*]

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I am not sure if that helps answer your question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, that was a very good answer.

Ms. Northam, in spite of the whole process that has been put in place, I cannot say there are a lot of people right now in the various consultations that have begun. We'll see what happens during the cross-Canada tour.

Would you say that the consultation process established by the government is exhaustive enough to justify changing the voting method at this time?

● (1635)

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: From our community's perspective, as I said earlier, our community would like to see this done. It is something they have been talking to us about for a long time. Our experience is that we have been going to some of these town halls and we have seen town halls that have overflowed. I hope it is also your experience that lots of people are excited to come and talk about it.

I think there are other ways we could go about having this conversation. I mentioned the citizens' assembly, which has been held up as a very good example of a way to have a deliberative process around these questions that is much more free from political influence. We are committed to engaging in this process insofar as it has been laid out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Does your organization support any kind of change in the voting method or is it strictly in favour of proportional representation?

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: At this moment, our community has endorsed proportional representation, so that's what we are supporting. We don't have a definitive position on the other questions at this point, but if that does come about later on, we'd be happy to relay that to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: If the government ultimately decides to put forward a different proposal, you would have no opportunity to express your views even if you disagreed with it, since you are not in favour of a referendum to give Canadians an opportunity to express their views. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Ms. Katelynn Northam: We're sort of keeping an eye on things. We're committed to engaging with the process all the way through. We definitely, as a community, are very good at rallying around the causes that our community cares about. We'd be looking to engage with members of Parliament, depending on what the proposal was at the end of the day. We'd have to stop and re-evaluate and see what we want to do at that point, so I can't really speak to that question.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota is next.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I'm laughing because my colleague and I were talking about recruitment right now and we think we should recruit you, Professor Thomas. You would be an excellent politician, except for the fact that you won't travel and you may be too sensible.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I don't want to be testifying and I do want to learn as much as possible from all the witnesses here, but I am from a minority group and I am a woman and I did run in this last election. I have a young son, so I have a young family.

I can attest to why I made the choice and to the barriers that I felt I faced and still face today, and why I've talked to a lot of other women I know, trying to encourage them to run, and the responses that I get from them.

Some of the barriers have to do with that Internet stuff you were hinting at earlier, the dirty politics that can be in an election campaign. Certain ridings are more prone to that than others, depending on who you're running against and what they're known for. Some women don't want to risk the negative impact it might have on them. They fear it may have a worse impact on them than on their male counterparts at times.

I can definitely tell you that it wasn't the electoral system. Most women who want to get into politics like the competitiveness and like politics. That's why they're there, but it's also some of the stuff that my colleague Ms. Romanado mentioned. It's after the fact.

I sit on the procedure and House affairs committee. We've been looking at a lot of factors that we can change in Parliament in order to make it more inclusive, to allow more people to make that decision to run. A lot of people don't do it because of the travel that you mentioned.

They don't do it because of the work/life balance. How can that be attained? How can we ensure our children aren't strangers on the floor? How can we make those procedural amendments, such as maternity leave? There are so many things to consider that are inherent obstacles for women. I know some are for men as well, but there are other biological factors and problems that women have that men don't encounter.

It's so complex. Why more women aren't in politics is such a complex issue. It's very simple to just say, “This is the reason, and we can solve it by either PR....” Had we had a PR system in place today, you could maybe make the link that maybe we have a gender-balanced cabinet because PR countries lead to gender-balanced cabinets. Well, no, they don't. It's political will, as you said. If you want to do it, you'll make it happen.

I definitely agree that we need the political will across all parties, regardless of what party it is, to get that mirror image in Parliament.

Thank you for your testimony today. You've given us a lot of other things to think about.

I want to open the floor to you and Ms. Northam. If there's anything else you want to say in conclusion before you have to leave today, things that you weren't able to testify to today, I'd like to open the floor to you to do that.

● (1640)

Prof. Melanee Thomas: On recruitment, there are concrete steps that could be taken that would have payoff down the road.

We know that political parties are a vessel that recruits candidates and forwards them for election. We know that party members are much more likely to be men than they are to be women. We know that when women are party members, at least from research that has been done in the past by William Cross and Lisa Young, the kinds of positions that women were in were different from men's positions.

In blending that research with other research, I would say this: recruiting women as candidates first is probably a good way to fail. I would recommend that all political parties recruit women as party members and integrate them into internal party democracy processes. The other thing that becomes clear from the research is that if those women are in key positions, they will recruit other women as candidates and they'll recruit other women into their parties.

The other thing that also becomes clear from the research is that women need a lot of time to set things up so that they can run, a lot more time than some of the men who get asked. This could be a multi-year process. If you're asking somebody two months from an election date, they're probably going to say no. If you ask them two years from an election, it might be a little different.

The last thing I'll say, which came up in the research that I conducted with my colleague Lisa Lambert, is less about the Internet, but it links to it as well: sitting members expressed safety concerns not only for their person but for their children when they were talking about the conduct of their jobs in ways that their male peers did not. This is an additional element to take into consideration when we're talking about finding those 169 women and setting the stage for them so they'll actually be prepared to participate.

The Chair: Ms. Northam, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Katelynn Northam: On that specific point, not so much. I just want to thank you all, and I'll end by saying that if you are thinking about first past the post, you're endorsing a system that under-represents millions of Canadians.

I think it's a question of whether we can do better and whether we can do better at representing people in this country. I'll leave you with that thought.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have one last question that I would like to ask.

When it comes to countries that have list systems, either MMP or pure proportional—and I know there aren't very many that are pure proportional—on average, what is the gender makeup of the lists? I naively thought they would automatically be fifty-fifty, because that would be one of the reasons you might want to have a list. It was a naive assumption.

Is it anything close to fifty-fifty? If you look at Europe, for example, you would think that the lists would be fifty-fifty, but what are you finding?

Prof. Melanee Thomas: I have the figures for all OECD democracies, meaning Europe and a few other countries. For list proportional representation countries with a legislated gender quota, their legislatures are 32% women. If they have a voluntary party quota with list PR, their legislatures are 29% women. The list PR plus a legislated quota plus a voluntary party quota is 28% women. That suggests to me that if parties are voluntarily putting quotas on and they're legislating quotas, the barriers are considerable.

List PR countries with no quotas are at 30%—

The Chair: Sorry, I don't understand. You're losing me a bit because I'm just looking at the list. I'm not looking at that portion of a system that is riding-based.

When you have a list in a PR or mixed member proportional system, what percentage of the list is typically women? Do some countries have fifty-fifty lists and some have sixty-forty? How does that work?

● (1645)

Prof. Melanee Thomas: The variance is going to be huge, and it will be determined by each political party.

I can tell you that there is at least one party in Sweden that will make it fifty-fifty, but there are a bunch of parties in Sweden that won't.

The Chair: Right. Okay, that's the issue.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: Because parties set the list, it comes down to the party to figure out how many women they want on the list. There's no hard and fast rule. There really isn't.

The Chair: Yes. Then it doesn't converge on equality in any sense in these countries. It's all over the map.

Prof. Melanee Thomas: No, it doesn't. That's right.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

That was really a fantastic session, and I have a feeling that a lot of the testimony from today will work its way into the report.

Thank you for joining us from Calgary.

Thank you for joining and being here, Ms. Northam, and I thank Professor Massicotte in his absence.

Thank you for making the time today. Have a good day. Thank you.

Colleagues, we'll have about a 10-minute break because we—

A voice: We don't have another meeting.

The Chair: We don't have a meeting?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Okay. I thought we were going to do some stuff. There are so many meetings.... I thought there was a meeting.

Colleagues, I haven't hit the gavel yet, but I want to remind you that we have a meeting tomorrow at 9:30 in this room. I'm sorry we don't have a meeting after this.

The meeting is adjourned.