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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (0945)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Good morning, colleagues. Welcome to our witnesses.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank them for being here with us today to share their ideas and their views on this rather complex issue.

This morning we have three witnesses: David McLaughlin, Craig Scott and Graham Fox.

I would like to summarize their biographical notes, starting with David McLaughlin.

[*English*]

David McLaughlin has extensive experience in the public policy sector and has held a variety of senior positions in both the federal government and the New Brunswick provincial government. Mr. McLaughlin served as the chief of staff to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Premier Bernard Lord, and Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty. He has also served in the New Brunswick government as deputy minister of intergovernmental affairs, and policy and planning and in the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy. In the latter capacity, he managed the commission's study on democratic reform, which produced a report with over 80 recommendations for electoral, democratic, and legislative reform. He was also the president and CEO of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy from 2007 to 2012 and is a regular contributor to a variety of publications, including *The Globe and Mail*, *Policy* magazine, and the *Huffington Post*.

[*Translation*]

Craig Scott is a professor of law at the Osgoode Hall Law School of York University. He served as the Member of Parliament for Toronto—Danforth from 2012 to 2015. He attended Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship. He obtained his Masters of Law from the London School of Economics. His academic specialty is international law with a focus on human rights.

Craig Scott is editor of the *Hart Monographs in Transnational and International Law* series and founding editor of *Transnational Legal Theory*. In 2000, he became a member of the Faculty of Law at Osgoode Hall, and he was Osgoode Hall's Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies from 2001 to 2004. As an NDP MP, he was the opposition critic for democratic and parliamentary reform.

Welcome, Mr. Scott. It is a pleasure to see you again here on Parliament Hill.

[*English*]

Graham Fox is the president and CEO of the Institute for Research on Public Policy and has an extensive background in public policy. Mr. Fox has served as chief of staff to the Right Honourable Joe Clark and has been an adviser to members of Parliament. He has also held a number of positions in public policy research organizations, including vice-president of the Public Policy Forum and executive director of the KTA Centre for Collaborative Governance.

Prior to joining the Institute for Research on Public Policy, Mr. Fox was a strategic policy adviser at the law firm Fraser Milner Casgrain, where he provided strategic analysis and advice in a variety of public policy fields.

Welcome, everyone.

Before we get started, I will just mention the way we have been operating. After each witness presents for 10 minutes, we have two rounds of questions. In each round, each member gets to engage with the witnesses. What I mean by that is that questions and answers must fall within a five-minute time limit. We do two rounds in this format.

[*Translation*]

I would like to point out that if an MP has finished speaking in the five-minute period allocated and you did not have time to answer a question or say everything you wanted to, do not worry because you will have an opportunity the next time you speak to finish your thoughts and answer the question asked previously.

We will start with you, Mr. McLaughlin. You have 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. David McLaughlin (As an Individual): Good morning, everyone, and thank you for your invitation to appear before you today. Let me begin by wishing you, first of all, every success in your work on this important matter that will affect all Canadians.

I'm here as an individual with some expertise and knowledge of electoral reform deliberations, and as a deputy minister to the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy from 2003 to 2005. It is in this capacity that I'd like to share some observations and conclusions I hope will assist you in your own deliberations and recommendations.

The New Brunswick process and report was the most extensive democratic reform exercise ever conducted in that province. Electoral reform was a central but by no means the only focus of the commission's work. Specifically the commission was instructed to examine and make recommendations on how to strengthen and modernize New Brunswick's democratic institutions and practices in three main areas: electoral reform, legislative reform, and democratic reform.

Electoral reform is about changing our voting system, drawing electoral boundaries, setting fixed election dates, and boosting voter turnout. Legislative reform is about enhancing the roles of MLAs in the legislative assembly, and opening up the appointments process for agencies, boards, and commissions. Democratic reform is about involving the public more in decision-making and proposing a referendum act.

The commission's goal was to present recommendations that would bring about fairer, more equitable, and effective representation in the legislative assembly; greater public involvement in decisions affecting people and their communities; more open, responsive, and accountable democratic institutions and practices; and higher civic engagement and participation of New Brunswickers.

Our final report, which I have here, is over 200 pages long with some 100 specific recommendations. It provided research, analysis, policy recommendations, and even specific legal text in a process of just over one year of meetings. The driving mission animating the commission, which I commend to you in turn, was fostering a more citizen-led democracy.

This focus on citizens led the commission to develop three themes from which our recommendations flowed. Common to each was how democracy can be made to work better for “you, the citizen”. Those three themes were making your vote count, making the system work, and making your voice heard. When we were in doubt about our approach, or faced trade-offs and choices, as you undoubtedly will, this focus on citizens kept us grounded and focused.

I want to highlight three areas of our work germane to the committee's mandate: democratic values and principles, electoral reform, and citizen engagement. The commission began, as you did too, with a focus on democratic values. When it came to deciding the best electoral system for New Brunswick, we had to make trade-offs based on which of those values mattered most. You will, too.

The key principles we used to decide upon a new electoral system included local representation, which is the principle of all geographic areas of the province having a particular representative in the legislature to represent their interests; fair representation, ensuring all New Brunswickers' voices were fairly represented in the legislature; equality of the vote, ensuring each voter's ballot had equal influence in determining the election's winner; and effective government, the ability of the system to result in the easy selection of a stable government that is able to govern the province.

We used those principles to consider the strengths and weaknesses of various electoral systems and specific design features. These principles are similar to your list of values, with perhaps one notable difference: effective government. Your focus is on effectiveness within the electoral system. We also considered that, but the commission felt strongly that the outcomes of that electoral system had to include the notion of producing governments that could govern. Instability of legislatures and governments was much on our minds.

We recommended a mixed member proportional system as optimal for the province, based on a consideration of all the alternatives in relation to the roster of democratic principles. Animating New Brunswick's discussion most was a peculiar outcome of provincial politics: big majority governments and small, weak oppositions. Between 1987 and 1999, you may recall, the opposition never won more than 20% of the seats in the legislature, despite the combined opposition parties winning between 40% and 52% of the vote during this same period. MMP would fix that.

MMP also proved appealing when considering the regional nature of urban and rural communities in the province. It also proved viable —and this was important to New Brunswick, as Canada's only officially bilingual province—to ensuring equality of representation between the English and French linguistic communities. MMP's ability to create regions mapped to linguistic boundaries, with party seats for topping up votes in a two-vote system, was deemed attractive.

● (0950)

We recommended a 56-seat house, with two-thirds single member seats elected via the current first past the post system, and one-third PR seats, choosing five MLAs from closed party lists in one of four multi-member regions on the basis of the party vote received within the region. The two-thirds:one-third split enabled us to both ensure necessary local representation while introducing a sufficient degree of proportionality to be meaningful in translating votes into seats.

A minimum 5% threshold in the separate party vote on a province-wide basis was required to be eligible to win any list PR seats. This was necessary to avoid a proliferation of single-issue parties with undue influence in the legislature.

Candidates would be required to choose to run as either a single member riding candidate or a regional PR list candidate, but not both, as a way to avoid perceptions of gaming the electoral system.

Engaging New Brunswickers in our process and the eventual decision on a new electoral system was central to our consideration. Frankly, despite best efforts with a dedicated website, the social media technology of the time, regional open town hall meetings, online questionnaires, an interim report, academic conferences, and partnering with civil society organizations, interest and participation in the commission's work was low.

We were of no doubt that we had done our own work thoroughly and fairly, but an electoral system is not the politician's or party's property. We felt strongly that a referendum was necessary to legitimize such a change. Our recommendation was for a double majority, comprised of 50% plus one of votes cast by at least 50% of eligible voters, in a binding province-wide referendum vote.

To ensure fairness and impartiality in the referendum process, we recommended a new referendum act for the province with extensive provisions for governing such a process to be held at the time of the next provincial election. It contained spending and contribution limits, establishment of referendum committees, registration of groups, voter education, and a new independent Elections New Brunswick agency to administer it. We also recommended a legislative assembly study committee to review the new voting system after two elections and report any improvements that might be necessary.

There were two conclusions from our work that may assist you in yours.

First, FPTP has good features and is both familiar and legitimate to most voters. After all, we do accept election night results, and Canada has progressed. However, it does have clear drawbacks and inadequacies that an MMP system could mitigate. MMP, we know, is more reflective of the democratic values of fairness, inclusiveness, choice, and equality of vote. However, MMP at the national level has never really been modelled or analyzed in a comprehensive way that I've seen, except for one Law Commission of Canada report. There are real consequences that we found in outcomes, based on the specific design of that system, that you will need to research and consider should you decide to recommend it.

Second, public legitimacy of a new electoral system is highly desirable and surmounts party and politician interests. It is about the citizen and voter in a citizen-centred democracy. A referendum is the simplest, clearest, and most acceptable way of conferring legitimacy for the long term, not just on the system but more importantly on the outcomes it produces.

I know this is contentious, so let me offer a second best but still viable option to you: provide for a validating referendum after two elections, based on a Parliamentary review of the system, and give Canadians the chance to accept it, perhaps with improvements, or revert back to the previous system.

I'd be happy to take any questions you might have. Thank you for the invitation and for listening.

● (0955)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLaughlin.

We will now move on to Mr. Scott.

[*English*]

Professor Craig Scott (Professor of Law, Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, As an Individual): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. It's good to be back. If I'd known I was coming, I'd have baked a cake, which is to say, I would have sent a paper. But I haven't and I'll send one afterwards.

Just to situate you briefly, yes, I did work on this file when I was a parliamentarian. I think the culmination, in terms of what went on in Parliament, was an opposition day motion in December 2014 specifically to test the waters on not continuing with winner-take-all electoral systems and specifically to endorse mixed member proportional representation adapted to Canada. The vote didn't pass, but it is noteworthy to know that 16 of the 31 Liberal MPs voting that day did vote with the motion. Therefore, I think we have the basis for the cross-partisan/pan-partisan discussion that this committee is clearly all about.

Let me start by explaining in brief several reasons mixed member proportional deserves to be at the top, or at the top along with one or two other proportional models.

The standard reason you've all heard is that it's the best of two worlds, which are the two principles from the committee's mandate. They are called effectiveness and legitimacy, but effectively it's the fair translation of the votes-into-seats principle and the local representation principle, which are both attended to by the model.

The second two reasons I want to point out are less commonly noted.

The first is one that I have been beating like a dead horse for the last three years, but others don't seem to talk about it as much. I think MMP takes local MPs and local candidates much more seriously than any other form of PR and more than first past the post. That's because of the potential for crossover voting. Voters can tick “local representative” and vote for candidate X, who happens to be from a certain party, and then go over to the regional MP lists and decide which party they want to support, and which person on the list if it's flexible. They don't have to be from the same party.

I think that has salutary impacts. In New Zealand, around 30% take up that option of cross-voting. It means that the local candidates are more likely to be able to attract votes for who they are, what they've done, what they can bring nationally from the local level, without having to worry about the strategic vote. I think this is an extremely important feature of MMP.

The second thing is almost heresy to say, but I think the idea of having a coterie of regional MPs alongside the purely local MP has a salutary impact on national politics. It already is taking a bunch of MPs away from the purely local. They're going to have to look a bit more broadly at the dynamics in a bigger area than a local riding. I believe, after three years on the Hill, that we have a deficit when it comes to a capacity to focus on national issues in our Parliament. It's far too localized by virtue of the system of 338 ridings set alongside each other, which somehow then has to generate a national politics. I think there would be some added benefit from MMP that way.

Some of the problems from the current system deserve to be highlighted because I think MMP does address them, as would any serious PR system. One is the “diversity of viewpoints” problem. When you have false majorities, you have less of a true diversity of the range of voters' opinions. You have a serous problem with lack of diversity of viewpoints coming from regions. Right now Atlantic Canada is represented by albeit a fairly large-tent party, but nonetheless one party. Toronto has gone without representatives other than one party. When the NDP swept in Quebec in 2011, we had 80% of the seats, with something like 42%, 43%, 44% of the vote. That was no fairer in our score than what's happened in many other contexts.

It exacerbates regionalism because people tend to start associating Alberta for example as nothing but Conservative, especially if that repeats itself over more than one election.

It also feeds into an unduly executive-dominated Westminster system of Parliament. The false majorities can give licence to that power dynamic. It can produce tunnel vision and ideological fixations in legislation, rather than forcing legislation to have to encounter the different points of view that the product of proportional representation elections tends to produce and our false majority system doesn't.

● (1000)

I also believe we have a system—and it can be exacerbated in different points in time—that tends away from consensus and collegiality, and toward adversarialism and hyper-partisanship, almost a gridiron style of politics that is tied a bit to the winner-take-all dynamic and the organizing for the next election on those same terms.

Alternative vote is a ranked ballot system within single-member districts that is on the table. The Liberal Party has put it on the table in its own policy book from some time ago. I just want to make sure that.... It is crucial that everybody know there is nothing about AV that would really counteract most, if any, of these problems.

The first thing is that, although it is unpredictable, it is almost always the case that, at least to some extent, AV will exacerbate the problem of disproportionality. Éric Grenier for CBC, using available data right after the last election, suggested that something like 224 Liberals would have been elected, instead of the 185 or so who were elected under the current system.

Beyond that, even on its own terms, AV is presented as a majoritarian system. I want to make sure everybody understands the limitations to that characterization.

First of all, it's not really majoritarian in the sense of a majority of first preferences. For many of the ridings, you have to add second preferences. That's the first thing that everybody has to note.

The second thing is that it doesn't even make sense of the notion of making every vote count, which was the top line in the government's platform in the last election.

For years, we all assumed that the expression of making every vote count really referred to proportional representation. But it's clear that if it was used in the Liberal platform, it had to be meant to possibly do service to keep open the possibility of alternative vote. However, that can't be the case when AV doesn't actually count every vote equally. It's not just that what happens is that when you count the second votes, you're only counting from the bottom up until somebody crosses the 50% threshold. You almost never get to counting the second votes of the first- and second-place candidates after the first round. It's actually a false presentation of making every vote count.

I would say that there's also a deceptive majority problem. I'll send you the chart where I've done the work on this. You can actually get candidates crossing the threshold of 50% plus one in the first plus second votes, while if you added up all of the first- and second-place votes, including those for the top two candidates, that candidate would not be the preference.

It's a system that has benefits, but you have to be very careful to know what they are and not falsely say this is about a majoritarian system. It's really not a majoritarian system of great consequence.

I'll end by saying that I spent three years as an official opposition critic for democratic reform making the case for PR, and the NDP's position was MMP. That was arrived at after the NDP studied it in the early 2000s. There have been various commissions across the country, including the one in New Brunswick that was really well outlined by Mr. McLaughlin, the positive experience abroad in Scotland and New Zealand, Germany, for example, and my own review. I do believe MMP is the ideal, but I want to emphasize that principled and respectful compromise can do the job too. It's central already to your work.

I would, for example, urge this committee to consider the U.K. Jenkins commission's idea of MMP, allowing ranked ballot voting on the local election side. You'd have to make sure that you don't have a split between local and regional seats that unduly favours the local election side, because the ranked ballot could produce greater distortions at that level. But if there are folks in the room who say there's an independent benefit to ranked ballot voting for local elections, it can be built in.

Similarly, I also believe you can design a single transferable vote system that would allow for a degree of local attention. You can divvy up multi-member district ridings for service functions. You can have a coordinated delivery of services even though all the MPs represent the entire riding, and you can approximate a form of local attention with STV.

There are ways to compromise and get to multiple goals.

There are many other institutional design features that I'm happy to take questions on, but I'd end by saying that I think this committee started extremely well. Minister Monsef's introduction talked about two mischiefs, not one. She talked about the problem of false majority. She also talked about why an alternative vote style system might address another set of problems. She wasn't exclusive, and the composition of this committee has, I think, given a jump-start to something that many doubted would ever be possible.

There are lots of folks out there, nay-sayers, commentators, who are assuming that behind the scenes—not for the members of this committee but behind the scenes—one of the goals is for this to all end up as a big noble failure and that there will be a deadlock, an impasse, nothing will come out of it, and we'll keep the current system. I don't think that has to happen. I have a skeptical optimism that I believe we can do much better, and I believe you're starting that because this very committee is formed in a way that proportional representation would form committees in the future. You guys can do it. It will itself be proof that a system can work like this in the future.

● (1005)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Scott.

[*Translation*]

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Fox.

Mr. Graham Fox (President and Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Research on Public Policy): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to speak to you today.

Since it began holding hearings, the committee has met many experts who have spoken about the characteristics of various voting systems, the experiences of different countries with these systems, and whether or not they could be implemented in Canada considering our geographic and demographic realities as well as our political system.

Naturally, these considerations are very important. However, in my presentation this morning, I will instead focus on the committee's mandate, the deliberative process, and engaging citizens in this debate, which may have an outcome with all sorts of consequences for the democratic system, whether intended or not. In that sense, although this was not planned, I will echo a number of the points that Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. Scott have already raised.

● (1010)

[*English*]

That is why the manner in which Canadians are engaged in this deliberative process is so critically important to any eventual proposal for reform and to the legitimacy that proposal will have in the eyes of voters.

It is exponentially more important that we get this right, than that we get it done on time.

[*Translation*]

With regard to the consultation tools that have already been announced, I applaud this committee's efforts to create more opportunities for people to express their views on this issue. Your decision to hold meetings across the country and the availability of an on-line questionnaire are obviously good ways to engage the people who want to be heard.

They are opportunities to express an opinion. However, to develop a broad consensus among voters, which, in my opinion, is vital to the the long-term success of a reform proposal, you must also create opportunities to share, to exchange and to move forward.

[*English*]

The consultation process that's been launched currently allows for the articulation of interests, but it is less clear how those varied and sometimes competing interests will be aggregated into a public consensus on the best way forward.

Canadians should have as many opportunities as possible to state their views, but a genuinely deliberative process should also capture the changing of views as individuals hear from others or consider new evidence. As elected representatives of the people, members of Parliament can certainly support that process by staying connected to the evolving views of their constituents and reflecting them in their interventions in Parliament. However, party policy and party discipline will put limits on their ability to do so freely if constituents have views that differ from that of their party, legitimate limits perhaps, but limits nonetheless.

On an issue of such fundamental importance to the democratic system, Canadians themselves must participate meaningfully in the debate and their collective wisdom must drive the outcome. Thus, the question that came to me as I was considering this process was how we graduate from public consultation to citizen engagement. With this in mind, I'd make the following observations for the committee's consideration.

First, I'm not sure the average voter yet knows what problem we're trying to fix. Every voting system comes with distortions and flaws, but what is it precisely about the outcomes of single member plurality that we think are deficient? This very point in the public's mind that alternative voting systems would yield more desirable outcomes is in itself a matter of contention.

The committee's mandate is to make recommendations to the House, but should the government, based on the committee's advice, decide to produce a bill, public leadership will be required to ensure there's broad support for the intention of reforming the electoral system, which I humbly submit does not currently exist. In order to achieve any measure of consensus on reform, we must first ensure that there's a common agreement that there is a problem to be fixed and a common understanding of what that is.

[*Translation*]

Naturally, I recognize that the committee was given a very specific mandate and must operate within a given framework. However, perhaps it would be possible in your exchanges and in your reports to remind decision-makers that the educational dimension of this debate is vital to the way forward. The information booklets on the reform options provided by the committee are very useful, but eventually the government will also have to show leadership and convince Canadians that the reform is necessary and a priority.

Second, the mandate of this committee lists principles and values that any proposed reform should support or enhance, namely, effectiveness and legitimacy, participation, accessibility, integrity, and local representation. To my mind, the mandate gets it right in the sense that the right principles were identified. The work that remains to be done is the public debate on prioritizing these five principles in the event that they conflict.

As citizens, do we prefer to sacrifice a little local representation in order to increase the participation of groups that are currently underrepresented, or do we prefer a voting system that protects at all costs the link between the elected representative and the territory?

Both options can be defended, but we must reach a consensus.

[*English*]

It is on these values and principles outlined in the committee's mandate that the public debate should be centred, at least in the initial phase. The eventual debates on the mechanics of voting systems should be based on how we collectively feel about these values and how we've agreed to resolve the conflicts among them if and when they arise.

A common understanding of the relative importance of these values for Canadians will also ensure that the eventual choice of a voting system can be assessed against a public declaration of shared values rather than tactical partisan interests, and on this specific issue of designing the engagement exercise, either as part of this process or any subsequent legislative process if a bill does indeed come to Parliament.

I'd encourage the committee to reach out to expert practitioners, such as Don Lenihan, who have direct experience working on engagement exercises within parliamentary and government processes.

As a final observation and echoing a point that Professor Scott made, I want to reflect on the composition of this committee and the choice that was made to ensure that it was more reflective of the popular vote than the makeup of the House of Commons. In an important way, that makes this committee a prototype of the typical committee of the House of Commons elected under a more proportional system.

● (1015)

[*Translation*]

One of the principles mentioned in the committee's mandate seeks to foster collaboration in the political processes. The committee's composition makes it possible to go beyond the recommendations and demonstrate this collaboration in your work.

[*English*]

The way in which the committee conducts its business and reports back to the House will be instructive as to how Parliament under a new system would behave. You have the opportunity to foreshadow what electoral reform might yield. Process in this case is content.

The political sensitivity of the issues you must consider may increase the risk of trying to achieve consensus among you, but the signal it could send may also increase its rewards. In contrast, a result that is more akin to the expected majority report by MPs from the governing party and dissenting reports from all the others may be less encouraging to those who hope that a change in the electoral system will bring more collaboration to our politics.

On that specific point, let me say that, like Professor Scott, I think the committee is off to a really terrific start on that front.

[*Translation*]

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I would like to thank you very much once again for your invitation. I wish you good luck. I would be pleased to discuss this matter with members of the committee and to answer their questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fox.

We will start the first round with Mr. Aldag, who has five minutes.

[*English*]

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

Thanks again to all of our witnesses for some wonderful testimony. There's lots to think about.

The three of you have provided some excellent additional insights, things that I'm mulling over, but I'm going to start by taking a step back. Part of it's triggered by a discussion from one of our panels yesterday about “is this the right time for change?” I'd like to pose that question to the three of you. We're not in a crisis situation right now. The comment was made that the crowd's not marching and protesting by torchlight. Do we need to wait for that kind of crisis in our system to do it or are we at the right time? I've heard some general support for continuing our discussion.

Mr. Fox, I think it goes to comments that you made about whether change is needed now.

Prof. Craig Scott: I'll start by saying I think it's probably in general not great public policy to wait for a crisis.

Second, there's been a slow buildup to this. It's not as if it's coming out of the blue. Since the early 2000s till right now, we've had a number of different commissions and processes from different provinces, even at the federal level with the Law Commission of Canada. There's something to be said for the slow-boiling, cumulative politics that produced where we're at now, which is what can tend to happen a little in more consensual parliamentary processes. They might take a bit longer for the same reasons.

Third is something called electoral promises. If we take seriously the very fundamentals of our electoral democracy feeding into the parliamentary system, it was a pretty high-profile promise on the part of the government to start this kind of process. At least two other parties had more specific ideas but obviously were open to the bigger discussion about what kind of electoral reform, so I think there is a popular mandate. People vote for all kinds of reasons and all kinds of dynamics, but we would be throwing out the window the idea of party platforms and the worth of electoral promises if we didn't take this one quite seriously.

● (1020)

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Mr. Fox.

Mr. Graham Fox: In support of what Professor Scott just said, I think it is precisely because there is no imminent crisis that this kind of work needs to happen now. But I would add that it emphasizes the importance of public education and bringing along voters and citizens as a necessary component of a successful process.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Mr. McLaughlin.

Mr. David McLaughlin: I would concur with both Craig and Graham in what they said, but I would offer this bit of dissent. I think your job frankly is more difficult because there is no imminent crisis or sense of need to get at this right now, which would concentrate the public's mind on it. Part of your task, while you study various systems and look for improvements, as you should as parliamentarians, is also convincing Canadians of the need for change.

Graham said at the outset, what's the problem we're trying to fix? I do believe you still have to spend some time communicating that and putting it in terms that people can relate to. It is worth casting ourselves back to the previous commissions. At the time we did New Brunswick along with others, very specific electoral outcomes were driving the debate. As I mentioned, New Brunswick had big majority governments, small oppositions. That was bothering people, so that animated our conversation. In B.C. the citizens' assembly went from one extreme to the other, where Gordon Campbell won almost every seat. In Quebec, Jean Charest and the Liberals won the majority vote but lost the election. These things do get into people's minds a sense that the system isn't fair.

Right now, because there isn't that sense across the country, I would argue, post the last election, your task is a little more difficult. Frankly you'll need to find some ways to get it on people's minds, but the way you do your work will work for you in two ways. It is the way you do your work, the consultative process, the engagement, but it's also the quality of your work and the recommendations that you come out with.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Reid now.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you very much. All the presentations were excellent, but I have to focus my questions on one person, so it will be Professor Scott.

First of all, let me say, Craig, it's a pleasure having you back here.

Prof. Craig Scott: It's good to see you too, Scott.

Mr. Scott Reid: We sat on a committee together during Craig's entire period as a parliamentarian. I thought he was one of the most thoughtful people we had ever had on that committee. That's high praise, because among others Ed Broadbent had sat on that committee at one point.

Prof. Craig Scott: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Reid: I want to turn to substance. I agree with your analysis of alternative vote. I think you're entirely correct in how you describe it. I think it has an additional problem in Canada, and that is that, unlike most first past the post systems, where you tend to get a party of the right and a party of the left battling it out, and you get a government of the left or the right alternating, in Canada we've tended to have a party of the centre governing. The Liberals, therefore, have a systemic and predictable advantage under the AV system.

Harold Jansen who appeared before us pointed out that both in 2015, their best election in three decades, and in the 2000 election, the worst election ever for the Liberals, they'd get more seats under alternative vote than under the status quo. I asked about previous studies, previous elections. He said one had been done on 1997 that confirmed the same thing, and I've since looked up that study. It appears to be the case that, given our party structure, perhaps not forever but at least for the next election, this produces a predictable result. That is significant because you could get a smaller percentage of the vote than they got this time and still get a majority under AV, and therefore get 100% of the power. In fact, this is the opposite of the kind of proportionality that I think we're looking for.

Having said that, I'll now move on to your discussion of MMP. Again, my sense, from what we've heard from witnesses, is that MMP tends to work better in the Canadian context than in the other proportional models for reasons I won't go into or else I'll do all the talking. You mentioned a model, which was recommended by the Jenkins commission, that involves proportionality through a list, and then has alternative vote at the riding level. You said you think it may have some merit.

I'll read the Jenkins commission's report in due time, but the concern I have under this system is that if we implemented it here, one party, the Liberals, would get all or the vast majority of the riding votes, and the list seats would therefore go to the other parties. This would produce, at the very least, an odd balance in Parliament. It might not be the end of the world, but I want to ask you if that strikes you as being a problem, given the nature of Canada.

● (1025)

Prof. Craig Scott: Yes, it's definitely a problem. It's why I very hurriedly ended my comments by saying you'll have to be very careful about the distribution of local versus the regional list seats, because you'll get at least as much if not greater distortion of the number of seats won by a party that's favoured by AV at the front end. For example, if one said that the law reform commission, without recommending AV as the way to vote on the local side, just first past the post for the local elections, recommended 65:35, or roughly two-thirds and one-third, if you kept that proportion and went to AV, it wouldn't be good enough. You'd have to at least go down to 60% in order to account for that extra distortion, for the reasons that you're saying.

I'm offering it out there as a position that would still have to be fought for. People would still have to ask what is it about AV, other than what I'm calling relatively unclear and not entirely accurate claims about majoritarianism, that people think is fixing something? If that case is made, and somebody wants to go in that direction, you can still build it into MMP. That's really my only point. It's not the first place I would go, because I think it makes the proportionality side harder to achieve.

Mr. Scott Reid: I have 20 seconds, so just quickly, we heard a very good presentation yesterday from some German professors suggesting we should have a fifty-fifty split, list seats versus riding seats. Given a choice of where you'd put the marker, what percentage would you pick?

Prof. Craig Scott: I tend to use sixty-forty; it's almost a political guess, too. Proportionality is my first stop in terms of design. I think the German system comes much closer to ensuring it, and fifty-fifty is recommended for a reason by them, but sixty-forty I think would be the top that I would go to in terms of the split.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I'm a seventy-thirty guy myself, but we can have that argument later.

I don't know if any of you read the Andrew Coyne piece from yesterday. He talked about effectiveness of government. One of the things that government needs to be effective is predictability that they can have a two-, three-, or four-year mandate. In nine out of 20 of the last elections, Canadians have put forward a minority Parliament, which under first past the post is very unstable, because there's an incentive from somebody at any point to bring the government down. Yet when we've looked through the global experience of first past the post versus proportional governments, there is actually slightly more stability on the proportional government side, because there isn't that same incentive under that system to bring the government down.

Is anything I've said so far wrong in the analysis, Mr. Fox or Mr. Scott?

Mr. Graham Fox: Not in my view; I think it's a compelling argument.

Mr. David McLaughlin: At the time we were doing our work, we found a bit of the opposite. I do recommend, if you're interested, some academic research that we had conducted and that we published in a book. Many of these academics you've seen here. Some of it may be dated, but we did some original analysis to show the effects of government formation and instability. At that time, 2003 to 2005, PR governments seemed a bit more unstable, but I know you've had some subsequent research. Maybe it's changed a bit, but I did look at it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We looked at some OECD 60-year longitudinal study, that type of thing.

Prof. Craig Scott: I think the bottom line is that the two systems, on the stability measures of length between elections and length of government, are actually quite similar. There's a tiny edge on these long-term longitudinal studies for PR systems, but it's not statistically significant. A lot of the studies that might have been taken into account back in the early 2000s were throwing Italy in. What were effectively cabinet shuffles—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Ah, Italy.

Prof. Craig Scott: —were treated as government changes. That skewed some statistics.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: When the cabinet would shift, it was recorded as a change of government.

Prof. Craig Scott: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The voter's experience is what I'm interested in, so I want to go back to you, David, on the recommendations you made in New Brunswick about treating votes equally, regardless of where they're cast. You've joined some other folks, because we have this legitimacy question as well. How do we legitimize what's going on here?

I hear in different ways from all three of you a responsibility, a test put to us as a committee regarding the composition of this committee, which is closer to a reflection of how Canadians voted, and whether this committee can function. So far so good.

David, the idea of testing a new voting system after it's put in place has been supported by some and decried by others. You suggested support for it today. How come?

● (1030)

Mr. David McLaughlin: The starting point for me is that it's the public system. It's not the party's system or a politician's system and whatnot.

I also think our sense of democracy has changed over time in terms of what people are expecting from elected officials. It's unfortunate, but we don't hold a high enough opinion of them to devolve upon them all of these kinds of decisions. While I think elected officials through this process can very much inform the way people think and help them with the options, I just have a strong sense in this country that we will not, as citizens, give up that opportunity or that right, as we perceive it, to cast a vote on it, one way or the other.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Craig, you talked earlier about tunnel vision in policy. We had Mr. Broadbent here earlier suggesting that if you go back in time we've had many governments form in Canada with very poor representation from all the regions. Previous Liberal governments with almost no representation in the west, his contention was that it led to some bad energy policy. We've had Conservative governments with the opposite: a very strong western base, but virtually nothing in Quebec over much time. The balance of those interests and regional interests under a proportional system, some see that as a diffusion of focus for a government, a lessening of the strength of the policy that comes forward.

How would you argue against that?

The Chair: Be very brief, please.

Prof. Craig Scott: I'll be very brief.

I think insight and legitimacy comes from diversity. If you have a serious interaction of diverse points of view in a good-faith climate, you come to better policy.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, you now have the floor.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank you, gentlemen, for these presentations.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of open change, but not just any change in any way whatsoever. We are saying that we have to go beyond the inner circle, the experts, and especially the political parties. We are starting from the premise that this is a file dominated by partisanship. As balanced as it is, the committee is also dominated by partisanship.

That is why we believe that there must be a second step in the process. We must put citizens back at the centre of our desire for reform. I understand that you agree with that, Mr. McLaughlin.

[*English*]

Mr. David McLaughlin: I don't have a sense that this committee is that partisan. I do have a sense that it's proportional and the parties are doing their work and members of Parliament are doing their work. With that slight dissent, I do believe and did offer up a referendum, a chance for citizens and voters to pronounce on the work of this committee. More fundamentally, a government motion, a bill that would go into the House of Commons through the parliamentary process is the way to bring the most legitimacy to the eventual outcomes of the process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: What do you think, Mr. Scott?

Mr. Craig Scott: As Mr. Fox said, I also believe that there is an educational aspect to this issue. It is not therefore necessarily a question of partisanship, but a question of knowing whether or not the the men and women in politics represent Canadians.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Do you not think, Mr. Scott, that when a government or political parties are responsible for reforms, the motivation for change is the extent to which it favours the party and partisan interests?

● (1035)

Mr. Craig Scott: Yes.

Mr. Luc Thériault: First of all, no one is going to forget that. Everyone recognizes that no system is perfect. There are advantages and disadvantages to every system.

Mr. Craig Scott: That is not the same thing.

Mr. Luc Thériault: The final decision must be the responsibility of the people; it must be up to them.

What do you think, Mr. Fox?

Mr. Graham Fox: That is exactly why the debate on values and principles is so important.

Even if citizens form constituent assemblies, we will do whatever we want if, during the debate, the first things discussed are the mechanisms and voting systems and whether we want one system or another. If we do not first agree on the values that underlie the system, we will have the dynamic that you described. We must produce a public declaration of the principles we want to uphold. Then, we can assess the specific proposals on the basis of these values rather than on one another's partisan interests.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Don't you think that's what would happen if we adopt a mixed-member proportional system?

We have to change the mechanism, but for things to be equitable, we need to reinstate federal funding for votes cast. We can't say we support ideological pluralism if we don't give an equal chance to every one of the voices that we want to see as part of that plurality in the House.

I would add that reforming parliamentary procedure would ensure that no MPs end up in a situation like the Bloc Québécois's.

Mr. Graham Fox: I don't necessarily want to speak to the specific issue of public funding for political parties. However, once we have greater clarity about the debate happening around this table, we will have to see where it fits into the greater governance picture.

What would more coalitions in Ottawa mean for the federal system if the provinces don't have the same system?

The funding issue is related to all that. We need a big-picture perspective on this.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Still, the main goal is not the determination of governance, but plurality within the legislative branch, which is the foundation of democracy. The executive branch is not the foundation of democracy.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May, your turn.

[*English*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses, and again particularly, you said in your opening, Craig, that if you'd known you were coming.... For those who are watching who don't know, you were able to sub in at the last minute for a witness who suddenly cancelled. I don't know how many of you are in the same boat, but I'm very grateful to have this panel this morning.

I want to start with you, David, about the experience of the New Brunswick commission. I have a question from Twitter that came from Laurel Russwurm. She wants to know if you think New Brunswick should have implemented the recommendations. It's a tough question. You put a lot of work into it. Do you wish in hindsight that MMP had been brought in for New Brunswick?

Mr. David McLaughlin: Yes, because it would have been brought in by a Conservative government that had been re-elected.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: Excellent.

Mr. David McLaughlin: The commitment by Premier Lord was that if he had won the next election it would have gone ahead, but there was a change in government and the new Liberal government said no.

Ms. Elizabeth May: In terms of your focus, I'm very gratified by the focus that you've brought here, which you used in the commission, of a more citizen-led democracy. I've been trying to figure out how we, as parliamentarians, because I see us around this table first and foremost parliamentarians and not some sort of proxy unit for large political parties.... I think the way we'll come to a consensus here will be operating as parliamentarians, and we have to somehow disengage the notion of a voting system that serves political parties and focus on a voting system that serves the interests of voters to feel their vote counts.

How in practice did that lead you to MMP? I'll ask the same question of Craig and Graham, if I may. How do we as parliamentarians dislodge ourselves or at least communicate to Canadians that our job here is to act in the interests of Canadian democracy and the voters?

Mr. David McLaughlin: It led us to MMP with the broader mandate that we had and with those other principles too of effective government, quality of the vote, etc.

When we had to make certain trade-offs, we looked at different systems, so we looked at AV, we looked at STV, we studied Germany, New Zealand, all of the same kinds of models. As a specific example, we knew then New Brunswickers were really quite keen and fond of having their local MLA. Losing that connection would have undermined that citizen focus, if you will, so we put that in there.

We also had recommendations with respect to how parties could reform themselves, and that was getting a bit at some of the issues that Mr. Thériault raised. Again, we wanted more transparency in the process.

We thought a two-vote system was not complicated. Everybody can count to two, but we thought, with the citizen focus, that a more complicated system with large ballot sheets might actually not be the best thing for voters. It began with the principles, Elizabeth, but then as we worked through the various design elements, they helped us make some of those choices.

My final point is that parties are legitimate actors in this system. Fairness to parties, in a way, is not something you can absolutely discount. But if it's all about parties and if it's seen to be about parties, then you have lost your way and the system will have lost its way.

● (1040)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Craig, do you have a comment on this?

Prof. Craig Scott: Yes. It may be a slightly tangential comment because I didn't get it in on my main comment. It is that if we are going to take Canadians seriously in the way you have outlined so well, we also have to bring into the discussion, at the institutional design level, a few other questions.

The question of gender has to be really quite central. For example, if you went to an MMP system, would the zippering of the list be that every second person on the list for any given party must, by legislation, be a woman? Would something along those lines make sense as well for aboriginal peoples, given where we are at in our collective understanding of 150-and-going years of relationships with aboriginal peoples? I think you have to somehow figure out those two factors, along with other, less representative communities. It is not the generic people only. You have to think about Canada as it is and figure out what elements can be built in that aren't overly complicating.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I think I have 20 seconds left for your comment, Graham.

Mr. Graham Fox: Not to be too cute, but find more time.

A pan-Canadian citizens' assembly is probably unworkable, given geography and those things, but I think there are other ways you can build a process. If you are going to follow the principle that you first need to define before you discuss and before you decide, you are going to need more time.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Mrs. Romanado.

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

I would like to thank our three witnesses today for coming in on a sunny August.... Sorry, it is September 1 now. It has been a long summer.

Mr. Fox, you mentioned something that a few witnesses have said to us, and it is kind of sticking out now: what is the problem we are trying to solve? For us, it is very evident, but we heard in yesterday's testimony that only 3% of Canadians are actively engaged in this process. Looking at the process we have put in place so far, should we be doing some sort of situational analysis before we go out on our road show? What should we be doing to make sure that folks understand what the problem is that we are trying to solve, and what would be the best way to do that? Could you elaborate?

Mr. Graham Fox: I think the idea of trying to take stock, before you go on the road, of the advice and testimony you have heard is quite an interesting one. It may be that behind closed doors all members of the committee have come to a common definition of the problem. I am not aware of that.

Certainly, if you could all sign on to a common articulation of what it is that you think you are trying to fix, that would make the process progress tremendously. I think there is also an interesting signal in that. If this committee can come to a common articulation of the problem, then it makes it easier for Canadians to reflect on it and say, "Well, do I agree with this? Yes or no?", as opposed to trying to grow a common understanding organically as you are travelling the country, where you might be at this for 18 drafts and not get to a final one.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

Mr. McLaughlin, you said the one value that wasn't included was the effective government, and my colleague mentioned it as well. In terms of prioritizing the values or principles, what are the things that Canadians may be willing to trade off? We have heard there is no perfect system to address all the issues that we have in our electoral reform mandate.

What should we be doing to make sure we capture the proper information to give us the idea of what is absolutely non-negotiable versus "Okay, I could live without that"? What would you recommend?

● (1045)

Mr. David McLaughlin: I'm going to riff a bit off what Graham Fox said in terms of putting some stuff out there that people can react to. We did that in the New Brunswick commission. We had an options paper. We had some draft recommendations. We put things out to try to narrow the debate in terms of getting people to respond to specific things, to help us come to conclusions and decisions. I do commend that, whatever the equivalent would be for you folks to do something similar.

An example of the trade-offs would be proportionality, pure proportionality versus effective government. A pure PR system, designed willy-nilly, will lead you to issues of stability and the rest of it. There is an example of it. How far are people prepared to go? They will list these things as their values and they will want to have them reflected as much as possible. That's the dilemma—as much as possible. So it's two words: design matters. The design of your system, in terms of what kinds of outcomes it produces, will have a real impact on how much of one value or principle is reflected or not.

I think Canadians would be willing to let a committee like this, hearing from experts, help shape that, as long as they see that the core principles are in there. Since there is no ideal system, there is no best system. It is by definition going to be a choice of trade-offs, but the sooner you are able to put out to people something about your thinking, something about shaping the conversation in a way that allows you to get a better handle on it, the more productive your work will be.

The short answer is that there are lots of specifics you can do in there, but something along those lines would be useful.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

Mr. Scott, do you have any suggestions?

The Chair: You have about 15 seconds.

Prof. Craig Scott: I think what Mr. McLaughlin said was absolutely correct.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Okay, good.

Mr. Richards.

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

I appreciate everyone being here today.

Good to see you again, Mr. Scott. As Mr. Reid said earlier, you and I had this opportunity to sit on that committee together as well. I feel like we're playing musical chairs, because I think you sat right in this chair, exactly—

Prof. Craig Scott: Exactly that chair....

Mr. Blake Richards: —where I am. I was over there. I don't think either one of us ever thought we'd be sitting over there where you are, but welcome back.

Prof. Craig Scott: Forced retirement has its virtues, by the way.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think I'm going to start, though, with you, Mr. McLaughlin.

You made a comment in *The Globe and Mail* in May, and I'm going to quote it. You said, the process here is "short on principles, short on timing, [and] short on legitimacy." Now I think a lot of people in the room will be surprised to hear that I want to focus on the timing part of that quote. You went on in that article to say that the "five provinces that did this each took about two years to do it, not six months. Each proposed a two- or three-step process involving the legislature, independent commissions or citizen assemblies and in four cases, a referendum."

What I wanted to focus on was the fact there are almost two competing parts in the Liberal promise in their campaign that we have to grapple with at this point now. The first was, obviously, the clear statement that this election will be the last one under the first past the post system, but I think there's also an implication in the statement that was made. They made the statement that they would be setting up a parliamentary consultation process. I think there's an implication in this that it would be a thorough process that would involve proper consultations. I think we're coming to the point where we're starting to realize here that those two things are competing and it may not be possible to accomplish both.

I guess my question to you would be, which part of that promise is more important to keep? Is it more important to keep the part of the promise that the next election not be conducted under first past the post, or is it more important to make sure the process is thorough and that there's proper consultation and that we get this right? Is it more important to do it quickly or to get it right?

Mr. David McLaughlin: Get it right. I didn't make the promise—

Mr. Blake Richards: Fair enough.

Mr. David McLaughlin: —but I do believe there is great merit in studying our electoral system. As somebody who has studied it but also as a voter citizen, I'm open to change for it. I do see the inadequacies of the system. I don't want to stand on ceremony here, but I do think you have to allow a process that is inclusive enough, expansive enough, and timely enough. Give yourself some more time, if you can, to get your own deliberations right. I do feel that December 1 is rushed. I know you're working very hard, harder than Canadians perhaps recognize and appreciate, but there you are.

At the end of the day, my point is that it's still a Canadian system, and we want to know that this work has been done. We want to know that we have a chance to reflect on it. We also want to know what the consequences are of the change. We get the consequences of no change. It's status quo. Life goes on. We have managed. But with regard to the consequences of change, if they're not illuminated, if they're not brought forward in some way, then I think you will have a lot of explaining to do. I think that's unfair to our democracy, to our society.

I would absolutely encourage you to take more time. I know that then does impinge upon the timing for the next election, but we gave ourselves two elections in New Brunswick. The evidence is there: everybody who has made fundamental change has either given themselves time or has at least allowed a safety valve, if you will, of a referendum, in terms of the people's vote, to do that. We will accept the results of that referendum, I'm sure, even if it's squeezed in that time.

Therefore, in the spirit of offering up something, perhaps as a compromise solution, I suggest perhaps a validating referendum after we've had a chance to see the system. Canadians will want to know that they have a chance to opt out, not just be forced to opt in. It's that distinction that I know you're wrestling with. I don't think you've arrived at a satisfactory solution thus far, but you still have some time.

● (1050)

The Chair: Mr. Richards, you have about 10 seconds left.

Mr. Blake Richards: Then I guess we'll save the rest for the next round.

The Chair: Sorry about that, Mr. Richards.

[*Translation*]

Mr. DeCourcey, your turn.

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

I would like to thank our three witnesses for their remarks and their wisdom.

[*English*]

Mr. McLaughlin, I appreciate the levity in answering Ms. May's question. I think it reminds us that we can't predict the outcomes of elections. I know that the election in 2006 was called early in New Brunswick, I assume with some thought of partisan advantage, which turned out the other way.

It gives me an opportunity to clarify the record for my friend Mr. Reid, who I believe adds a lot to this conversation as well, that Harold Jansen, yes, did opine that perhaps the AV system would lead to a certain result in perpetuity, but then came to this committee and essentially contradicted himself, saying, no, we can't predict the outcomes of elections not knowing what a different system will deliver to us and not knowing what other issues will be in play at that time.

I do have a question about the process, which I'll get to in my second question, but I want to talk to you, Mr. Scott, about a comment you made about the importance of campaign promises. I would say that this could be an arguable merit of the system now, that parties deliver platforms, visions for how they want to steer the country. Voters vote, hoping to see those commitments enacted. We've had some testimony that in different systems of PR, you muddle some of the campaign visioning or the platform visioning that takes place. That's one thing I'd ask you to comment on, where you see the relative trade-off there and how we should present that to Canadians.

The second question is about this idea of fairness and equality of the vote. I'll agree that elements of PR allow for votes to be counted in fair ways. Have you seen any of the testimony from Dr. Maskin, who presented to us the idea of the majority rule, where effectively each winning candidate is preferred to all the other candidates in a particular riding? Do you think it would be fair to present both an MMP system as a way of achieving fairness in the vote as well as this system when we speak to Canadians?

Prof. Craig Scott: Yes, the last one was interesting. I'm not sure I will have a good answer.

On the first one, I think you've seized on a very important structural issue, but we also can't indulge in myths. So, yes, there are platforms and there are promises and people do vote hoping their party would generally, for those who know what are in the platforms...would like to see. But people do know minority governments can happen in our current system and we've already just briefly touched on how that can be a somewhat dysfunctional way of figuring out which campaign promises do get attended to and which don't and what kinds of compromises are made.

If you have a system where people know in advance that campaign platforms do have to end up in some kind of a more compromising collegial environment, it might not be a bad idea to start pushing parties to be a bit more clear on exactly what their top priorities are, in a way that basically tells people what might happen if this party and this party start talking about a coalition government. I think there is an issue of not knowing exactly what to count on when two parties start talking together who haven't indicated in advance that they would form a coalition. In most PR systems, you do know in advance what the likely coalitions are going to be—not always—and that can play itself out in how the platforms get presented.

I wrote something recently on this. I think it is an important issue and more generally we have to be more attentive to how easily we make promises and how many promises we make in campaign platforms. I actually think we have a kind of debased electoral process right now. The platforms are too huge and too unrealistic.

On the second one, if the two can fit together and produce proportionality and there's independent merit to the majoritarian model that was being discussed, then I would never rule it out.

● (1055)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thanks very much.

Mr. McLaughlin, the question I want to ask you, and maybe we'll explore it more continuing on the second round of questioning, is about the nomination process for list candidates that was proposed within your New Brunswick model. My read of it is you're trying to balance competing tensions of having the party be able to offer a diversity of candidates as well as allow the electorate to see some transparency and openness in the way that those candidates were selected. Can you speak to the thought process or the conversation that took place in developing that list PR recommendation?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we'll have to come back to that question later.

Mr. Boulerice, your turn.

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

I would like to thank our three witnesses for being here with us this morning for this fascinating study. In particular, I would like to thank Mr. Scott for returning to see us again. I have to say that I really wish he could be in my shoes.

Mr. Fox, you said something very interesting just now. You said that people have to understand the problem before they can talk about how to fix it. That makes perfect sense. You're right because really, who gets up in the morning thinking, “The first-past-the-post system creates distortions. Single transferable vote could be the solution, but Canadian geography would result in tensions between rural and urban areas”. People don't spend a lot of time thinking that way.

Even so, people feel that their votes are wasted. They don't always do the math, but nine million of the votes cast in last year's election are not represented in Parliament. On Vancouver Island, 21% of the people voted for the Liberal Party and 21% for the Conservative Party, but not a single MP from either of those parties was elected. In the Maritimes, NDP and Conservative supporters voted for their parties, but not a single Conservative or NDP MP was elected. I'm not even going to talk about what happened in Toronto.

On the ground, people ask us, “Why should I vote if it won't make a difference? My vote doesn't matter”.

In 2008, when I ran for the first time and was not elected, people told me, “Why should I vote for you, Alexandre? You're not going to win”. People feel that there's no way to make their vote matter in Parliament.

Mr. Fox, how do you think we should tackle this issue?

Mr. Graham Fox: I agree with you.

There probably is no such person, and that might be a good thing.

The fact that some votes cast don't count or don't affect the outcome of an election means that, for some people, in their part of the country, the party they support is under-represented and does not end up in Parliament. Others, such as youth and seniors, feel that applies to their whole demographic, and still others perceive the problem as one that affects people of a particular gender or minorities of all kinds, be they linguistic, ethnic or otherwise.

That's why it makes sense to start by clarifying what we mean by a vote that doesn't count. We all have a slightly different perspective on that. People are frustrated about this for different reasons, reasons that can affect their preference for a particular voting system over others. That's why I think it makes sense to address this issue first before confusing people with all kinds of voting systems and mechanisms.

● (1100)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

Mr. McLaughlin, during your presentation, you made some intriguing comments about distinct groups and minorities. I would like you to expand on that.

You said that a mixed-member proportional system would be beneficial to New Brunswick francophones. What did you mean by that?

[*English*]

Mr. David McLaughlin: What we meant by that in the report was that the way regional boundaries could be drawn under an MMP system could very much safeguard and protect communities of interest where you have significant minority communities located. You could actually craft boundaries that have the largest population centres for francophone voters, and that in turn would ensure that changing the system would not result in a dilution, if you will, of a number of self-styled francophone MLAs in the legislature. That was an obvious concern in New Brunswick. Among the commission members, we were equally balanced toward francophones and anglophones, so it was a way to do it. Our experience showed that change in the electoral system should not be a barrier to that. You could find ways to address it. I just wanted to bring that to your attention because it is a key issue, I think.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

The committee heard from Jean-Pierre Charbonneau. Once upon a time, he was involved in an attempt to reform Quebec's voting system. At the time, regional representatives in Quebec were concerned that they would be less represented or less well-represented in government. Mr. Charbonneau said that a mixed-member proportional system could produce the opposite effect if regional members worked together.

Mr. Scott, you talked about this earlier. Mr. Charbonneau said it would force members of both governing and opposition parties to work together in the interest of their region. What do you think of Mr. Charbonneau's idea?

The Chair: Mr. Scott, please keep you answer brief.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I can pick this up again later, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Prof. Craig Scott: I think, again, that political culture will be so important. Transition will take time, but yes, the idea of regional MPs from different parties working together is real in Germany, for example, although they have less of a service culture when it comes to their constituents than we do, so it is not tested the same way. Nothing precludes a very different way of interacting professionally as parliamentarians.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rayes, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to start by thanking our three witnesses for being here with us today.

As my colleague mentioned earlier, those who want to change the voting system to a proportional system, mixed-member or otherwise, always talk about how people regularly tell them their vote doesn't count.

Yesterday, however, the Institut du Nouveau Monde representative talked about a survey that revealed the real reasons people gave for not voting. Survey respondents said that they were too busy, that they were dealing with a problem with voter registration, that they felt cynical or uninterested in politics, that none of the planks in the candidates' or parties' platforms interested them, that they did not trust the parties, that they were out of the riding, that they had health problems and so on.

I get the feeling that people saying their vote doesn't count has more to do with the fact that their political party didn't win the previous election. That frustration can carry over from one election to the next. Am I right about that?

Regardless of the voting system in place, voter turnout is down worldwide. That's why changing the voting system will not, in and of itself, motivate people to vote in greater numbers or develop a greater interest in election issues. I think what we really need is a culture- and education-based change.

You said it well. The three young people who came to talk to us really emphasized the importance of civic education about politics. Is that right?

Would you please comment on that?

Mr. Graham Fox: I think you're right about the importance of understanding all of the reasons why people don't vote. It's true that some of those reasons have nothing to do with the voting system. However, it is clear that quite a few of their reasons are indeed related to the voting system.

You raised what I think is an important point: we cannot expect that changing the voting system will meet everyone's needs or fix all of the problems with our democracy. There are other things we can do to increase voter turnout. I agree with you on that.

● (1105)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Do the other witnesses have anything to add?

[*English*]

Mr. David McLaughlin: The evidence shows that PR systems tend to have higher voter turnout, so I think that is probably reflective of a sense that the votes do count. But by itself, it's probably insufficient as an explanation. There are other factors that go into play. We do know that voter turnout goes up in a change election, for example, in this country. Why? Because people think their votes do count. There is something more at stake, I would presume. Even with an inadequate system in terms of equality of vote, people still come out to vote. There are going to be a myriad of factors, but it's the motivation vote that we're really talking about here, not the barriers. You will have to address them, barriers to vote, and all those administrative things. You still have to make that work. But people will come out to vote if they think it matters and if they think their vote counts in that kind of integration of the issues.

The electoral system will clearly make a play in it because you know that sometimes a seat that just always elects a Conservative, always elects a Liberal, always elects an NDP will always be an outlier. Parties and campaigns don't pay much attention to it. They don't send the incentives out to voters to come out to vote. It's contested seats, swing seats, that parties focus on and where voters get the education, information, the messaging to go out and vote, and sometimes then that results in a higher turnout.

Prof. Craig Scott: I would only add that I think it's important to understand that changing the electoral system and the 5% to 8% increase that creates for turnout, by most studies, isn't just about people knowing my person can be elected more easily. It's associated with producing a better political process too. I think part of the outreach to Canadians needs to talk about the connections between the electoral system and what Parliament and the House of Commons could look like that you could reasonably project would be different. My experience in three and a half years as an MP was that I think we underestimate how much people care about the way Parliament works and parliamentarians act. It might not be at the top of their list, but they care.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): My mind is going in a hundred million directions right now, and which one I should take.

Mr. Fox, you had raised the point about the next step of our process. We should really go prepared to people with a main concern in mind. We feel a sense of urgency on this committee. The government feels a sense of urgency because they have made a commitment to look at this and to change it. How do we get people to feel that sense of urgency? We've been talking about this issue for years and years, and we know there are issues at stake that are important to people, but how do we get them to understand? What would you think is the main concern we should be addressing to people? I know you were talking about whether we've discussed and come up with a main concern. I think we have many concerns, but we can't figure out how to get people concerned about this issue.

Mr. Graham Fox: I'm not sure it's up to me to propose an articulation of the problem. On the process, though, if we knew how to get citizens engaged in the manner in which we all hope they would on all things at all times, political life would be considerably easier in Canada. It's a challenge we all face in a host of ways.

But two things came to mind as you were putting your question that I think are important. The first one, and I think the committee is off to a good start on that, is to deliberate in full view of the public. I think if you are not just genuinely open but are seen to be open and doing things in full view, that helps. I think a process that is explicit about the fact that you don't have a preconceived view about the outcome will also encourage different views to come to your table. It's not a perfect answer, but it's the one I have now.

● (1110)

Mr. David McLaughlin: I wrote a piece for Graham's publication that offers up some suggestions as to how you might consult more and improve the process.

In short, I suggested things that were done previously under the constitutional process, under Joe Clark, such as a bigger conference, citizen conferences, if not a citizens' assembly; independent academic research that the public could see and that you could put out to people to show that you are considering the trade-offs and the issues; and a series of online things that you are starting to do. There are a number of things that you can do to engage people beyond just the traditional committee process.

I would encourage you, if you are going to go down that path, to do it sooner rather than later because of the time constraint, obviously, that you are working under, whether it is December 1 or whether you give yourself some more time. It is not a lot of time.

Second, to really make that work.... When do Canadians focus? They focus when it matters, or when they think a decision is coming. Right now, you are in a fairly broad, expansive learning mode. At some point, you have to be in a deliberation mode, and you are going to be deliberating specific options or specific choices. At that point, I would really encourage you to go public with a shorter paper or some specifics to say, “This is what we are thinking. This is where we are heading. It really does matter, and now we want your input on this.” Then you have to find some way, again, to get input on those specific things.

Until you put something out that is more explicit, more specific, and more real to Canadians, I think it will be an interesting notion, but everybody has other things to do. We have struggled with that in New Brunswick, even with a dedicated process, and we had lots of engagement in terms of devices. It is still very tough. This is an off-the-top-of-the-head recommendation, but feel free to read the piece as well, if you would like.

Prof. Craig Scott: All I would say is, get the Tragically Hip to do a bunch of town halls with this committee and then call the CBC, and you have your engagement right there. I am only half-joking. The CBC has started doing town halls outside of election cycles, for example with the Prime Minister and a minister or two. It is a completely legitimate thing to approach a public broadcaster about a completely pan-partisan parliamentary process and whether or not they might be interested in that dimension of your work in terms of publicizing through town halls.

The Chair: Thank you for that idea. It is a good one.

[*Translation*]

We'll start the second round of questions.

Mr. Aldag, it's your turn.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Mr. McLaughlin, in your opening comments you made a statement about the model that was developed, that you couldn't have both the list MPs and the constituency MPs in the mixed member proportional model. I am curious about the reasons for that. We have heard from other witnesses, in other jurisdictions, that they allow that. It is interesting that you excluded it, and I am just wondering what the thinking was behind that.

Mr. David McLaughlin: Let me take advantage of this to perhaps answer Mr. DeCourcey's question about the closed list as well. They all sort of come together.

Mr. John Aldag: Yes.

Mr. David McLaughlin: First, we chose the closed list because of the feeling that, if the lists were closed, then the parties would make a bigger effort to put more women in particular on the list. That was a concern of the commission at the time, to try to increase the number of female representatives in the legislature.

Second, we were concerned that open lists would result in real intra-party competition as candidates vied for share of voice relative to others to move up the list and get votes, and therefore this would put parties in a position of being overly competitive, and would demean the political process a bit.

Third, perhaps peculiar to New Brunswick, was the sense that large population centres could overpower smaller communities. If you had a list member from one city or bigger town within a community, then they would get more votes relative to others. There was a sense of unfairness. Those are the things that drove us there.

Again, with that process, it's not a far leap to say let's not allow the candidates to be on lists as well as local member candidates. We were concerned about two things.

One was this potential gaming of the system, that they would say that you got elected on the list. They saw you put your name there. Partly what was of concern to us was creating two-tier MLAs. It's not a guarantee, but how you arrive in office, or how you arrive in your legislature, your House of Commons, does have a bearing on how colleagues treat you and react to you, and potentially more importantly, how citizens or constituents would react to you. That was a feeling that it would be better from a non-gaming perspective, that the public would see the system as your choice, you won or you didn't win, end of story.

Remember, the systems, especially New Zealand's, were relatively new. We did hear evidence, from talking to New Zealand folks, about this sense of second-class or first-class MPs or MLAs. It was a way to try to address that.

Over time you guys work things out in your daily business, but that was what motivated us.

● (1115)

The Chair: Mr. Scott.

Prof. Craig Scott: Briefly, there's a politico-cultural dimension to it. In Wales there was that kind of resentment, to the point that they did try to have a rule along the lines of the New Brunswick proposal, and Westminster overrode it. In Germany they basically almost forced everybody to be running locally as well as to be on the list. Apparently, a high percentage of German members of their legislature served in one or the other capacity over the course of their careers. One thing the German approach does is it actually gets people to understand that there isn't such a great difference between the two sets of MPs, and it produces more continuity.

Some people would say, in a “throw the bums out” culture, that's not a good thing. Obviously, I'm sitting on the wrong side of the table to be saying this, but in Canada we probably have too much turnover. We have, probably, the highest turnover in comparable legislative processes. We could benefit from, probably, having more continuity, especially in collegial, consensual legislative environments. If people who are completely new are constantly coming in high numbers, you do lose something. Germany has more continuity, and I think being able to be on both is part of it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Following up with that, I agree with Craig's observation about the high turnover here. It's striking. I've been here for 16 years, and I'm one of the 15 most senior people on Parliament Hill. If I were in the United States Senate, I would still be struggling to get—

Prof. Craig Scott: A second term.

Mr. Scott Reid: —a junior chairmanship of a subcommittee on something nobody wants to do, and I'd be surrounded by octogenarians who've been there since President Truman or something—or McKinley, maybe. That is a realistic problem that exists, for sure.

I want to go back to a theme that has just been discussed but that may not have been addressed directly. Mr. McLaughlin, right at the very end of your presentation you mentioned there can be issues with how you design MMP. What I thought I heard you say, but I'm not sure I heard you say it so I want your confirmation, is that if this committee were to, for example, just recommend MMP but give no specifics, the government could then take it. The cabinet, after all, designs and produces a system, which has a different outcome from that which might have been imagined, at least in some respects that are significant from a partisan point of view, and from what the committee thought it was sending to the government. I may have misinterpreted that, so I want to hear your comments on it.

Mr. David McLaughlin: I would agree with your interpretation. That would be a concern. We were tasked with recommending an electoral system that met certain principles, but we felt very strongly in our commission work that we had to spell out what that system would be and all the details; that we were charged with figuring it out; that the details did matter; and that the potential for unintended consequences for the various actors in the system, all of whom were legitimate, needed to be thought through as best we could. We had to come up with recommendations. Where we could, we came up with precise legal text as a way to encourage both the government and the opposition to actually move it along. We didn't want to leave very much to chance that things would get muddled at the other end.

So yes, to use your example, Mr. Reid, if you proposed MMP and had some rationale for it and gave no detail, I think you would be leaving yourself open to perhaps a different kind of system in important respects from what you had contemplated or desired.

If you're going to do your work, do your work. Do the detailed heavy lifting in order to help move the process along.

● (1120)

Mr. Scott Reid: It's perhaps unfair to push you further on this point, but I'll do it anyway; you can just say, no, it's illegitimate, if you feel this way. Would it be your recommendation, then, or would you accept it as a good recommendation, that we ought to actually be working on selecting, if it's feasible or if there's enough of a consensus, an actual model, and then trying to fill in the details as part of our report?

Mr. David McLaughlin: Yes. I would very much encourage that, and for a number of reasons. One is that this is the only way, in my view, for this file to progress within at least a shot at your time frames. I'd try to be respectful of that. Second is that I think it would show Parliament working. I think it would show the committee process working, and I would argue that you'd probably, as a group, find it more fulfilling in terms of having that kind of engagement and that kind of commitment. So yes, on a number of levels; absolutely.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

I have to ask this question, because the committee has not made a decision to go in favour of one system versus another. Let's say, for the sake of argument, we were drifting in the direction of STV. Would you make the same recommendation in terms of trying to pin down the details?

Mr. David McLaughlin: Yes. Again, I think it's system-agnostic, so I think you would have to show it, and you would have to show how it would work. You would start with principles, but people also want to know how it would work.

I go back to the outcomes. In a way, you're doing a long game in a very short period of time. The long game is to improve the legitimacy of our governments and of our system, etc., and that will flow from the outcomes. If at first people are maybe not so sure about this but over time grow accustomed to and like the system, that's a good change and good progress for the country. The legitimacy of the outcomes and the details do matter.

Frankly, in the short period of time you have, if you're proceeding on that, to give direction to Elections Canada but also parties, how do you then organize yourself for an election campaign? Just think of the questions that go back and forth to Elections Canada now on funding rules and so on from your local campaign manager, where people supposedly know. They're volunteers, right? Your CFO's a volunteer. Now you have a new system. Where's the boundary? It used to be they voted at the church down the street, but wait a minute, this town is out, this town is in.

All of those things will matter. Help Canadians come to grips with that. This would be my strong advice.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen, it's your turn.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is interesting. I've been here a couple years. I like deadlines. I've seen Parliament kick around ideas forever, with everybody stating the importance of the issue, and why it matters to everybody and we should really do that. As soon as I hear the word “should”, I start to lose faith: we “will” do this or that.

I take your comments, David, about moving from an expansive to a deliberative focus. I'm a visual learner. I went through the B.C. process as an observer, and needed to see maps. Maybe it's because I'm engaged in politics in this way, but I just want to see how it will look. Until I see that, it's theoretical and perhaps confounding.

Mr. Fox, you're nodding. Does at some point the committee get to that point for Canadians where we say, just to pick a number, here are the three choices we're looking at, and here's how it might look in New Brunswick, in Toronto, in Vancouver, in rural Canada? Is this important for us in terms of that engagement level, and then raising the level of legitimacy of all this work?

Mr. Graham Fox: I think it is. I think the more you can get to actual, concrete details around your models, the more it will increase public confidence that you've done the homework and that you have come to a common view. When you think about what happens after your report, the more you all agree on the greater number of details, the more it might be interesting or beneficial for the government to follow through on your leadership, because this is where the national conversation has happened.

● (1125)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We've also heard from elections officials that as the committee—or Parliament, more importantly—starts to narrow down, they begin their work as an elections commission. If they can tell Parliament is headed towards one of these models, then that whole idea of this being too rushed and then there's a panic, and then the next election doesn't come off coherently, if I can put it that way, is diminished if Elections Canada is given early signals. These are a couple of paths that were taken.

David, you would agree?

Mr. David McLaughlin: Absolutely. They are the ones who administer the election and they're responsible for its proper administration at the end. So yes, they've got to get going.

Prof. Craig Scott: Can I just—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sure.

Prof. Craig Scott: I'll make it two sentences. One is this that this goes back to that CBC suggestion. At some point, having this committee in a deliberative mode, with the institutional design choices of an MMP—there are 15 main institutional design choices and maybe seven are crucial—having the different models in play where you're all working through together in maybe a slightly hypothetical way, because you're not all committed to each of these or maybe any of them, in a well-moderated way, where you can possibly film it, it could possibly be done in public, you could consider something like that. I just taught it last term. Make yourselves like a mini citizens' assembly in the way you interact.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is what, back in February, we had suggested to the government. It was to have a parallel citizens' assembly process, working through some of that on-the-ground truth-telling of what a system would mean. What does this mean for me in Mississauga, etc.?

You talk about trade-offs a lot here. This is what it's going to be. It's always the case whenever we redraw boundaries in the country that there are always trade-offs. One of the trade-offs I'm concerned about is this list thing. I've got to tell you, I'm not a huge fan of the closed list system, just in terms of legitimacy in the eyes of the voters. Who's on the list? How do they get on the list? Is it just knowing the leader of the party? Are you a fundraiser? There's the notion that the voter has got to be involved. We've seen some models come forward that say that list is derived from the next most popular candidate in that region, as a way to legitimize their place and not have two-tiered MPs. So the voter choses that person and that person goes ahead, not somebody in a back room.

Do you have any thoughts on that model versus the other in the trade-off question?

Mr. David McLaughlin: You've absolutely hit the issue on the head and we wrestled with it. It was one of the final pieces of the puzzle that we actually worked through, and then we came to a choice on it. It was a unanimous report, so we understood it, but we had a companion piece, because of our large mandate covering all these aspects of democratic reform in New Brunswick, for changes to party democracy.

One of the ways to get at that was that we had legislative changes proposed for how parties conducted nominations. It was, for some, perhaps seen as more interventionist but we required open nomination processes and things to avoid the top-down process. This is not to say that the parties would have liked that, but it was our way of trying to get at the kind of concern you raised, to try to make it more transparent and try to make it more open.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Thériault, it's your turn.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to touch on three subjects.

First, Mr. Fox, if I understood you correctly, you would rather do things properly than hastily. I gather Mr. McLaughlin feels the same way.

It seems to me that, on this file, the worst-case scenario would be for the legislative branch—which we represent—to finish its work on December 1 and let the executive branch decide what happens next. I don't think that three weeks is enough time to get a clear sense of what voters from coast to coast want.

That being said, it would be good for the committee to agree on the recommendation to leave the matter in the hands of the legislative branch and perhaps a citizens' assembly. There has to be a second stage before the executive deals with this issue. The executive branch might well decide that the lowest common denominator is that everyone wants change, and it might make a unilateral decision—backed by its parliamentary majority—about what that change should be. That would be a complete failure. I see you nodding, so I guess you agree with me.

Let's talk about gender parity.

Judging from what has happened in Quebec, some mechanisms have a greater impact on parity. However, no system, not even ours, can provide absolute control over gender parity.

I've done recruitment, and I've observed that merely getting a woman to run in a safe riding is not enough. The problem is everything that being in politics at the federal level represents.

It would be great for Parliament to address work-life balance. I have been a member of the Quebec National Assembly, and I can tell you that work-life balance there is much better than it is here. If we don't make things better, we won't be able to do that kind of recruitment and achieve parity even if we have lists. We would miss out on some excellent candidates in certain age groups.

What are your thoughts on that?

● (1130)

Mr. Graham Fox: I think Mr. Scott talked about that earlier. I think it's very important to consider not only the mechanics of reform, but its impact on how the House of Commons works. How can Parliament foster work-life balance in light of the added challenges of geography, particularly compared to provincial legislatures? This is an extremely important issue, for sure.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Scott, on the subject of cultural change, you said that the transition would take a long time. I agree. Just changing the mechanism does not mean that, from one day to the next, people on the ground will start working together. If the proposed Quebec model had passed, then when I was elected in 2003, my rival would have been elected as well, but he would have been a list member. He would probably have become the Minister of Transport.

Imagine what collaboration would have looked like in that scenario. I think it would have led to—this was actually my experience—four years of partisanship. We would have had the government representative on one side and the opposition representative on the other.

Wouldn't the cultural change mean focusing more on the legislative branch, on how we decide who represents the people in the House and on the ideological plurality that's represented to ensure that every vote counts? If we want to push cultural change even further, why not elect the executive with a majority of two-thirds of the representatives in the House?

The Chair: That's a very good question.

Mr. Craig Scott: It's a very good suggestion. It might be a good idea, but we don't have time to comment.

The Chair: We have 15 seconds left, and it's a very good question.

Ms. May, it's your turn.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thanks very much.

By a bit of preamble, when you were talking, Craig, about the fact that this has been an issue since 2000, going back through parliamentary records, it may interest you to know that the first parliamentary committee looking at electoral reform was in 1921, when Ireland had just gotten single transferable vote in order to protect minority rights in Ireland. It has been a topic that has come up, and it seems, as far as I can determine, when every commission, federal or provincial; every citizens' assembly; every law commission; every review of electoral reform since 1921 in Canada comes to a conclusion, it comes to a conclusion that we should move to some form of proportional representation. It does seem to me that the time is right and that this is a once in a generation opportunity.

But in my questions to you, I wanted to focus on the harms of first past the post, because you raised one that Professor Peter Russell identified. When you combine a Westminster parliamentary democracy such as Canada, where the executive has rather more power than even in other Westminster democracies around the world, and certainly more than in the U.S. where the executive has checks and balances, it's rather important to know that the majority of Canadians support the general direction of a majority government. You referenced this rather tangentially in your opening remarks. I wondered if you wanted to revisit the question of the power of the executive and the harms that can be done when you have what Professor Russell calls a false majority. And I don't think it's partisan; I don't know how else you'd describe it.

● (1135)

Prof. Craig Scott: Yes, we tend to address the false majority notion as in a party simply gets more seats in the legislature than their popular vote would warrant, and that seems unjust; and it's a voter-centred perspective and that's good, that's fine to say that's a problem. But the fact is you're giving the majority of seats to a single party in a system where there's a fused executive-legislative arrangement that in any Westminster system already gives a lot of power to the executive. In our—I wouldn't say political system—political culture, we have a much greater degree of internal party unity, party discipline. I think the localization pressures on our MPs, because of the size of the country and other things like that, also mean that the extent to which parliamentarians can be legislators, as opposed to members of a party, taking direction from good advice, etc.... We have a culture where once you give a majority to one party, you are partly at the mercy of how that government runs itself because you can have more and less willingness to engage with the rest. The rest could be not just the opposition but the 60% who didn't actually vote for the party that now has 100% of the power.

Ms. Elizabeth May: And it's a sensitive topic because it's raw, because we just had a change in government, and I apologize to my friends in the Conservative ranks here, but Gérard Deltell actually put the question to Professor Russell, “What harm has ever come from first past the post?” To my surprise he said climate change. We didn't act for 10 years, and 80% of Canadians since the early nineties, by polling, have always wanted action on climate change, and I know a lot of Conservatives wanted action on climate change. Unfortunately, one of them wasn't the former prime minister.

So for me, that's not just a theoretical or academic harm. It's real and it has damaged our reputation in the world, and it was not something supported by most Canadians. So forgive me for mentioning that one, but I'll turn to my friend David McLaughlin, and I don't want to put you on the spot. Obviously, you are a Conservative. You've made that clear. You were chief of staff to our friend, the late Jim Flaherty.

Do you have any comments on this executive power in the situation of a false majority? You were a victim as CEO of the national round table of omnibus Bill C-38, which I don't think was the will of Canadians.

Do you have any thoughts on this aspect of first past the post?

Mr. David McLaughlin: One of the ways that we tried to get at that issue in the New Brunswick commission...again, we had a broader mandate...but I do want to refer you to our section where we talked about making the system work. We did look at improving or enhancing the role of MLAs as individual legislators, enhancing the role of the Legislative Assembly as an institution, and rebalancing power and authority away from the executive branch back to the legislature. We proposed a number of things for strengthening legislative committees, higher funding allowances for MLAs, more extensive committee work, just a broader role for the legislature in what had traditionally been defined as government life.

That allowed us to do that, independent, if you will, of the electoral system piece. But yes, there's no question that Canada...and I agree with Craig, as a political cultural issue, we have very strong executive power authority. I've been in the Prime Minister's Office. Some days were better than others. Some days you liked it; some days maybe not.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm just going to address one issue and then move to my question. I know that people have been questioning the timeline. I know that when we had our Chief Electoral Officer here, he said that this is absolutely possible. We're hopeful that this committee will come up with a report that will have a consensus, that we'll be able to put into action. I just wanted to reiterate that.

One thing this committee has been trying to do, and I've used this term earlier, is to take a voter-centric approach. As parliamentarians, we have our own ideas. What does it mean to have a legitimate process? What does it mean to have a simple process? Is it from our perspective or from the perspective of the voter? I think that's something we need to be mindful of when we're communicating with Canadians. We have done the first phase of this process, where we've heard from experts and so on, and now we're going on the road.

Given your expertise on this file, we know there's some low-hanging fruit that could address the *bobo* we have in our system, that's not necessarily a different voting system—for instance changing the voting date to Sunday or a day that people are not working, and so on. Keeping voter-centric in mind, what would you recommend, when we are engaging with Canadians on the road, so that we are making sure that whatever system or any recommendations we put forward are reflective of what they are looking for?

● (1140)

Mr. David McLaughlin: Let me start. I'll let my colleagues reflect a bit more.

Force them into some trade-offs. You have to do it. Find out what they value most. Come up with your series of principles, explain how they can work in comparison to others. I suspect that local representation will be very close to the top of the list. They'll want to know who their MP is. They want to know where you live, because it's that accountability and that possibility of throwing you out afterwards, the blunt democratic instrument, that's fine.

That would be one example that I think would jump up to the top, but try to force them a bit on that. Then, if you can, find out what they really want from an electoral system in this sense, and let me rip off what Elizabeth May said in terms of the central authority, the executive authority. Do they think it will cure this versus something else?

You may have a role in helping to address myths as well as improvements. Don't let the myths stand out there, that if we change the electoral system we can fix A, B, C, and D. Help them understand what those absolute choices are and help them appreciate where this is an improvement but not a panacea, if you will.

Off the top, that would be something that you could think about.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Before the other two go, I'm just going to probe a little more on that. You mentioned that if what they value most is to know their MP and know where their MP lived—and trust me, I have people showing up on my lawn—that being said, why would we ever recommend a closed list? I'm just throwing it out there. If people want to know who they're voting for, the person, not just the party but the person, why would we ever put forward a closed list?

Mr. David McLaughlin: Again, the closed list is a mechanical process or step to get to the electoral outcome. You would have a closed list. The reasons I gave are what were populating our minds at the time, and it can seem there's a lack of transparency, it's unaccountable, etc., but it was the outcome we were more concerned about along the way. I'm talking about how “Where do you live?” is a euphemism for afterwards, when you are elected. They want to know who to go to to help solve their problems, and of course, represent their broader interests. At the end of the day I'm not convinced a closed list or open list is absolutely germane to that. I think it's a way station en route to it.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'll let the two of you go.

Prof. Craig Scott: I will just answer briefly.

I think Dave was sort of predicting what might rise to the top. In terms of the closed list, keep in mind that there is a direct analogy. People are actually already faced with closed lists in our current system. It is a one-person list, but the party is the one that generates the only person you can vote for. If you are leaning toward a particular party or a set of principles, you know who is on the list generated by the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the NDP, the Greens, etc. It is all transparent, and the ability to then tick is an added element.

You know who you are voting for on these lists, and then you can evaluate: “How did they produce that list? I am not going to vote for a party that produced the list this way. I am more inclined to vote for a party that produced it that way.” “Closed list” doesn't mean they are closed in all senses; it just means you can't go in and change them.

The last thing is that, when I went on a tour as official opposition critic—I think about 12 different sessions across the country—I started with a list of something like 10 or 11 different principles or variables. They had to be a lot more specific than the ones for the mandate of the committee. I got people to fill out at the beginning, before there was any discussion at all, where they were on that. It took about five to 10 minutes, then there was whatever the session was, and then I had them do it again.

This was slightly biased, because people were coming knowing I was NDP, knowing we are already in favour of PR, etc., so it didn't represent Canada, but it represented where people started—that was most valuable—and then it represented change. The change wasn't so great, but for your group the changes could be quite important.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards, go ahead.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Fox, I have a question or two for you. You made the comment in your opening remarks—I think I am quoting this accurately, because I was trying to keep up writing it down, so I am pretty close, if not bang-on here—that Canadians themselves must participate meaningfully and their collective wisdom must be part of the process.

I take that to mean that you think the current process isn't succeeding in that, and I want to get your opinions and thoughts on what this should look like. What would give Canadians that meaningful participation? What would allow their collective wisdom to drive or push the process?

Mr. Graham Fox: You are reading me correctly, in the sense that I don't think the process is doing that yet, but I am not sure the process needed to do it at this stage, in the sense that it is important to do the research and get to facts and essays and papers. As you think about what you do with the meetings you are going to be holding on the road, reinforcing the last two comments, you will be limited in your options because of the travel schedule and the calendar, but I would try....

To David's point about asking people to make choices, I think there is a lot to that. Part of the limit of hearings like this is that I get my five minutes and then I leave the room; someone else comes in, they get their five minutes, and then they leave the room. I don't get the benefit of hearing the person before or after me, or signal to you that maybe I have changed my mind based on what I have heard. Relaunching questions in a certain city.... If there was a theme emerging as an element of consensus in Winnipeg, test it in Halifax: "We heard this in Winnipeg, and we heard it a lot. What do you people think?"

Try to get to how you would bring all those views together in a way that isn't just a long list because, frankly, if it is going to be monologues in rapid succession, you might as well just ask for emailed submissions.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, that is fair enough. I appreciate that.

You have written fairly extensively on parliamentary reform as well, and I think that ties to what we are doing here. We have heard a lot of testimony that talks about the different trade-offs there are with the different electoral systems, and certainly I think it is almost universally held, if not universally, that there is no perfect electoral system. Obviously, we have heard from a lot of people that we have to be looking at what the values or the goals are that we are trying to achieve. You mentioned yourself that the public doesn't seem to really be aware yet of what the problem is that we are trying to solve.

I guess what I am trying to get at here is that the electoral system, and changes to our elections, can be one of the things we can do to try to solve some of the issues there might be, but parliamentary reform may solve some of the issues, and maybe solve all the issues that might exist.

My question for you is, what do you see as some of the other potential changes that we could be looking at on a parliamentary level, and could some of those meet some of the challenges we face?

Mr. Graham Fox: That's an excellent question.

I'm not sure I would go all the way to say that parliamentary reform or other reforms would fix all the issues because, frankly, we have to worry first about the men and women we send to the Commons before we worry about what they do once they get there. For the last 15 years, it's been more of an interest of mine looking at what happens here once people get here. My hope is, if we are to change the mode of election and if we are to have a House that is more reflective of popular vote, that this diffusion of who gets to decide may also have an impact on committee independence and with votes in the Commons.

I understand the imperatives of needing to drive messages tightly. People don't like disagreement because it's messy and those who cover politics will make it seem a weakness or a flip-flop, but I would genuinely like to see governments rediscover white papers and asking committees to conduct some preliminary work long before they've decided what they want to do. That's independent from electoral reform, but I think one may feed into the other and facilitate it.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's great, thank you.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Richards.

Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: I have one more point of clarification on the issue of the closed party list. I understood well the reasons for that and you applied it to Mr. Aldag's question and Mr. Cullen's question as well.

Achieving representational equity is the main idea behind the closed party list. The party produces the list. How does the open convention that gives the party licence to produce the list work in this recommendation in the report?

Mr. David McLaughlin: The way it worked is that we thought the parties were legitimate actors. They had the right to incent and choose the folks they wanted to represent them, but we wanted to create an incentive and a public pressure on them to do so.

Let's go back to how you operate. You operate in a competitive environment. You are seeking a political advantage in the best sense of the word relative to your competitors, putting your best foot forward in one way, showing that you are more in favour, on one issue or another, showing your representation. In how many campaigns in the past while have we had party leaders showcasing candidates behind them, a number of women, a number of visible minorities, etc.? This is the party's way of adapting to a new reality and a new pressure within the country under a first past the post system, and we show the candidates that we have to say we look like Canada, if you will.

Again the issue you raised was one we wrestled with and there were strong opinions on both sides. But the trade-off we made was that we wanted to have more women elected as MLAs. There were other issues there and that seemed to us, the commissioners, to trump the other kinds of concerns.

I don't want to diminish this, but Mr. DeCourcey, as you raised the issue of transparency and democratic legitimacy, it was something that we wrestled with. In the end, we made a choice based on the trade-offs. It's a legitimate example of how you will have to work through the stuff as well. And we did hear from parties too.

I'll reinforce what I said earlier. Parties are legitimate actors here. We need strong political parties. They are the partisan vehicles in the best sense of the word to allow views and issues and ideas to be debated. I'm in favour of partisanship if it allows for clarification of ideas, if it gives choice. I think that's a good thing in democracy.

So a bit of perhaps going the other way on the closed list, I get it, but that was our reasoning.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: But effectively as opposed to having party members vote for the preferred candidate as would happen in a constituency, would the party essentially trot out the candidates on the list and say this is our one, two, three, four, and then have it vetted through the party membership? Is that how that works?

Mr. David McLaughlin: No. We knew that this was a possibility, absolutely, parties being parties and leadership being leadership of parties. We encourage a primary process as well and as a way to do that. That's why I mentioned we had companion recommendations and improvements for greater party democracy to go hand in hand with changes to the electoral system. Again, that's part of thinking through the consequences of changing the system without thinking through what the companion actors are or the issues that go with it. Changing an electoral system creates a cascade of effects that you will need to wrestle with.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Mr. Fox, you talked a little bit about rallying Canadians to some sort of consensus on what malaise or what issue we're trying to resolve here. One of the issues that I believe have the potential to rally us together is the idea of better engaging Canadians in the way they see themselves reflected in Parliament, particularly Canadians who feel disengaged from the system. I know there are Canadians who feel that their vote isn't represented in Parliament, but there are also Canadians who don't vote, and therefore are completely disengaged.

Is that a spot where you think we can start? How best do we engage those people who have not traditionally seen themselves as a part of the process?

Mr. Graham Fox: As much as I don't worry about mandatory voting, I'm not sure that's a convincing, long-term way of fixing one's commitment to the system. Turnout was high at elections where people felt like there was something at stake, which usually coincided with a change in government, but not necessarily. In 1988, the first example, there was a genuine issue of fundamental public policy choice that drove people from both points of view out to the.... So I think part of trying to get citizens interested in political life and democratic life is to make sure they understand that their input matters, that you didn't decide before you showed up, that they do, in their interventions, have an opportunity to move the yardsticks. I think that goes a long way. If I don't feel like there's a point, why would I go?

● (1155)

The Chair: Okay, thanks.

We'll go to Mr. Boulerice.

[*Translation*]

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

Before I ask my question, I would like to point out that Mr. Cullen and I do not embody a great deal of diversity in many respects.

Yes, we are both men, and we are both white. One of us has a beard; the other is clean-shaven. However, we are very different in one very important respect that is typical of our electoral system. Mr. Cullen's riding covers 330,000 square kilometres. It is larger than Poland. Mine is 11 square kilometres. The circumstances governing our work as MPs are extremely different.

When we look at the systems in Germany, New Zealand, Denmark and the Netherlands, we see a number of very interesting things. However, we can't just copy-paste. That's why I like Jean-Pierre Kingsley's suggestion about being informed by what is happening elsewhere but coming up with a made-in-Canada system. I feel we should really think about that.

If we want to achieve proportionality, I think there are three ways to do that. We could have provincial lists, regional lists within provinces—some provinces are larger than others—or amalgamated ridings, which would result in multi-member ridings with three, four, five or six members representing the same small region.

Obviously, that would work well for Montreal, but it would not work as well in Mr. Cullen's riding or the Northwest Territories. We have discussed this with witnesses who expressed differing opinions on the subject.

Can we have a system with first-past-the-post ridings in some cases and amalgamated ridings in cities and suburbs allowing for a degree of proportionality?

I would like to hear from all three of you.

Mr. Craig Scott: I think we could have a system like that, and I don't foresee any constitutional issues with it. There would really have to be exceptions for northern ridings and maybe for very large ridings closer to cities in the south.

Like the NDP, we considered a mixed corrective system designed for Canada. I think that Mr. Kingsley's suggestion has a lot of merit. However, I don't know that it's such a good idea for ridings with smaller populations to have just one member. They could be combined, except in the north, where they should remain as they are.

[*English*]

Mr. David McLaughlin: It's a great question, and I would concur heartily with a "made in Canada" system. You'd be informed by electoral systems elsewhere, but we have different realities. It's language, of course, and other things, but geography is perhaps the biggest defining thing.

In New Brunswick it meant that...to do the proportionality that we came up with, without increasing the size of the House. That meant that the single member ridings were a bit larger; they were very tiny, but they were larger. It was what some of the people wanted. You have to think about that if you're going to go this way to try to address this issue, which I think is very legitimate. Do you want a bigger House of Commons? How do you allow for that, because you will have these kinds of inequities, and you will still want to keep the variances down to a manageable level in terms of representation of population, which is part of a process of redrawing boundaries, which you will, by necessity, have to go through here.

I don't know if some kind of hybrid system is the right system. Again, I go back to my presentation; we haven't had that kind of study here. We've had studies of mixed member proportional. We've looked at the key principles, but the application of it with maps, with boundaries, thinking about the roles of members of Parliament, how many in one province or region versus others, that's really quite consequential and matters a lot to voters. It's an interesting notion, and I encourage you to pursue it and see. You may end up saying, we need a larger House of Commons, and the euphemism for MMP becomes "many more politicians".

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David McLaughlin: It goes from there. It's not to be pejorative or anything.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We have just a few seconds.

Mr. Graham Fox: I agree with that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rayes, it's your turn.

Mr. Alain Rayes: In 2003, when I entered politics for the first time at the provincial level, a person whom I consider to be very wise gave me some advice. He may be listening now via the web. He always told me that, as long as I treat the voters as intelligent people, they will respond intelligently. The fact is that the people, the citizens, are always right when given a chance to express themselves. That flows naturally from us taking the time to ensure they are well-informed.

Changing the voting system is really the centrepiece of reform, but we all agree that there are many other things we can do, so there is something I would like all three witnesses to explain to me.

When consulted haphazardly via opinion polls or referenda on this issue, people—in Canada especially—rejected the proposed option or preferred to keep the status quo most of the time. That's true despite everything those pushing for change say about voting systems, all of the lip service about changing the system, and even the fact that governments have the financial means to educate people through the Chief Electoral Officer. I'm not talking about consulting interest groups because, when they present their proposals, apparently everyone completely agrees with them.

Mr. Graham Fox: I may be mistaken, but I think that in British Columbia, there was a simple majority in favour of change.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Right.

Mr. Graham Fox: But it did not reach the pre-set threshold.

Mr. Alain Rayes: It was 57%.

Mr. Graham Fox: Exactly.

Mr. Alain Rayes: There could be 50% plus one who want change.

Mr. Graham Fox: Exactly.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I'm not saying that people reject the proposed system, not at all. People don't reject an option simply to reject it. Maybe, on some level, they like the existing system.

Mr. Graham Fox: That is definitely possible.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I would like to hear your opinion on this trend, except with respect to what we saw in British Columbia.

Mr. Graham Fox: The same thing happened in Ontario during an election in which I myself was a candidate.

The referendum was held in 2007 at the same time as the provincial election. The government of the day said that it would not campaign for or against change. I was a candidate for the official opposition, and its position on the issue was vague as well. The party let each candidate take his or her own stance.

When people have to choose between the status quo and the unknown, I think they are likely to choose the status quo. In some situations, if nobody explains why the change should happen, people are comfortable keeping what's familiar to them.

You said that we need to treat voters properly and give them information. I agree completely. They do not make bad decisions.

[*English*]

Mr. David McLaughlin: I'm in favour of the default position of letting voters decide because that works for us. At the end of the day that typically works for the system.

One of the reasons is that we accept the results. We have good winners and good losers. Good losers around the table, if you will, who then participate in a different way, not having won the main prize, the main chance, but agreeing to participate as loyal opposition, or as members of the opposition, etc. That's the nature of the system, so we accept it and we move on.

I've been involved in referendums. I was involved in the constitutional referendum in 1992 with Prime Minister Mulroney. I travelled everywhere with him on that basis. And yes, I saw first-hand where the animus toward him personally helped colour the results, etc.

So other things can come in, but to say that the public didn't know about the issues, didn't know all the things that were in Charlottetown.... They liked Charlottetown as a package; they didn't like individual elements. So perhaps too much was put forward, so that's learning.

We do know as well from elections why it is that, as practising politicians, you tend to go out door to door with your literature and hammer one message—and I've been a campaign manager—to the exclusion of others because you try to simplify it, and you try to put it in terms that matter to the public. You haven't yet found that sweet spot on this issue. Perhaps it will emerge in the process.

In the absence of a compelling argument to change—something that Graham said at the outset—or in advance of a concerted, independent effort of education, of information that in my view would have to accompany a referendum process, then the public will, I suspect, revert to they're not certain they trust this, or they're not certain, etc., and then probably that's more of a vote for the status quo.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. David McLaughlin: If you are making a change you've got to make the case for change very strongly.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will conclude our week of work with comments from Ms. Sahota.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I want to move toward finding other ideas, a made-in-Canada solution, and then I think we could adopt a lot of these systems to perhaps fit into our country.

We have vast differences from a lot of other countries. Redrafting boundaries is going to be a big hurdle; it would be complex. Having ballots that have far too many options would be a problem. We've been talking about a lot of these different issues that we're facing, as well as the values that are important. I know fairness keeps coming up when we want to move toward PR.

And then there are also these other issues that we've been talking about throughout the week. I feel we haven't created a really concrete causal connection to PR, which is female representation, diversity, and other things. Because so many factors are in play when you look at those things I don't think any electoral system—and you can correct me if I'm wrong—but from all our witnesses we don't have a direct link at this point that gives cause and effect.

I would like to take a look at some slightly different options.

Mr. Scott, you had mentioned the Jenkins commission and an option that they proposed because they didn't want to increase the number of their members, and didn't want to perhaps redraft boundaries. They went beyond AV but tried to make it more proportional; I'm not quite sure. Could you lay out the differences between what they had come up with and MMP? Is it the same, or how does it differ?

Prof. Craig Scott: Yes, some call it AV-plus, and some call it MMP-plus.

I call it MMP-plus because it's MMP but when you're electing on the local side, instead of using first past the post as we do, you use the ranked ballot, so you produce the locally elected MPs that way. That's the only difference.

But they also were quite fierce in their criticism of AV as a stand-alone reform where you just keep single member districts and use AV. I don't know what the compromise dynamics were whereby they must have seen a separate set of good reasons why having more general support—even if some of it is second preferences it counts for something—and they embraced it. I can't quite remember their reasoning. That was the only difference from MMP.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

We saw from this panel we had from Scotland, and we've heard testimony, that once people go toward PR they don't go back. But I'm just a little perplexed why that referendum in the U.K. didn't work since so many regions and their municipalities have changed toward a different system, but—

Prof. Craig Scott: I think their referendum was on alternative vote, not on PR.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: So it was the question. It was the choice that was presented to people that they didn't like.

Prof. Craig Scott: And it wasn't tied to the Jenkins commission report. It was separate. Alternative vote was the proposal, and it was voted down.

Mr. David McLaughlin: It was the coalition agreement with the Liberal Democrats. I think, as part of the agreement to form a coalition, the Conservatives agreed to have a referendum on this preferred system. That was the price of a coalition. There are prices to be paid in forming coalition governments.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Interesting.

Mr. David McLaughlin: On your comment, Ms. Sahota, about "made in Canada" or a different system, etc., I would encourage you, encourage anybody in this business, because it is what animated us and drove us, to consider that the more it looks like a system that Canadians are familiar with, the easier it will be to find acceptance of change. With the idea of a whole new system, from stem to stern, as we say back home in the Maritimes, you're going to end up running against the view of that's a lot of change. Why that? What's the problem, etc.?

Part of MMP, why we moved that way, is it still has single member plurality, everybody still did the same vote for a local member, the way they did before. It introduced a degree of proportionality. The amount of proportionality depends on the splits. We went two-thirds and one-third, and there are other design features there. We didn't think it was that big a step for people.

It's just some advice, in terms of cautioning you, as you think about the way you want to go ahead. A big new system may deal with all the trade-offs, may deal with all the principles, but it just may be a step too far for Canadians to accept, given we do have an attachment to this system because, in part, we're comfortable with it and because we see that generally it seems to work. We know, as experts, and you're living in it, that there are certain flaws with it. I'm not certain that very many Canadians see that on a day-to-day basis.

So just some gratuitous advice, if you like, in response to what I think was a good question you asked.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thus ends our discussion.

I would once again like to thank the witnesses for joining us. They shared some very well-thought-out perspectives very clearly with us.

As I said before, it's a pleasure to see you on the Hill again, Mr. Scott.

[*English*]

We need about five minutes in camera for some future business. It will go very quickly.

Thank you very much.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]