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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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• (1825)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Good evening, everyone. This is meeting number 26 of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

As you know, we met in the summer to receive testimony, in many cases from academic experts and other stakeholders. Now, as of yesterday, we started our cross-Canada tour, which is a three-week tour that will take us to every province and every territory.

Earlier today we had the same kinds of hearings in a town outside of Winnipeg, St-Pierre-Jolys, and here we are tonight in the city.

We have three witnesses: Professor Paul Thomas, professor of political studies at the University of Manitoba; and two witnesses from the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. Each witness will have 10 minutes. I believe Mr. Sosa and Ms. D'Aubin will be splitting the 10 minutes.

The way we function is that after the presentations we will have one round of questions. Each member can engage witnesses for five minutes, and that five minutes includes the member's questions and any answers to those questions. If I have to close the segment after five minutes or so, please don't be offended. It's just that we have time restrictions, and it's just the way things work procedurally at House of Commons committees. After the round of five-minute questions, we're going to have an open-mike session, and I think we'll probably have quite a few people coming up to the mike, which is fantastic. It looks as though that will last about an hour and 45 minutes, depending on how it goes.

We'll get started with Professor Thomas for 10 minutes.

• (1830)

Dr. Paul Thomas (Professor Emeritus, Political Studies, University of Manitoba, As an Individual): Thank you very much for allowing me to present my perspective on this important topic.

Let me also thank the members of the committee. I know that some summer plans were changed, and now you have an arduous trip across the country. I appreciate the work you're doing on behalf of Canadians.

I have a formal submission, within the word limits you assigned, on the subject of mandatory voting. I also prepared a 30-page paper for my own enlightenment on the pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, of various electoral systems around the world, with

some examples. I'm happy to provide that to anybody who would like to tackle that. It comes with a guarantee to cure insomnia.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Paul Thomas: So those are two topics I'd be happy to answer questions on.

For today's opening remarks, I thought I'd stick very strictly to a text I've titled "Ten Quick Thoughts on Electoral Reform in Ten Minutes". I didn't add that they were not particularly original thoughts, but you may be thinking that.

Point one is that there's no perfect electoral system. Different countries have relatively strong, healthy democracies under a variety of electoral systems. By international standards and comparisons, Canada has a relatively healthy democracy. The design and choice of an electoral system must reflect the geography, history, traditions, and changing social, economic, and political realities of a particular country. Borrowing from elsewhere must be done cautiously, because it is difficult to predict how different models will work in the Canadian context.

Two, there are two main questions involved with electoral reform. What problem, or problems, are we seeking to address, and what principles and values are we seeking to see reflected in the design of a new electoral system? On both these points, reasonable people can disagree on both the principles and values that should guide reform and the real-world consequences of a particular substitute model.

Three, electoral reform is often presented as a response to the public frustration and disillusionment with politics, politicians, and governments. There is a malaise, not a crisis of democracy, in my opinion, within the Canadian political system, but the first past the post electoral system is not the principal cause of what is a multi-dimensional problem. Adoption of a new electoral system would contribute only marginally to a reduction in public discontent.

Four, a related issue raised by the current electoral reform debate is whether it is realistic in a large, complicated, pluralistic, and dynamic country to expect omnibus national political parties to capture and to give meaningful political expression to the diverse values, interests, demands, and needs that exist in Canada. Has the era of national brokerage political parties passed? Does the future entail a proliferation of parties that structure their appeals to voters on a narrower, less inclusive basis? Should electoral reform support a trend towards more specialized parties? It's definitely clear from comparative examples that some models of proportional representation would lead to more political fragmentation in the form of a greater number of fringe parties.

Five, composing a list of principles and values that should guide the design of an electoral system is actually relatively easy. However, such a list is almost always general and vague. Finding agreement on what the principles and values mean in practice is one of the difficult steps in the reform process. Moreover, such design criteria will to some extent clash, so it is not possible to maximize the achievement of each of those values and principles. Instead, trade-offs must be made, but this can only be done subjectively and impressionistically.

Six, a constructive debate over electoral reform must avoid reduction into simplistic false dichotomies that encourage proponents of different models to talk past one another. For example, the choice is often presented as between a majoritarian model versus some form of proportional representation. In fact there are working models out there that seek to find the sweet spot where some of the advantages and fewer of the disadvantages of each type of the PR model are realized.

•(1835)

Seven, national party representation versus individual local representation is another such dichotomy that's often presented. My past research on regional ministers, on party caucuses, and even on the Senate, tells me that there's more regional representation happening within the Canadian political system than is popularly imagined. The problem is that such representation occurs behind closed doors, so it is not generally recognized by the public as taking place.

In my view, therefore, preserving the personal factor in any electoral system is absolutely crucial. By the "personal factor", I mean the maintenance and even enhancement of the role of the local MP in being responsive to and representing her or his constituency in Ottawa. Service to the community is the main motivation that causes people to stand for public office initially. Serving constituents is often the most satisfying job for MPs. Even if a majority of Canadians are hard-pressed at times to name their local MP, they are nonetheless strongly attached to the idea of a local representative who is elected by and answers to their community.

Eight, the word "legitimacy" comes up frequently in electoral reform debate. This is a contentious notion. It involves both a substantive and a procedural aspect. Put simply, legitimacy requires decisions that are based on widely held values and made through appropriate and widely accepted procedures. In other words, legitimacy is more than just levels of approval in a poll, an election, or a referendum. A decision based on sound evidence and careful analysis should have legitimacy even if it fails a popularity test, especially in the short term.

Nine, from the standpoint of legitimacy, electoral reform poses a dilemma. Political parties represented in Parliament and around this table are asked to select the rules of the game in which they are players. In an era of widespread public cynicism, there will inevitably be perceptions that each of the parties will make a self-interested calculation to choose their preferred electoral system. It is conceivable, however, that a party or parties could genuinely believe that a particular model not only will be to their political advantage but also that it will best serve the current and future needs of the country. In terms of public support and legitimacy, it would

definitely help if agreement on a particular electoral system would be achieved among two or more parties on this committee.

Ten, mobilizing informed public consent and support for electoral reform will be difficult. Most Canadians take the electoral system for granted. They are reasonably clear on what values and principles they wish to see reflected in the electoral system, but they lack information on the technical matters related to the design of the system. In communicating about the electoral system, it is important for reasons of credibility, and to avoid future disappointment, not to exaggerate either the problems of the current system or the benefits of alternative models.

In summary, a decision on a new electoral system involves a consideration of multiple values, a series of potential purposes or aims, and a significant measure of uncertainty about how a particular model will work in practice. There is no way that even the smartest and best-informed Canadians, including the members of this committee, can hold all the relevant considerations in their mind at one point in time and make a comprehensive decision weighing all the factors.

In terms of practical reasoning, therefore, I would recommend that each member, and Canadians generally, select three or four values and aims that they consider to be the most important. Then you might consider constructing a matrix that ranks two or three electoral system options against this limited number of criteria. In regard to the long paper I mentioned, you can just watch people's eyes glaze over when you go through multiple lists of advantages and disadvantages. I think simplification is necessary.

Finally, I'll conclude by saying that I'm skeptical about the urgency of electoral reform and the capacity of any system to deliver all the multiple benefits that various sincere proponents of other models claim. In my opinion, if there must be a replacement for first past the post, the choice is most likely between an alternative vote model and a mixed-member proportional model based on regions.

•(1840)

Electoral reform could wait until after the 2019 election. A committee report and a concrete government proposal could become part of the next election campaign. Meanwhile, there's much else to be done on a democratic reform agenda.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Thomas.

We'll go now to Mr. Sosa, for five minutes.

Mr. Carlos Sosa (Second Vice-Chair, Council of Canadians with Disabilities): My name is Carlos Sosa. I am the second vice-chair of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

CCD is a national human rights organization of people with disabilities working for an inclusive and accessible Canada. We welcome this opportunity to speak to you today on this critical and important public policy issue.

Before I get into my main point, I'd like to put the following concerns on the record about the accessibility of the Minister of Democratic Institutions Maryam Monsef's cross-country tour on democratic reform. In one such consultation that was held at the University of Toronto in University College, the consultation was not physically accessible. In fact, there was no elevator and it was on a second floor up a long flight of stairs.

In another consultation in Peterborough, there were also accessibility issues. Minister Monsef acknowledged that this had occurred, and a constituent of hers recommended that she hold a consultation for persons with disabilities and their organizations.

It is absolutely essential that consultations such as this are accessible to all Canadians, including those with disabilities. In any further consultations, efforts need to be made to invite persons with disabilities, and their organizations, to make their accommodation needs known before an event is held. That includes committee meetings such as yours.

Tonight, there are some issues of accessibility in this room. One thing that could be done is ensuring that there is seating for people who have mobility issues, and wheelchairs as well. That should be done, including also ensuring that there is some kind of American sign language, ASL, interpretation, and a CART provider as well.

Voting is a right that is exercised by millions of Canadians, but persons with disabilities encounter many barriers when it comes to participating in the political process. Some of the barriers we face include accessing identification, especially if you live in poverty and have a fixed income. That can be a major barrier to participation. The choice would be simple here, and that would be survival.

Those who are vision impaired also face significant obstacles in the voting process, as they are unable to verify who they have voted for independently. Online or telephone voting can serve as a solution, but it must not replace the paper ballot. In the development of any process, persons with disabilities must be involved from the ground up.

Another issue is access to polling stations. It is absolutely essential that efforts are made to ensure that voting is accessible to every Canadian over the age of 18. This afternoon, the parliamentary committee conducted its hearings in St-Pierre-Jolys, in rural Canada, where there is also a lack of affordable accessible transportation for persons with disabilities. In urban environments, there can also be a lack of accessible taxicabs, and long waits for what we call Winnipeg Handi-Transit, which is called para-transit in other cities. There are long waits for that. Polling stations must be conveniently located for those who are unable to afford the transportation costs to get to a polling station or for those electors who have mobility issues.

In order to become a candidate, people must run for nominations for their respective political parties. Those who want to run face many barriers just to secure the nomination, including access to financial resources. When running for elections, candidates with disabilities often need additional accommodations to ensure they are on the same level playing field as those without disabilities. Some of the accommodations include having a guide for visually impaired persons or an ASL interpreter for those who are deaf. A person who

has mobility issues may not be able to access apartment buildings or houses because of a lack of accessibility.

● (1845)

Persons with disabilities who want to find out information about their local candidates running for election must be given an equal opportunity to find out more information. Campaign offices must be accessible to everyone, including persons with disabilities. At all-candidate meetings there must be a requirement to ensure that they are accessible and that American sign language interpreters are there to interpret the meeting.

In the development of any legislation, the experiences of persons with disabilities must be taken into account. If they are not taken into account, then many of our community will feel that they are not heard.

I thank you for giving us this important opportunity to share the disability perspective.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sosa.

Ms. D'Aubin.

Ms. April D'Aubin (Member and Research Analyst, Council of Canadians with Disabilities): On behalf of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, as my colleague Carlos did, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to appear before it.

As my colleague John Rae, the first vice-chair of CCD, pointed out in his personal submission to the committee, much of what we do involves trying to remove all barriers and prevent the introduction of new barriers. As surprising as it may seem, new barriers continue to be introduced even in 2016. That is why we are here tonight, to encourage you not to introduce new barriers as you go about electoral reform.

I note that the electoral reform national dialogue information booklet "Electoral Reform: Community Dialogue" states, "Canadians expect greater inclusion...from their public institutions." This statement echoes what CCD has been advocating since 1976, increased access and inclusion for persons with various disabilities. The booklet also goes on to elaborate a number of guiding principles, including "Support accessibility and inclusiveness to all eligible voters, and avoiding undue complexity in the voting process." Adherence to universal design principles would go a long way toward eliminating the barriers encountered by Canadians with various disabilities.

The work of this committee presents an opportunity for Canada to take another step down the road toward implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Canada ratified in 2010 through a unanimous resolution of the House of Commons and with the agreement of all Canadian provinces and territories. Thus the CRPD enjoys a broad political support in Canada, and it is up to us, as citizens, to translate this political support for the CRPD into practical action.

In the CRPD preamble, Canada has agreed that "persons with disabilities continue to face barriers in their participation" and human rights violations, and it has undertaken, in the general obligations, to address these problems.

In article 29, which addresses “participation in political and public life”, Canada has guaranteed “persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others”. The article goes on to encourage states parties to “[facilitate] the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate”.

At this point, I would like to address the committee's mandate to look at online voting.

As Carlos said, marking the paper ballot is a barrier to some voters: people with vision impairment and dexterity problems. As well, the written information on the paper ballot is a barrier for people with intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities, for whom the written word is difficult. A ballot that includes photographs of the candidates could address this problem. Depending on how it is configured, online voting could offer a solution to these barriers.

We are encouraged that the committee was instructed to look at online voting, but we appreciate the complexities related to incorporating any new approach to voting. CCD was involved, to a limited extent, in Elections Canada's testing of an assistive voting device in the November 29, 2010, by-election in Winnipeg North. Elections Canada held sessions with the disability community to allow it to test this device and explain the parameters of the test. While this particular device was found to be unsatisfactory, a setback such as this should not discourage Canada from looking toward new technologies, such as online and telephone voting, to overcome barriers associated with the paper ballot. Although the test was not deemed satisfactory, engagement with the disability community about the device demonstrated an understanding of the “Nothing about Us” principle, which should be continued as we move forward toward any implementation of voting using new technologies.

● (1850)

In the hearings about the Fair Elections Act, CCD raised concerns about measures in the act that would make it more difficult to test electronic voting, and thought it shouldn't be more difficult to test online voting.

I'd like to spend a few moments addressing mandatory voting. I participated in Minister Monsef's consultation in Winnipeg, where we discussed possible penalties for non-compliance if mandatory voting were instituted. For instance, tax penalties have occurred in Australia.

During the social security review process conducted by then minister Lloyd Axworthy, CCD adopted the principle that people with disabilities should not be made worse off by reform. Some individuals with disabilities may be prevented from voting due to barriers that they have no control over. For example, there may be a lack of accessible transportation to the polls. A person who relies on the services of a personal care attendant may find themselves unable to get out of bed on voting day because their attendant did not show up. A polling station may be inaccessible. It would add insult to injury for them to then have to pay a tax for not voting.

CCD has not taken a position on whether Canada should continue with first past the post or adopt an alternative system. Whatever system Canada adopts, it needs to be fully accessible, inclusive, and understandable by grassroots Canadians with and without disabili-

ties. At the September 12 community consultation, information was provided on the different systems. In my view, we as a community need to get better at translating complex information into plain language so that information is accessible and understandable by the widest range of Canadians possible.

CCD's member organization, People First of Canada, is very knowledgeable about plain language. I would urge the committee to consult with People First of Canada as it engages with Canadians.

● (1855)

The Chair: Ms. D'Aubin, we're a little bit over time.

Ms. April D'Aubin: That's it. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. I'm sure you'll have many questions.

We'll start with Ms. Romanado for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): I'd like to thank you all for being here on an evening in Winnipeg. It was actually quite interesting. You probably saw me tapping away like crazy, because I was taking a lot of notes. A lot of the information you provided us with will be very helpful.

Mr. Sosa, you mentioned that accessing identification was a problem. Could you elaborate on what you meant by that? I'm not quite clear on it.

Mr. Carlos Sosa: Fees are normally charged for you to get appropriate identification. If you have to get photo ID, for example, there's usually a fee. A disproportionate number of persons with disabilities rely on some kind of government assistance program, income assistance, whether that be at the federal level or the provincial level. When your income is so meagre, you cannot afford to pay for identification. Yes, there are other forms of identification, such as a health card or a birth certificate, but even for a birth certificate you have to pay money to get it. It really depends on a person's situation.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that.

Ms. D'Aubin, you mentioned that you've been trying to remove old barriers, and that whatever it is we produce or introduce, we shouldn't be introducing new barriers. Could you give us an example of what a new barrier is? I would like to make sure I understand that correctly.

Ms. April D'Aubin: Let's say a form of electronic voting was instituted where a voter was expected to interact with a touch screen. If there was no audio output, then that would be a new barrier, because people with vision impairment would not be able to read the screen. The individual would need a system where they could hear the instructions and then interact with the screen.

It is possible to make these things accessible. You just have to work on it from the ground up.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay, so I guess you would say, or it would be safe to say, that whatever we decide to put forward as a recommendation, it would be wise for us to work with the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and groups like that to make sure that whatever it is we're doing, we keep that lens on to ensure that we don't put in any more barriers, basically.

Ms. April D'Aubin: The guiding principle for the development of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was “Nothing about Us, Without Us”, and that’s a principle we advance in all activities.

It’s not that people want to put barriers in place. It’s because their experiences of the environment are different from those of people with disabilities, and they are not aware of what the barriers are.

• (1900)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Professor Thomas, I tried my best to capture your 10 points, and I think I did get them.

One of the items you brought forward was national party representation versus local representation, and that preserving the personal factors is absolutely crucial. You said that we need to maintain and enhance the role of the local MP.

We’ve heard of certain systems that would—I don’t want to say “dilute”—add to the number of MPs representing a riding. For instance, in the MMP model, you would vote for a local MP, but there would also be a regional MP, chosen by the party whether from an open list or a closed list, once the voter voted for whatever party they approved of. What do you think would happen, in terms of your suggestion to maintain and enhance the role of the MP, if we were to have multiple MPs in a riding?

Dr. Paul Thomas: You obviously would have two categories of members of Parliament. In conversations with members of the House of Representatives in New Zealand, we heard that those MPs who do not have constituency obligations play a different role. For some people, if you’re into policy development and you want to be hands-on and help hockey teams—and I guess they wouldn’t be coming from New Zealand—or help individual citizens, then you may feel that is not the choice for you. That’s one of my concerns.

I like the idea that the local MP puts a human face on government. I was a parliamentary intern way back in the early 1970s in the House of Commons. I worked with two fine members of Parliament, and I saw how important the mailbag was back in those days. It was more than just running errands on behalf of local people. It was generalizing from the cases that were coming before you to be informed when you went and talked on estimates to the minister and the public servants. I don’t want to lose that connection.

A two-tier model of MPs can happen, but I think on a national basis it’s a non-starter. It has to be on a regional basis or provincial basis. I don’t think you want policy kings sitting up high there, favourites with the Prime Minister’s Office, if they’re in the governing party.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid.

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

First of all, let me start by saying to April that you and I have a mutual friend, Kory Earle, who lives in Carleton Place, which is where my constituency office is located. Kory and I go way back. We’ve been in Santa Claus parades together and a whole variety of other things. Also, during the ice bucket challenge, Kory was the one

who dumped the big bucket of ice on my head. I remember that with fondness, but I’m glad it’s over.

I want to ask a couple of things to make sure I’m clear on this. When it comes to the issue of mandatory voting, am I right that your organization is opposed to mandatory voting? Would that be correct?

Ms. April D'Aubin: We’re opposed if, before all the barriers that might prevent people from voting were resolved, there would be penalties. People with disabilities should not be made worse off by any penalties that would be established with regard to mandatory voting, because there are sometimes reasons beyond your control that prevent you from getting out to vote.

Mr. Scott Reid: When one says “mandatory voting”, I assume the only thing that can mean is that there’s some kind of penalty for not voting. I can’t think of what other meaning it could have.

Okay, I think that answers that.

There’s been some discussion about electronic voting. We know that polls indicate that Canadians generally are in favour of the idea. On the other hand, the experts who have spoken before us warn us that we ought to be careful about security issues. It does strike me that if it were introduced as a supplement and were made available to people who are not able to exercise their franchise simply by going down to the polling station, then there might be a reasonable entry point for this means of voting.

Would it prove to be a meaningful supplement for people with disabilities? If so, which kinds of disabilities would it make the biggest difference for? I think mobility issues would be one, but what else would there be?

• (1905)

Ms. April D'Aubin: There are people with vision impairment. There’s a concern that people with vision impairment cannot independently verify their vote because of the paper ballot. Our colleagues with vision impairment are in support of online voting and telephone voting.

Mr. Scott Reid: That’s where you would hear the feedback? The automated voice would say, “You have voted for candidate B, so please confirm that’s right.” Is it that kind of thing?

Ms. April D'Aubin: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: For people who are visually impaired, though, when you go into the polling station don’t they have a grid they put over it? They tell you whose name is first, second, third, or fourth, then the official leaves, you remember that the candidate in position C is the one you want, and you make that notation. Doesn’t that somewhat resolve the problem?

Ms. April D'Aubin: That allows the individual to mark the ballot, but when I discussed it with my colleague John Rae, who is our first vice-chair, he said that after the last election he wasn’t really sure when he marked his ballot with the template if it had been affixed to the template correctly and if he had the X in the right spot. He couldn’t independently verify it.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. That’s the advantage of the audio feedback, if you have that kind of system.

I should mention, by the way, on the voting by telephone where you would hear that feedback, that we actually do it in the town where I live. I was suspicious of it beforehand, and I was impressed by it afterwards, for what that's worth. Now, that's for a town of 5,000 people, and the security issues are fewer and so on, but it was interesting to note.

As a final question here, we've talked about trying to increase voter participation through changing voting systems. I don't mean to diminish the validity of trying to search for solutions that achieve that goal. But am I right in asserting that for people with disabilities the main effort ought to be in ensuring the most thorough follow-through possible with Elections Canada's post-election report on all the myriad little problems that exist with accessibility, such as the location of polling stations, the access to polling stations, the ability to...? Am I right in that? Is that the main focus we ought to be having?

The Chair: Briefly, please, if you can.

Mr. Carlos Sosa: You're right. We need to commit to learning from the mistakes that were made.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you to our witnesses.

I offer a particular thank you to all of you who turned out here tonight in beautiful Winnipeg. It's the hot ticket in town.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We all have a serious affliction that we should probably talk about later.

Professor Thomas, I don't want to paraphrase your comments too much, but I would suggest, from hearing you testify, that there was something to the effect that you're generally satisfied with the voting system as it is, the first past the post model as it applies to Canada. Is that fair?

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yes. Generally, I think some of the problems are not caused by the design of the system. Dare I say they're caused in part by political behaviour?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: How dare you, sir? I take that quite personally.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let me express some dissatisfaction and have you perhaps address it. I'm going to frame this in terms of the 40% or 30% of Canadians who don't vote, which all political actors say we're concerned about. When people don't vote, they don't pay attention. Whole groups are under-represented. Traditionally, those are low-income groups, first nations, women, and people with disabilities. Is that a fair assessment?

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Getting voter turnout up would be good. The Elections Manitoba report that came out today suggested that under a proportional system as much as half of the voters who didn't vote in the last provincial election would vote under a proportional system.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I haven't read that report. I've only read the press release. The turnout issue is more complicated in terms of the reasons why people fail to vote. The largest category of reasons are the everyday things in your life, like "I forgot", "I'm too busy"—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, not according to this research.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Different polls have told us different things. Elections Manitoba.... The last poll done by Probe told a different set of reasons in terms of what was the top priority.

I'll just say this to conclude, Mr. Cullen, on this point. The simplest, least expensive way to bring turnout up is to make voting mandatory. You'll get close to 90% or above 90%. If turnout is your measure of the health of democracy—

• (1910)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It is one of the measures we could—

Dr. Paul Thomas: It is one.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Here's another measure.

We rank 64th in the world in terms of women in our Parliament right now. We know, through evidence, that proportional systems give us far greater representation of women, far better policies on issues like social justice, climate change. This is research that this committee has heard.

As a country, we have not done a good job in terms of the determinants of health, social justice issues, and the gap between those who have and have not, nor have we done a good job to this point on issues that are longer term, like climate change. There has been an implicit connection—more than anecdotal—an empirical connection, between voters having greater power and votes being equally represented by the vote in terms of the seats that are elected.

I want to speak to the distortion factor. It is that 39%, or less in some cases, gives you 100% of the power under our current system. One of the reasons people suggest that they lose faith is that they don't feel their vote is a voice, that it has no power. We should keep that regional connection that you talked about by the way. I think that's important, but why not give every vote the power to effect change, rather than the current system in which in the last election more than nine million, more than half of the votes cast, went toward anyone actually becoming elected?

Dr. Paul Thomas: I should have kept track of all those points. Let me start at the end.

The idea that votes are wasted because I vote for a candidate who doesn't get elected is a misunderstanding, it seems to me, of the nature of democracy. I could vote for a lifetime in the most affluent constituency in Manitoba, Tuxedo, for the NDP, and I could see myself building support for the party more generally.

So that's one—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sorry, so I vote for a lifetime and the only thing I get for it is something about maybe nominally building support. I want to affect what happens in my life.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I know you do, but voting is not the only way you can do that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, but we're talking about voting.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Right.

On the point about diverse representation in legislatures, I am all in favour of a more socially representative background for members. A critical mass of people from a certain background makes a difference in terms of the legislative output and so on. Now, it matters more to be around the cabinet table than to sit in the House of Commons in terms of where influence resides, but that's another problem.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I find that it depends on the minister and it depends on the MP.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I agree, it all depends.

However, there are other ways of doing it, a royal commission on electoral reform. Give the parties an incentive, or a rule even, to offer more balanced representative rosters of candidates in elections. There are a number of ways you can go at it. I'm onside with where you want to go. I'm just saying there's not one route and the electoral system is an indirect route.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. St-Marie.

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

I also want to say hello to all the people in the audience. Thank you for coming in great numbers this evening. We look forward to hearing from you.

I'll start with a question for you, Mr. Thomas. Don't worry, I will not confront you as much as my colleague Mr. Cullen did, constructive though it is.

You suggested that we target three or four values to build on as we determine the next system. Let me throw the question back to you: in your opinion, what are the three or four key values?

[English]

Dr. Paul Thomas: As you can tell, I'm something of an institutional conservative. I'm not big into radical experiments with institutional and constitutional arrangements that have served the country fairly well. I would say that our system concentrates authority and power, and that way people take the credit or the blame for what they do. It's unlike the American system of divided power and checks and balances where accountability is diffused.

I like the idea of a local representative. I've already indicated that. That's a very high priority for me. I wouldn't sacrifice that.

I don't like the idea of two categories of members of Parliament. I could live with it. I like the idea that if you don't have coalitions or minority governments... I'm not afraid of coalitions or minority governments. If we went the route of coalitions, we'd have to develop precedents and practices for that, and we don't have any experience with that. New Zealand had to develop that, so they have had supply agreements and confidence agreements among the parties since they adopted mixed-member proportional.

I like efficiency and effectiveness in government. I don't want a prime minister to be able to say, "I would have given us a bold policy on climate change, but I couldn't because my allies, my colleagues in the coalition, wouldn't allow me to do that." The Americans have a problem of too much dispersible power and

authority. We have the opposite problem of too much concentration of power and authority. Again, as I said to Mr. Cullen, there are other ways to deal with that beyond the electoral system. I'm not saying no to electoral reform, I'm just saying you don't put all of our eggs in one basket.

● (1915)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you very much.

I have a question for Ms. D'Aubin. Mr. Sosa, you may add something to Ms. D'Aubin's answer if you wish.

I think we have clearly understood your message, namely that access to polling stations, candidates and rooms—like this one, for example—is paramount. We must not overlook this; we must bear it in mind at all times. In my view, this value exists but we have to revisit it.

For instance, in our constituency offices, we are very strongly urged to provide access to people with reduced mobility. We must continue to move in that direction. This is a very important value. We all know people with reduced mobility and we can see the challenges they are facing on a daily basis. I believe we must implement measures to help all those people reach the polling stations. For the hearing and visually impaired, there must be special ballots or touchscreen ballots. Measures must be taken for them.

Ms. D'Aubin, I would now like to talk about voting by telephone, online or by proxy. My big concern with that is the possibility of fraud. As we know, there have been many cases of fraud in the past.

In some parties, malicious people are willing to do almost anything to win the election, including vote-buying or identity theft, even stealing the identity of deceased people. Can you imagine that? There may be undue pressure. It is difficult to monitor remote voting. When you step into a voting booth, it feels more like a solemn occasion and the level of oversight is higher.

In your opinion, is it possible to control fraud problems when the voting is done remotely?

If so, how can it be done?

[English]

Ms. April D'Aubin: I'm not a technology expert, so I don't have any recommendations on how to control fraud or to make it a secure system.

We believe that we need to persevere and try to develop a system that is barrier-free.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): I really do appreciate so many people from Winnipeg coming out tonight.

I wanted to start with the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. This is a concern we haven't had raised. As you know, this is our 26th meeting. We haven't heard very much from your community. I really want to take advantage of your experience and always be mindful of "Nothing About Us Without Us". Thank you very much for being here.

I'm wondering about the experiment that you told us about, Ms. D'Aubin, in which they attempted in a by-election to try out new technologies. This is very consistent with what Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand told the committee he might be interested in doing with online voting, perhaps a specific experiment, maybe in a by-election, looking specifically to a community that might benefit.

What lessons would you like to share with us? I can't predict what my colleagues on the committee will want to recommend. I think it's very unlikely we would recommend something that the Chief Electoral Officer has told us is simply not on, such as widespread use of online voting by the next election. However, a targeted experiment, a pilot project, is quite likely.

What can we learn from this experiment in Winnipeg?

• (1920)

Ms. April D'Aubin: One of the things that we learned was that replicating the paper ballot made it a very difficult test. Each ballot was to look different, so that the people who counted wouldn't be able to tell that this had been done by the machine versus something that people had marked themselves.

I think we need to have reasonable expectations of what we're looking for. Is it really reasonable to replicate squiggles in people's writing style? That's one thing we need to be looking for.

Also, if you're working to make it for people with disabilities, then involve people with disabilities right from the very beginning stages and throughout the process, so that it's not that they come in after you've selected a device to test. You start right at the very beginning stage and involve that community so that you have an idea of all the concerns from the get-go, when the test is designed.

Ms. Elizabeth May: It strikes me, too, that we might jump to online voting as a solution without exploring other ways in which we could reduce the barriers for people with disabilities to vote, because a lot of the ones you mentioned aren't technological at all. They're access to transport, the costs involved, the accessibility and location of polling stations—all of those things.

Of course, there's also the additional ID requirements, which I personally think we should remove. I think it creates a barrier that makes it particularly difficult for certain Canadians to vote. I don't think we ever had a problem. I've always said that the idea that we had to prove who we were before we could vote, as if we had widespread voter fraud in Canada.... Our problem isn't that people vote more than once. Our problem is that people vote less than once.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: I don't really know why we needed all that extra security.

In pursuing that, could you identify any ideas that we can implement quite easily, without new and untested technology with security concerns, to improve accessibility and remove the barriers for people with disabilities to vote?

Mr. Carlos Sosa: I think this will take a longer-term approach. It won't be solved in one election. I think we have to realize that poverty is the major barrier here. If we don't deal with poverty, then how will we be able to vote? It's simply the act of getting to the

polling station that's the issue, and there are so many barriers related to poverty right then and there.

The Chair: Mr. DeCoursey.

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

Thank you to all our presenters and to everybody who joined us this evening in hockey-crazed Winnipeg. On a night when Team Canada faces off against the U.S., it's great to see so many folks out.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We'll lose half the room now.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: The last update that flashed in front of me had the U.S. up 1-0 early in the first. Our combined will here will do us well tonight.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I hate winner-take-all hockey.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: But don't count that against me.

The Chair: The clock goes back to zero now.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I can't think of any cheeky comeback, Elizabeth.

Thank you very much, Mr. Sosa and Ms. D'Aubin, for your mindful presentation on the things we need to consider in working with your organization and those living with disabilities as we try to enhance the system for all Canadians.

Dr. Thomas, thank you for what I thought was a balanced and insightful presentation on the panoply of issues in front of us that we have to deal with. You spoke in your presentation about this conversation being part of a response to a democratic malaise, but reminded us that we are not in a crisis with our democracy here in Canada and should be mindful not to reduce this conversation into simplicities that allow polarized sides to talk past one another. Can you expand on that, and perhaps remind us of some of the ways in which we can turn this into a conversation of slogans and not the substantive conversation we need to have on enhancing the electoral process for all Canadians?

• (1925)

Dr. Paul Thomas: I just want to offer a short intervention—I'll get right to your question—on the disability issue. I am active with a coalition of 72 groups as a volunteer, and these issues are very serious for them. I'm also on the Elections Canada advisory board, and anything I say here tonight has nothing to do with that entity or with Elections Canada.

I know on automation at the polling stations and on online voting, we met last week for a day and those were the two primary topics of the day. Very serious thought is being given to the operational requirements of making those things happen.

Inevitably, there are advocacy groups—I've heard them in action—and they believe strongly and they have certainty in their minds that some systems are better than others. They wanted to bump the existing system and find a replacement, and sometimes I think they go overboard. Political scientists, if they were better at their research and had more evidence to present, might be able to give solid answers, but we're not there, quite frankly.

The main book on electoral reform across different countries tells us that, at the end of day, you tinkered with the electoral system and not a lot changed within the political system. It's rather depressing and discouraging. They may not have measured everything, but I cite that book at some length in the big paper that I mentioned.

We have to say that we can blend these models in some creative way to do a made-in-Canada model that respects the regional fact of life, respects the pluralism that's Canadian society, and reflects the fact that our system of cabinet parliamentary government is among the most centralized in the world. Things are changing under this government compared to the former government, and hopefully the democratic reform agenda that Prime Minister Trudeau ran under, including a lot of things like controlling pre-writ spending, regulating leadership debates, more autonomy for committees.... There's a long, long list of things to be done there. If we get too hung up on electoral reform, I think we may get away from those other crucially important agenda items.

That's not a satisfactory answer to your question. I don't have a definitive answer. I guess I'm saying that, in your report and in communications by the government and the other parties, we should try to find what's in the public interest and how we reach out to those disengaged voters who are paying casual attention to this, if at all, and appeal to them on the level of values. If you begin to talk the technicalities, you're going to lose them. I've been to two town halls now, a church group and a business group. I whipped them into apathy very quickly. I'm that good at this now.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I think what your answer does remind us is that the electoral system is one component of a larger system of parliamentary democracy and governance wrapped up in a larger political culture, all of which are intertwined together and are components of our democracy.

Can you touch quickly on the value of accountability that you see as foundational in the aspect of local representation that is part of our political culture?

Dr. Paul Thomas: There's a wonderful survey that comes out of Ryerson University on why people mistrust politicians. The reasons are the failure to deliver on promises—I'm speaking to retired parliamentarians on Thursday on this topic—the avoidance of accountability, refusing to apologize for mistakes that are made, and so on. The system makes it too easy to slough off responsibility. Too many politicians today—and I would probably do this if I were in public life—say, “I apologize, I take responsibility”, but there are no consequences, and Canadians think there should be consequences when policy blunders are made, when bureaucrats screw up, and when the minister dodges the responsibility for it in the House of Commons or beyond.

It's a complicated problem. I've written endlessly about accountability, the big “A” word, and we have to define accountability more strictly and—

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Monsieur Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Good evening. Thank you all for being here, whether you are a spectator in the room or one of the three witnesses.

Mr. Thomas, a little earlier, my colleague was talking about a study done in Manitoba. According to the study, 50% of people who did not vote said that they would have voted had the voting system been different.

A study by the Institut du nouveau monde in Quebec—which, let me just say right away, is in favour of a proportional voting system—combined a survey with group consultations. The study shows the reasons given by the young and not so young for not voting.

The reasons include people's lack of interest in politics, people being too busy, problems with registration on the voters list, disillusionment, people not liking the electoral issues, people being out of the riding for the vote, and health issues. So there are all sorts of reasons other than the voting system.

Personally, I have no doubt about that. I rely on the data from Professor André Blais, who is an expert in proportional voting systems in Quebec, at the University of Montreal. I see you nodding. You seem to know him or you may have already read his documents. He clearly stated that there will be no difference in the percentage of people voting if we shift to a proportional voting system. The difference is of 3%, give or take. So there is not really an upward trend.

That said, I am among those who believe that we could take tangible action to have people vote and to have more women. Witnesses have told us that we could change some party rules without necessarily changing the voting system.

Could you name some of the tangible actions that you think could be taken—apart from changing the voting system—and that would ensure that we would have better representation, better accessibility? I would like to hear what you have to say. Are there one or two things you could share with me?

● (1930)

[*English*]

Dr. Paul Thomas: On the decline in voter turnout, the biggest part of the explanation for that is the decline in voting by young Canadians, 18- to 25-year-olds. Over time, this is the strongest explanation. They are disconnected from mainstream politics. It's not that they're not political. They find all sorts of causes that they identify with and become very political and very active about, but not the idea of going out to vote.

We don't want to create a political culture in which the norm of non-voting becomes a pattern, a part of the political culture. In countries that have mandatory voting, there's some evidence, not entirely persuasive but pretty good, that mandatory voting does create a behavioural norm, if you like, in favour of voting. As you grow further into adulthood and get into your mature years, there's a greater likelihood, if you start early. Elections Canada is going to have pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds on the brink of voting age. That's a good idea. It's working in 15 states. There are other ways. Last time Elections Canada went out and reached out to student associations.

You have to amend the Fair Elections Act. It puts an unduly restrictive condition on the mandate of Elections Canada to do outreach. It shouldn't involve motivation. It shouldn't tell people they have to vote, or something like that, but it should tell people about the importance of voting, how to vote, and things like that. That will help with the margins.

Almost everything you can suggest helps with the margins, but that's not a reason to say you shouldn't try this or try that. You try some things and you try multiple things, and likely you'll get gradual incremental improvement in the health of Canadian democracy, which isn't that sick to start with. We want to help our democracy, but it isn't that sick to start with.

Marginal improvements make a big difference. Mandatory voting in the United States, it's predicted, would bring the turnout rate up 30%. In Canada, André Blais says that it would bring the turnout rate up between 6% and 13%. It depends on a bunch of factors.

Anyway, let's not go for one silver bullet, one institutional fix that will cure all of this. There are a number of things that have to be done.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Rayes, you have about 30 seconds left.

Mr. Alain Rayes: One of the arguments often put forward by those in favour of a proportional voting system is that it promotes better representation of women and minorities. Do you think that, with a rule that could be implemented without changing the voting system, we could improve those statistics and reach 50% of women and a better representation of minorities?

In your view, are there ways to achieve a result like that? Let's go quickly, because there's not a lot of time left.

[English]

Dr. Paul Thomas: There's some evidence that it works. The countries that have adopted proportional representation were quite often already progressive in their social thinking, so you don't know what's purely cause and effect.

The parties can do lots of things on their own. They can produce more representative slates of candidates and run women, aboriginal, and minority group candidates in ridings where they stand some chance of winning. There are things parties can do without having to change the electoral system in a fundamental way.

• (1935)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Rayes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Chair, I just want to take a second to make a comment and thank the other witnesses.

Let me just congratulate you. I did not have an opportunity to ask you questions. I admire the work that you do for people with disabilities, who don't have access to the same services as everyone else.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, go ahead.

[English]

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

This is a very interesting conversation. I am really happy to hear about accessibility issues because we haven't been talking a whole lot about that yet. You've given me and this committee a lot to think about in terms of how we can be accessible.

That's a great segue, I guess, into voter turnout. We probably don't have a lot of disabled people coming out to the polls. A lot of people are isolated in certain areas in terms of coming out to the polls. We need to improve on that.

Again and again, we're hearing, "my vote doesn't count and that's why I don't vote". When I was going door to door, I did hear that. I'm hearing it, and I'm not saying that it's not true, that sentiment that some people may feel. It's very good to hear that, but I was also hearing a lot of other things. The people who closed the door, saying, "I don't vote", weren't really interested in any political party. They weren't interested in politics. That seemed to me to be the recurring theme that I heard from people who weren't interested in going out to the polls. They didn't see what was in it for them.

Would anybody from the panel like to comment on that and why the turnout is so low? What are your ideas behind the fact that people are not coming out?

Mr. Carlos Sosa: I think one of the reasons can be tied to poverty. We see this in any trend. Typically, those who live in more affluent areas tend to vote more than those who are in poverty.

I think what we need to be dealing with here are the issues of poverty. Once we deal with those issues, I think people will get out and vote. The fact of the matter is that we also have to be dealing with—I'll reiterate—the barriers just to get to the voting station. It's about access to Handi-Transit. It's about the cost to get ID. It's about the accessibility of the voting station.

We have to look at this holistically. It's not going to change overnight, but attempts to deal with these issues definitely need to be made.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Professor Thomas.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Decline in turnout is a worldwide phenomenon, as is mistrust of politicians, and the causes of declining participation are both historical and contemporary—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's interesting to hear you say that, because I was looking at some numbers to see how we can improve and maybe be a great country that has a different voting system and have great voter turnout. No matter what, historically the numbers have been declining in every single country.

Even when New Zealand turned to MMP, their voter turnout didn't go up. It fell. In 2014 their voter turnout was better than ours. It was almost 77%. In 1960 it was 90%. I can even give you the numbers for the nineties and for what it was just before it turned. It was still a lot higher than what it is today.

We see that same trend in the U.S. for the presidential election. Yes, they don't have proportional representation, but they have two candidates running, so your votes basically would count. They've declined over the years too. All the countries seem to have been in the 80th or 90th percentile for turnout in the 1960s and the 1950s. Now they're all in the sixties and the seventies, and some are even lower.

To me, it seems that regardless of what voting system I'm looking at, turnout overall is just extremely low. We need to do something about it. We need to get people engaged again. I'm trying to figure out how we engage them and get that trust back.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Again, at the risk of repeating myself, just to go to your point, even a country like Australia, where typically 95% of the people show up to vote because there's a modest fine if you fail to vote.... Less than 1% of people who don't vote ever pay the fine. You get a letter telling you that you failed to vote and asking for a valid reason. Most of them escape paying the \$20 fine or whatever it is.

We can do things by way of mandatory voting. Also, at the level of Elections Canada, we can facilitate voting with weekend voting and even Sunday voting. Some people may not like that, but other people might take advantage of it. Also, we could have free registration of young people and automation at the polls. There are all sorts of operational things you can do to make the whole voting experience more convenient, more accessible, and so on.

The bigger problem is within the political system. It would require action from the politicians—

• (1940)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses and those in the room.

My first question is for Professor Thomas.

You asked us a lot of very relevant questions. I think we will have to find the answers to a number of them. If I combine your various questions, I come to the conclusion that our committee's mandate must be to reach a non-partisan compromise to better serve the country's needs.

I also agree with you that it is good to study the various voting systems being used in some countries around the world, but that we need to find a system that reflects our geography, our history and our culture. We must find the model that suits us best. We know that the proportional voting system has been in use for 60 years in a number of countries and, in fact, none of the countries that adopted a proportional voting system changed their minds later. I would have liked to hear what you have to say about the considerations at play here in comparison to other models.

You are asking the question, but I would have liked to hear the answer.

[*English*]

Dr. Paul Thomas: The country we're most often compared to is Australia, because we're large geographic entities, because of their federal system and cabinet parliamentary system, and because they're a former British colony, and so on.

On the other hand, they have a far more homogeneous society. There's less diversity in Australia. They also have aboriginal populations, indigenous people, and so on. There is more of a unified national political culture in Australia. That's not to say they don't have philosophical and ideological differences among their parties.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I fully understand those considerations. Thank you.

My colleague Nathan Cullen said that we need to find a voting system that helps have more women elected. My colleague Mr. Rayes asked questions about how that can be achieved. Every time we sit in the House of Commons—and I am sure that my colleagues have the same feeling—we, as women, are faced with the fact that we are only 26% of the members present.

That is why I was very happy that my colleague Kennedy Stewart is introducing Bill C-237. For your information, this is a bill on gender equity among candidates. Regardless of whether or not you are familiar with this bill, do you think it is a good idea to adopt measures to encourage political parties to address equity, as Bill C-237 is proposing?

[*English*]

Dr. Paul Thomas: I wouldn't start by doing it by law and regulation. I'd start by doing it by incentives to political parties to run balanced slates of candidates. Then, if they failed to respond within a certain period of time, I'd say that maybe we should follow the example of other countries and make it that there has to be fifty-fifty on the roster.

I would go to that reluctantly. On a lot of these things, we're asking ourselves if we trust politicians and political parties to fix some of the malaise and the problems, or do we need a set of laws, regulations, and institutional changes to do things that they wouldn't do if they understood what the country needed, things that are against their self-interest.

I'm saying I still have enough trust in politicians and political parties that I would like to see them do it themselves, rather than give them the institutional quick fix that some people may promote.

• (1945)

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Unfortunately, many women's groups no longer have that trust.

I have one last short question.

Mr. Sosa and Ms. D'Aubin, thank you for your comments on accessibility and online voting. You have not said anything about electoral reform. In your view, does one voting system or another hinder accessibility for people with disabilities?

[English]

Ms. April D'Aubin: We haven't taken a position on one system over the other.

The Chair: *Merci*, Madame Sansoucy.

Mr. Maguire, go ahead.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses here this evening. As the Manitoban on the panel, I would like to say welcome to everyone here, in our friendly city of Winnipeg.

Dr. Thomas, I was most interested in some of your comments about being skeptical about needing reform in our system. We've talked at other meetings about how we have a pretty good system in place, in terms of being respected by other nations in the world in regard to our electoral process. It doesn't mean it can't be improved, but it is recognized as a very good system. We all agree that there is no perfect system—that was your number one item, as I recall—and that problems exist in the principles and values. You look at changing some of those.

I got most of your points down here. I will get the rest out of *Hansard*. The legitimization of the process for politicians is the point that I would like you to expand on, as well as keeping the personal factor of the local member of Parliament. Personally, I find that to be very important with constituents. It doesn't matter who they are. When they come to my door, they are always welcome. Can you elaborate on what you meant there and how important it is to keep that part in our electoral process?

Dr. Paul Thomas: As I said, legitimacy is a contentious notion that has been the subject of debate among philosophers and social scientists for centuries, and I don't like it when we have shallow statements in the media that if you fail to get this approval rating on a particular project, somehow it is illegitimate, or that a referendum is the one and only way you can arrive at a legitimate outcome to a process like this. There could be multiple methods for deliberation and decision-making on a topic as important and sensitive as electoral reform, and a referendum could or could not be part of it. I am almost of two minds on that. Legitimacy, use the term carefully.

On local representation, I did research on how the MPs manage their incoming mail, and it proved to me that even though Canadians are often unaware of the names of their local representatives, when they have a problem they turn to them. I would not want to see that diminished. I could tell a wonderful joke about that, but I won't because the time is not here.

The Chair: If it is a good joke, we could give you a bit more time.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Chair, I will run the analogy for Dr. Thomas of members of Parliament here being like your insurance policy: you don't really want it, but when you need it, it is there.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I am a north end Winnipeg boy. I grew up in the north end. My mother knew Stanley Knowles's wife, so I knew Stanley Knowles.

A constituent called Stanley Knowles, the great dean of Parliament, and said, "Stanley, I just bought new garbage cans. The first time the crew came by they dented them all. What are you going to do about it, Stanley?"

Stanley said something like, "It is probably a city responsibility. What are you calling me for?"

She said, "Well, I didn't want to start at the top."

Sometimes people don't sort out jurisdictions very well in their minds. Anyway, I'll stop before I lose my credibility.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I think there is another comment there. We had one presentation that indicated that maybe we should just make a change to PR, or other systems of voting besides first past the post, implement it for a couple of elections, and then give people an opportunity to have a say on whether they like it.

I noted you said that we don't have to really rush to do this reform for the 2019 election. Can you elaborate on that?

• (1950)

Dr. Paul Thomas: I am trying to be fair and objective about this. I think it was a rash promise to suggest that this could happen before 2019. The government was slow to get going with this committee, and it was slow to make a compromise to ensure that all parties—not just official parties in terms of the House of Commons—were on the committee. They gave up their majority and that was a good gesture on their part toward compromise.

I just don't think it is feasible. You would have to hold a referendum by June 2017. It would have to be done under the current Elections Act. That means corporations could spend during the referendum. I just think it would be better to take the time and get it right. Then, I would say, have an action-forcing mechanism that four or five years from the adoption of this committee, or something like that, this committee be reconstituted so another parliamentary committee can do a review of what has gone on.

The New Zealanders went through it from 1993 and have been talking about electoral reform for more than two decades. It takes time to get public awareness and understanding of the issues.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll end the round with Mr. Aldag.

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

Dr. Thomas, we've had a lot of witnesses come to us and talk about the benefits of proportional systems. I don't know why, but I was a bit surprised with what I thought I heard you say, which was that first past the post was not so bad. Did I misunderstand?

Dr. Paul Thomas: It sounds contrarian almost, to be in defence of the status quo. I'm not an enthusiastic fan of first past the post. I think there are things that could be done within that system to ensure greater internal democracy within parties, including caucus democracy, and to make greater opportunities for regional voices to be heard in Ottawa. My Ph.D. was on the committee system. I'm a great believer that committees are the best forum for backbench members of Parliament to have influence, but there has to be permission, encouragement, and support from the governing party of the day.

There are other things to be done. I'm almost agnostic on which electoral system is best for the country. We could live with a number of them, and I don't think the electoral system is all that determinative of how Canadians feel about their democracy.

Mr. John Aldag: You've touched on it, but this is where I was going to go with that. Can we do enough tinkering on the edges to deal with the issues we're hearing, the dissatisfaction, or do we need to slide down the path of moving to a different system? This is where you're not having a strong opinion on it. There are things like alternative vote. Today we heard about PR light, which brings in an element of the proportional system.

Where do we start moving? You say that there is enough of the other stuff we could do. We have a sort of majority system. Is that the kind of realm we should stay in, given that it has worked for us? Should we focus our efforts on tinkering? Where do we go?

Dr. Paul Thomas: If you do alternative vote, there will be a greater consensus among the electorate in 338 constituencies that the winner is really the winner, because they had to accumulate more votes. Admittedly, some of those votes were second preferences of voters whose first preference dropped off the list. Nonetheless, it does address it to some extent.

If you ask yourself how serious the problem is and you answer the way I do, that it's not drastic, not a crisis, and you look at the alternative vote model, then you could make an assessment. If some of the problems persisted, even under alternative vote, and you could link those problems to the electoral system, then you could go back and have a second look and perhaps go for some form of modified proportional representation. No one in their right mind recommends pure PR for this country. It's just not on the books.

• (1955)

Mr. John Aldag: What constitutes legitimacy within a democratic system? It gets into systems and tinkering or fixing some of the other issues. Would you care to comment? I have another question we could go to, but if you have any thoughts on this question of legitimacy, we'd like to hear them.

Dr. Paul Thomas: I have probably said enough to bore people completely on legitimacy.

Mr. John Aldag: That's fine. Okay.

The final piece has to do with the brief that we had on compulsory voting. I thought it was interesting that you felt there was no compelling reason to go that way. There is lots of the material in the

submission we had, but is there anything further you want to share with us on this point?

Dr. Paul Thomas: I don't think there's much to add to that. It's a judgment call. My view is that voting is very important. It should be seen as a civic duty, and I think we can ingrain that attitude into the political culture more than we have now. I just don't think we're at a point where we should give up on the political process. In the last election, I think the turnout went up 7% or something like that, the highest turnout since 1993. A new leader, with new ideas, and some reaction against a former government helped that, no doubt.

Now I think it's up to politicians and parties to work to maintain contact with Canadians and get them returning to the polls and give them something more to vote for that they find interesting and exciting.

The Chair: Thank you.

First of all, thank you to the witnesses. We really appreciate your coming here tonight. It was the first time we'd really heard from representatives of the disability community. It was very useful for us, and we appreciate your being here to lay out those areas that require improvement. You're right, we have to constantly shine a light on what more needs to be done. It's just one of those things that we have to always be sensitive to and aware of.

Thank you for coming. Of course, you're welcome to stay for the open-mike session.

Now we're at the point that I know many in the audience have been waiting for with great excitement, I hope. The good news is that we have many people who want to provide their opinion on this issue. We at the committee are determined to hear from everyone. We need your input for our report.

We're very excited by the turnout tonight, but I'm going to need your help. I'm sure you want everyone to be able to have their say. For that to happen, we need to respect the time limits that we've been using for this segment of our tour.

Essentially, every intervenor will have two minutes. When there are about 30 seconds left, I will raise my hand. It doesn't mean you have to stop at that moment; it just means that we're getting to the end. That's essentially the procedure.

We'd like some good, bold statements. That means we don't need a preamble to soften your message. We can take the direct hit, and so we're hoping for some good direct communication.

Also, the way we'll operate to make it go a little faster is that I'll call two names to start: Ms. Lamb and Mr. Cyr. If one of you could take one mike, and the other the other mike, when one of you leaves the mike after you've made your comments, I'll call another name, and that person can go to the mike and wait their turn so that the mikes will always be occupied.

Mr. Cyr is not here. Is Ms. Lamb here?

Is Mr. Terry Woods here? Perfect.

Ms. Lamb, you have two minutes to weigh in on this important issue for our democracy.

● (2000)

Mrs. Louise Lamb (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm tired of being forced by the present electoral system to often cast my vote strategically. Essentially, I have to cast a negative vote against the candidate or party that I loathe, rather than voting for the candidate who I think will best represent me and the constituency. That's the essence of the present system of first past the post. I think it's the essence of the very real cynicism and lack of interest.

I have children aged 22 and 26. I still have an eye on how youth voters are thinking, and I can assure you that there's a real danger when your vote really doesn't count. Small wonder why our Parliament is not truly representative in terms of gender parity and visible minorities. You're not voting for your first choice; you're voting against to defeat, to replace, another choice. You're sick of something, but you're not voting for what you want.

I appreciate Professor Thomas's remarks, but I think he's wrong on what causes people not to vote or not to be excited by the political process. There is a very high level of disengagement from the democratic process, and cynicism is permeating our political culture precisely because of the present system.

The issue of strategic voting was something that was very much a part of a town hall I recently attended in which Terry Duguid and Minister Monsef were present. I think I can say fairly that there was a significant majority of people whose main point was that first past the post needs to be replaced. There has to be a way to vote for, rather than against a candidate, to make your vote count.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that notice.

We'll go to Mr. Woods, but before Mr. Woods begins, is Mr. Shore here? Please go to the other mike while Mr. Woods delivers his comments.

Go ahead, Mr. Woods. You have two minutes.

Mr. Terry Woods (As an Individual): I agree with what the previous speaker said. I think that's an important thing that we must think about.

I think a couple of things that came up this evening are very pertinent. One of them that keeps bouncing up is credibility and whether or not people believe, and can believe, what politicians tell them.

This is a very bold first step that the government has made in keeping its promise of electoral reform, to try to address some of the apathy that exists right now among our electorate.

A comment was also made by Mr. Thomas that we don't need to rush into this. Maybe another committee...and this sort of thing. I think this is one of the things that tends to turn people off when it comes to deciding whether or not they can trust politicians, and whether or not their vote actually means something. They see endless debate going on, with little that they can see as concrete from it. I think we need to move forward with this committee and with its recommendations, and not get mired in lengthy debates as to what is best.

The other point that was brought up was whether or not mandatory voting should be implemented. The one caution I would have with mandatory voting—although there have also been some issues regarding accessibility—is that if you force someone to vote, but they still don't think their vote counts, then you're really forcing them to do something they don't believe in anyway.

While you may get more people out to vote, I think that people should learn that it is their responsibility to vote. You have to have a result.

The Chair: That was two minutes even. That's good timing. Thank you.

Mr. Shore is next.

Mr. Marcel Gosselin, please come to the mike.

Mr. Shore, go ahead, please.

Mr. Henry Shore (As an Individual): I think these proceedings, instead of being run by politicians, should be run by Elections Canada, which is an independent body.

I think that no matter what comes of this, the government in power is going to twist arms and have the report say what they want it to say.

I think this process should be put into a referendum, with however many alternative types of voting, and with the questions to be determined by Elections Canada. It should go to a referendum so that it's democratic and not decided by the government, which was elected by a first past the post decision.

In terms of apathy, I think one reason there's apathy is that there's no one worth voting for, especially with the so-called main parties. I know that in the last provincial election, there was no one I wanted to vote for. I ended up voting Green, because they spoke the most to what I believed in, but the three main parties did not, which is why I think there's voter apathy. Also, in the federal election, all the parties were targeting the so-called middle class. The young voters, millennials, a lot of them are in precarious employment positions and are living marginal lives in economic terms, and none of the major parties was speaking to them.

It's like Trump and Hillary Clinton, there's no one to vote for there. There is no good choice, so young people are staying home. If there were more of a choice.... Maybe it's a matter of no longer deciding MPs or party leaders through political conventions, but instead having a vote of some kind by the public.

● (2005)

The Chair: Mr. Marcel Gosselin is next.

Jeremie Gosselin, please take the other mike.

Bonsoir, monsieur Gosselin.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gosselin (As an Individual): Good evening. I am really pleased to have this opportunity and to see you here. It seems to me that I have waited for this moment my entire life.

[English]

I have voted in every election for the last half-century, and my vote has never counted.

[Translation]

The only exceptions are the times when I was asked to give some of my tax money to the party I was supporting, but even that was taken away from me.

I'm fed up.

[English]

I'm surprised that I'm still going out to vote; I understand why some don't.

[Translation]

I really appreciate the comments made by Mr. Cullen and Mr. Rayes.

I heard what you said about the young people not going to vote. I say to myself: "My goodness, I used to be an educator!". I think that if their votes counted, we could tell them to have hope that some votes will go here and others will go over there. Then we would have proportional representation.

[English]

Please, do not have a referendum. It will kill it. It will kill it.

[Translation]

I am convinced that you are able to make the right choices to achieve an outcome that will serve us well.

[English]

Please, make my vote count.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Jeremie Gosselin, the floor is yours.

[English]

Mr. Jeremie Gosselin (As an Individual): Did you want to call somebody up?

The Chair: I have another name here.

[Translation]

Mr. Nicraez? Is there a Mr. Nicraez?

Great. Okay.

Mr. Gosselin, go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Jeremie Gosselin: That was my dad.

Ten years ago, I found out about proportional representation, and I was blown away. This is important to me for two reasons. I grew up in a constituency where my voice didn't count under first past the post, and under an alternative vote, it still wouldn't count. The winning candidate had above 50%, so why should I show up, even with alternative vote? Alternative vote makes me cringe a bit, because I want to have my vote count. That's the first reason. For me, it's not necessarily about voter turnout or whatever else; it's about democracy. For me, democracy is when people vote, and here we have a chance of having a system in which votes can count. When you have just one candidate, okay, sure, some people will lose. But here we have a chance of having every vote count. That's the first reason.

The second reason is the fact that it changes the way governments operate. I want co-operation to be the mainstay of Parliament. Under proportional representation, it's something that you cannot take away from the system. Laws have to be approved by a government that has the majority of supporters. For me, that's also a fundamental part of democracy.

So those are the two main reasons I think proportional representation is very important. Alternative vote and first past the post do not meet these requirements, according to me.

I have just one more thing. Proportional representation isn't rocket science. Eighty countries have it. I think if we take the time to explain it to Canadians and talk about it, we will see the benefits of it.

● (2010)

The Chair: Thank you.

I would call up Morrissa Boerchers. Am I pronouncing it correctly?

Ms. Morrissa Boerchers (As an Individual): No.

The Chair: I would like to learn. I'm here to learn. How do you pronounce it?

Ms. Morrissa Boerchers: It's "Bo-churs".

The Chair: "Bo-churs". Okay, I'm sorry.

We'll go with Mr. Nicraez—

Mr. Charles David Nicraez (As an Individual): It's "Nic-arz", actually. It's supposed to be Polish, but it's not. It's off the boat Polish

The Chair: Mr. Nicraez and Ms. Boerchers, please.

Mr. Charles David Nicraez: Thank you. I'll try to be brief and as non-partisan as possible. I was the Green Party candidate for the Manitoba election in Wolseley and I got within 400 votes of winning.

Aside from the partisan stuff, I knocked on thousands of doors and talked with hundreds of people. I was able to get an idea of the hangover from the federal election, which was only six months previous. A lot of people felt that if they didn't vote for someone who was going to win, their votes would be wasted. In the federal election the whole idea was to vote out Harper. I believe a lot of people felt their votes were wasted because they had to vote out someone and didn't get to vote for someone. That was a persistent theme.

I helped Andrew Park, who is here, campaign for Winnipeg South Centre for the Green Party. We ran into so many people who said, "Oh, I'd vote for you, but we have to get rid of the Conservative candidate in this riding." I have a little bit of perspective on that because I talked to so many people.

My second point, and I don't want to take up too much time, is that I'm leaning toward compulsory voting because we also force people to get drivers' licences. We use coercion as the government to force people to do all sorts of things, and perhaps doing so with voting wouldn't be so bad because then it would be part of the culture.

In a sense, politically, my background is more radical. I think we need to have a change in society and a change in the culture. If people were obligated to vote, then the voter turnout would be much more.

There are problems with that. I have a lot of friends who are aboriginal people, and they're sovereignists. They don't believe they're part of Canada, and there could be legitimate reasons they didn't vote. I think the majority of people should vote.

That's all. Thanks for listening.

● (2015)

The Chair: Thank you.

I call up Mr. Weinberg. Is Mr. Weinberg here?

Ms. Boerchers, please go ahead.

Ms. Morrissa Boerchers: Hi. My name is Morrissa and I'm here with Leadnow, a citizens exodus group. I'm in favour of proportional representation. I believe that every vote should count.

I'm from the rural riding in Manitoba of Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, and my vote is never counted there. My vote will never count there, and I feel that is a shame. I've never been able to vote for the party that my feelings are most aligned with because I've had to vote strategically. I've never had a chance of having my vote count, and that is a shame.

I have a problem with people saying that our current system is working fine for us now. Maybe it is working fine for those people who are saying that, but as a young woman and someone who is perhaps maybe more progressive, I don't think this current system is working. I feel it's bad when 60% of the vote is not for the party that has 100% of the power. That is a big issue to my point of view.

Just as a note on engagement, it was really hard to find out about this. There are not many chairs available. I think if you want to get people involved in voter turnout and electoral reform, you have to try a bit harder.

I'm a young person who is fairly savvy with the computer and that kind of thing, and it was difficult to find you. It was hard to find out who the panel members are. I think there's a lot of lip service here, and I would like real change.

Thanks, guys.

The Chair: I would call Mr. Maclean to the mike.

We'll hear from Mr. Weinberg now.

Mr. Alon D. Weinberg (As an Individual): Thank you for having me speak here.

If you consider that the largest block controls the whole territory in every riding in Canada, what else works that way? Gangs work that way, where the largest block controls the whole territory. You can see the behaviour in question period over the last two decades. You can see the gangs are at play. Most Canadians are turned off by that, and I say it's the logic of the system that we currently have.

First past the post is a blank cheque for governments to dominate the other parties and Canadians through fake majoritarian rule. One need only look at the countless constructive amendments to the previous government's budget bill, Bill C-38, that were roundly voted down, one demoralizing whipped no vote after the other. You can watch the video of them sitting there all night. I know a few of you were there.

It's important to recall that less than a decade earlier the then leader of the opposition, Stephen Harper, also railed against such omnibus bills, which were then introduced under the Chrétien government and its own series of false majorities.

This bipolarity of decade-long swings between one party and another through our country's history is the direct result of an electoral system designed for two parties back in England a few centuries ago, and it's been toxic to the development of our democracy. This swing between one government with total control over Parliament and another breeds alienation, disempowerment, and disenfranchisement. It's an affront to the most noble visions that Canadians have for this country, the second-largest land mass on earth. We have a responsibility that is not being met by our democracy. It resembles instead the long heavyweight boxing match, with each trading decade-long blows, at one moment champ another moment vanquished. Heavyweight boxing often leaves the combatants bloodied, bruised, and brain damaged. That, I submit, is the state of Canadian democracy today.

What is the answer? The two dominant systems are majoritarian, represented by the alternative vote and various systems of proportional representation. I encourage everybody here to read carefully Fair Vote Canada's submission to the committee, which models three different models for a new electoral system, including a very innovative and new one that is rural-urban proportional. This is similar to what we had in Manitoba about 70 to 100 years ago, except with a proportional system in the rural area, which still would have a single member riding.

This is not a new process for Canada. In 2004, this was published by the Law Commission of Canada in *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada*, presided over by Irwin Cotler. I could go through all the meetings that were held in 2002, in Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver, Charlottetown, Montreal, London, Calgary, and on and on. This has already happened, and that commission recommended a mixed member proportional system.

I'll quickly read what it had to say about the alternative vote, and then I will finish.

The Chair: Well, you are over time, but—

Mr. Alon D. Weinberg: All right.

It ends, “In light of current concerns, the alternative vote system is not sufficiently proportional to constitute a viable alternative to the first-past-the-post system.”

I, and maybe two or three other people—

The Chair: Sir, you're out of time.

I will call Mr. Morrison up.

Mr. Maclean, go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Maclean (As an Individual): First, thanks for having me today. I am a resident of Winnipeg South Centre and a researcher with the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I was asked to come here today, as our president in Manitoba, Kelly Moist, is ironically currently in Ottawa for meetings. She asked me to come here today and express support for change in the way that we elect our representatives.

There are two principles that CUPE believes need to be addressed in a new system: one, a local connection to the MP; and, two, about the same proportion of seats in the House of Commons as the proportion of votes that each party receives.

We believe the best way to make this happen is through a mixed member proportional representation. It sounds complicated, but it's not. It means one ballot with two votes. Your first vote goes to elect your local MP. With the second vote, you select a party. It would function the same way too.

With the first vote, locally elected MPs would be elected exactly the way they are today. They would function in the same way they do today as well. The second vote would go toward electing the MP from a list. These lists could be broken down by province or region so that MPs selected could be accountable to voters in that province or region. We suggest that about two-thirds of MPs should be elected locally, and MPs who are elected from the party lists should be given extra duties such as committee or regional work. Details could be worked out by mutual third parties, such as the electoral commission.

We believe this is the best system going forward. It's been used successfully in countries such as Germany, Scotland, Wales, and New Zealand. As has been mentioned before, it was recommended in 2004 by the Law Commission of Canada.

Finally, to reiterate, we believe that the mixed member proportional representation is the best system going forward. It's a system that's based on two principles: one, a local connection to the MP; and, two, proportionality. It's simple: one ballot, two votes.

● (2020)

The Chair: Thank you.

[Applause]

The Chair: I would call Ms. Rubinfeld while we listen to Mr. Morrison. Is Ms. Rubinfeld here?

A voice: Yes, she is.

The Chair: Mr. Morrison, go ahead.

Mr. Glenn D.M. Morrison (As an Individual): Thank you.

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation for Professor Thomas's eighth point made about the importance of not yielding to populism. I disagree greatly with where he went from that, and so I too want to repeat the words, “Please, please, please do not have a referendum.” The political end of the spectrum that would look to create fear and confusion and to undermine the process would be given a voice by doing that. Nor do I want you to take this into the next election. You have a mandate. There's a strong voice for change. Please act upon that.

Secondly, I want to echo words spoken tonight by Mr. Sosa and Ms. May, that we should never have had the requirement for a picture ID. The vouching is fair, and I just echo the points that have been made tonight. It was a foolish and ill-willed injection into our system and should be removed.

Finally, I wanted to thank you and apologize for forgetting my third point.

[Applause]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrison.

I would ask Mr. Proven to come up to the mike while Ms. Rubinfeld presents to us.

Go ahead, Ms. Rubinfeld.

Ms. Sandy Rubinfeld (As an Individual): Thank you.

I first got keenly engaged in politics when Harper prorogued Parliament. Since then I've remained keenly involved in various groups.

I was really interested in finding out about Fair Vote Canada about three or four years ago, and then found to my surprise and delight that there was a local group. We had some discussion about our name, but I think we go by “Fair Vote Manitoba”.

In that group one of the women is an adult educator, and she was doing a presentation for one of those teacher conferences. She asked us to do research. I looked at the alternative vote. Someone else took the single transferrable vote and someone else took MMP. I can say, from researching that alternative vote, that it's just another majoritarian system. It's a way of ranking the ballot. It is not another electoral system. Even worse than that, in my research I discovered that it can sometimes lead to even more lopsided results than first past the post.

A third point, which I've come to myself and not heard mentioned elsewhere—

● (2025)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Ms. Sandy Rubinfeld: I'll ignore the third point and just ask if anyone on the committee has come across a group called International IDEA.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance is the only global intergovernmental organization with the mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide as its stated mandate. It has amazing resources online, 200 pages of which I read. One of the things it looks at, besides increased capacity, legitimacy, and credibility of democracy, is more inclusive participation and accountable representation.

My only other point is that they have a bunch of charts. They have helped fledgling democracies select their form of government. They have never advocated first past the post, and very rarely advocate the alternative vote, for any other fledgling democracies.

The Chair: Thank you.

I did know about that organization, so I appreciate your mentioning it.

Mr. Woods, could you come to the mike while Mr. Proven speaks?

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Randall J. Proven (As an Individual): I'd like to thank the Government of Canada for going on this quest to change our voting system, because it is archaic and does not produce what we would normally call "democracy". You can't have democracy when 39% of the voters control the rest of us.

The voting system must have three elements. Every vote has to count equally; every vote has to count; and the result has to be proportional. There can be no other way to have a fair system.

You have been charged with changing this voting system. Do not shirk your responsibility by calling for a referendum.

[Applause]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rosemary Hnatiuk, please come to the mike while Mr. Woods presents.

Go ahead, Mr. Woods.

Mr. David J. Woods (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'll shorten my intervention by saying that I agree with most of what has been said before. I'm definitely for some form of proportional representation.

I think Professor Thomas's points are very good in a practical sense, but I don't feel this is a practical question. This is a question of principle. We want our vote to count, but when I vote strategically it doesn't count. It doesn't matter if changing the system improves voter turnout or not; I want my vote to count. That's what democracy is about.

Even in a practical sense, if I had an elected representative of the party I voted for, that would give me much better representation. In previous governments, I know that it was very difficult for me to get answers from and in contact with my elected representative, who was not from the party I had voted for. I feel it's a point of principle and something I feel a certain urgency about.

I agree that this has to be looked at in a certain amount of detail, perhaps in the next election, but this question should certainly not be put off for a long time. As was mentioned, it was already looked at in

2002. Has anything happened? No. We have to stop looking at it and take action.

I would just like to make a point that some people have probably already thought of. Our system dates from 1867, when ridings had 2,000 to 2,500 people and you knew the person you were voting for and they knew you. Now, with 40,000 to 50,000 people in a riding, it's not the same. It may still work, somewhat, but it's time to look at that again. It has been a while.

• (2030)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Could Ms. Shawn Deborah Kettner come to the mike?

Go ahead, Ms. Hnatiuk.

Ms. Rosemary K. Hnatiuk (As an Individual): Thank you for pronouncing my name correctly.

The Chair: I'm one for two tonight.

Ms. Rosemary K. Hnatiuk: At the risk of sounding a little glib among all these very serious and very thoughtful presentations, I'm going to be a bit contrary and raise a completely novel idea regarding voter turnout that's sort of inspired by Professor Thomas's comments on getting people into the habit of coming out. It's sort of like in therapy, where people are often told to smile or to laugh to improve their mood. If we can get people to come out and vote, then maybe they'll actually start thinking about the issues underlying the politics of the parties, etc.

When I go to my credit union meeting or to the Ukrainian Farmers Co-op meeting, or to my condo board meeting, for the AGMs, there's door prize.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Why do we have to be punitive about compelling people to vote? Why don't we enter everybody into a lottery for \$1 million, or have regional ones?

[Applause]

Ms. Rosemary K. Hnatiuk: We're worried about poor people coming out to vote. You know that poor people like to gamble. That would be a very big incentive for poor people to vote. Maybe then they would think about what they're voting for. Regional ones could be for \$10,000 across the provinces. There could be some sort of interesting combination to incentivize voting rather than punish the failure to vote.

The Chair: Thank you. You made a good point in that maybe if people are kind of required to vote, they will naturally follow this logic and all of sudden and start to think about it. Who knows? Nobody has brought this up before, so I thank you for that insight.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'd like to make a comment. Can we not do something like the blood drives do? The first time you give blood you get a little pin. Maybe we could do a little "I voted today" pin, or a 10-time voter or something. I like it.

The Chair: That's an idea.

We'll have Mr. Wasylycia-Leis come up, and we'll go with Ms. Kettner, please.

Ms. Shawn Deborah Kettner (As an Individual): I just want to say that I think very strongly that now is the time to move beyond first past the post. I have been voting in elections since the mid-1970s, sometimes finding the candidate of my choice in the winner's seat and sometimes not. However, as an engaged member of my community, I know that the day after the election a large number of my community's members were not represented. When people are being pushed out of the political process, they become disengaged until the next election. It is paramount that we all feel that it is worth our while to be engaged in the political process throughout the term of our elected representatives, not just at election time. By moving beyond first past the post and providing a system that better represents the citizens of this country, we will provide an opportunity for more citizens to be involved in what happens in our political system. This should be teamwork. Our elected representatives come from the people, and therefore they should represent the people.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll call Ms. Sexton up to the mike, and we'll go to Mr. Wasylycia-Leis.

You wrote to me, didn't you?

Mr. Joseph Harry Wasylycia-Leis (As an Individual): I did, yes.

The Chair: Did you get my response?

Mr. Joseph Harry Wasylycia-Leis : I did, thank you.

• (2035)

The Chair: Good. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Joseph Harry Wasylycia-Leis: Hi. My name is Joe. I'm a community organizer with Leadnow's "vote better" campaign here in Winnipeg. I just want to touch on a theme that's been common here tonight and that Paul Thomas took an extensive amount of time to explain, this idea that changing our voting system is somehow a false promise or a silver bullet. Now I agree that we need to change other aspects of our democracy, we need to decentralize power, and we need to improve accountability mechanisms, but I must challenge Mr. Thomas's central point that changing our voting system is the one thing that can truly shake up our political culture and improve our democracy. Now, myself and 25,000 other Canadians from across the country who have signed the "vote together" pledge believe that proportional representation is the right way forward. Introducing PR can be the catalyst for improving other elements of our democracy, mainly addressing poor political literacy and voter apathy. Let's shake things up. Let's transform our curriculum and launch massive public education campaigns.

I'll just end by pointing out that this cautionary and hesitant mindset is the same mindset that's now leading us towards 3° warming and threatening to destroy our climate for future generations. This is our moment to adopt PR and bring Canada into the 21st century alongside nearly 100 other countries. I urge you to push for real change and to put forward a plan for PR. Take comfort in the examples of successful PR systems from around the world and in the fact that Canadians, and especially young Canadians like myself, will support you all the way.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Krosney, please come to the mike.

Ms. Sexton, you have the floor.

Ms. Suzannel Sexton (As an Individual): Hi.

We're using a lot of words tonight. I'd like to cover accountability, ability, parity, clarity, and mandate.

First, I'd like to clear up one word that we're all using in a certain negative way. We keep talking over and over again about voter apathy, youth apathy, and apathy. You say that they're turned off from politics or they simply don't care.

Has anyone actually considered viewing this in a different way and asking if 150 years of first past the post has made Canada such a wonderful, great, fair, and open country that people do not have the need to vote? They are so comfortable, well fed, and happy that they don't have an issue to bring them out. Please, consider 150 years of proven results. Maybe our increasing voter apathy is increasing voter comfort and they're satisfied.

Please, I am going to ask for a referendum tonight. I find it very interesting that the people who are asking for respect for the individual and respect for their individual feelings are also demanding that individual Canadians do not get a vote on this. You've been put here by your constituents who received the vote, and they had faith in you to do your jobs. Give them that same right to vote on changing our democracy. If they trusted you, you should trust them to choose the system and you should have a very clear question.

Clarity: that's a word that we really need to cover tonight. If we have a referendum, which would be respecting the citizens of this country in choosing a new democratic system, the referendum question would have to be very clear and very simple. We have many people complaining tonight about ability. They are saying that Canadians were not able to get photo ID to vote and that it was beyond their capabilities as average citizens to get a photo ID to vote. How are those people going to understand a new system in two years before the next election?

Accountability: regional representation is very important. We have someone who is accountable to us for a vote, not a party insider that is going to vote with their party for the job all the time.

Mandate: if the last election gave us the current administration and was so trustworthy, and if first past the post gave them the mandate that 39% of Canadians claim to have voted for electoral reform, if it gives you that mandate, then why won't we have a referendum?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Gerstein, you could come to the mike while Mr. Krosney speaks to us.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Evan Jacob Krosney (As an Individual): First of all, I want to say thank you again for hosting tonight's event in Winnipeg. I know that electoral reform isn't always an issue that's on the top of people's minds, but it really should be. It's something that I've been advocating for over a number of years now, and I'm really glad this issue has come to light.

As a young person, I'm glad to see that so many young people have come out tonight. I wanted to touch on one point that Professor Thomas mentioned. He was talking about how our voting system isn't what's discouraging young people—it's simply apathy.

As a young person, I would like to disagree with that. I was working on the ground in the past federal election. What I heard from young people was clear: their vote does not count. If I'm a young person and I want to vote for a party but I know my vote is not going to count, there's going to be absolutely no reason to go out and vote. That apathy is being caused because of our electoral system, but also because of hyper-partisanship, cynicism, and a general distrust in government.

I would like to argue that a proportional system, where 39% of the vote gives you 39% of the seats and 39% of the power, is going to encourage co-operation. It's going to encourage collaboration. It's going to encourage better participation, not only from young people but from all Canadians. It's going to encourage our parties to work together in a system where they know they're representing Canadian values.

Finally, I also wanted to touch on mandate. I know that the previous speaker mentioned a referendum, but I think it's really worth noting that in the past election a huge majority of Canadians voted for political parties that were proposing a change to our system. The Liberals promised that it was the last election under first past the post, the Greens promised a proportional system, and the NDP promised a proportional system. Why can we not respect that mandate?

People voted for change. It's absolutely time that we implement a system where every vote counts, where people can work together in Parliament, and where people know that their vote is going to go towards electing someone. Where everybody can work together, we can reduce cynicism and foster democracy in our country.

Thank you.

• (2040)

The Chair: Could Mr. Siemens come to the mike next?

Dr. Gerstein.

Dr. Aleela Cara Gerstein (As an Individual): First of all, I want to apologize for the at-times-crying baby. He does not yet realize that he has to wait his turn.

I'm here, in part, as a community organizer with Leadnow in Winnipeg. I want to point out that there's clearly an engagement disconnect in this country. We had less than 70% voter turnout, yet some 98% of Canadians returned their census form. Also, I'm not the only person who was sad that I didn't get to fill out the long form. Something is wrong and there has to be a solution. It is not that Canadians are simply disengaged.

I first learned about proportional representation as a voting option in Grade 10. That was probably my last formal education in political science, but that fact has stuck with me for almost 20 years, long before this was seen as a possible change in this country. I simply don't understand why it hasn't already happened.

I'm not so naive as to believe that proportional representation is a magical cure-all that will solve all the problems of this country, but I am just optimistic enough to believe that it is the only clear choice and that it will facilitate change in the right direction.

On a personal note, Mr. Cullen, in my voting lifetime you are the politician whose written views best represent me on this issue and on many others, and I consider you as my voice on this committee. I hope other people in this room also find their voices on this committee. I think you have worked hard to be representative of Canadians, although it was still a first past the post system that determined the makeup of the committee.

Finally, to reiterate what other people have said: please, no referendum.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siemens, you have the floor.

Mr. Eric Suderman Siemens (As an Individual): Thank you.

It will be fun to look on Hansard later. I have a bunch of friends who do that. I'm in political science at the University of Winnipeg and I am glad that they will look up my name after this.

Many people have raised points that I will not go over again. A majority of people voted for parties that wanted change in this last election. There are benefits to proportional representation that I will not go over again.

However, I want to be clear on one point. The alternative vote is not a solution for Canada, and it's not a solution for most countries in the world. Only two countries have any part of alternative voting in their system. They are Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Australia has been thinking about changing that. In the 2014 election, there was a riding where the Australian Motor Enthusiast Party got 0.5%, that's 5 votes out of every 1,000, on the first choice. Then, by eliminating a bunch of candidates, they won that riding.

There are other very wonkish reasons why alternative vote doesn't work. If you switch preferences in some places, you can get the same result, which is baffling to me. Also, alternative vote will not guarantee representation for regions across Canada. You would need to have 50% of the vote to pass that post instead of merely a plurality, so regions such as Atlantic Canada would not be guaranteed a Conservative or NDP voice. Likewise, in regions such as Alberta, Liberals and NDP would not be guaranteed a voice, as has happened in elections in the past.

• (2045)

The Chair: Can you wrap it up in 20 seconds?

Mr. Eric Suderman Siemens: Absolutely.

A mixed member proportional system allows for a variety of members from a region. If you cannot get hold of your MP, you can go to another. It's a multiple line of communication towards Parliament.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you .

Ms. Herscovitch.

Ms. Judith S. Herscovitch (As an Individual): I would like to thank Dr. Thomas for being here.

Canada has one of the most peaceful and best democracies in the world. If we look around the world, changes in other kinds of voting systems are in some of the most poorly run countries in the world, with violence and chaos not only in the streets but also in the halls of government, and with fringe groups and extremist groups forming coalitions and still fighting with each other. Demanding this kind of change in the Canadian parliamentary system is not reform in any good sense of the word. No one who wants change has proposed anything specific in what they're saying. To people who say their votes don't count, I would say to them, get out and work for your candidate and convince other people to vote for that candidate.

At the town hall meeting that was held in Winnipeg earlier this month, the choices offered for discussion were only voting systems other than the one we have now. There was no discussion about the benefits of our current system, in which each Canadian voter has a secret ballot vote counted once and counted equally with every other vote. Alternative systems allow for one person's vote to be counted more than once in certain circumstances, but not in others.

Some people complain that there can be a majority with less than 50% of the vote. Yes, that means we have more than two political parties in Canada. Anyone is free to form a political party. Anyone is free to stand for election. Canadians are free to vote for whomever they choose, and no one is required to register with a political party to have their vote counted.

People complain about the lack of voter turnout. There was talk of imposing fines if a voter doesn't vote. This is a bad idea for so many reasons, including hardship for those living below the poverty line and for those who are homeless and cannot register.

Simple solutions were not discussed, such as setting up registration booths that are accessible to everyone, including in homeless shelters, community centres, storefront organizations, and so on. There was talk of apathy and lack of interest. How about civics classes? How about incentives to vote? How about Elections Canada becoming more public and within the education system? Don't create problems and chaos where there are none. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Elwood-Oates. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Ian Elwood-Oates (As an Individual): Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to members of this committee.

I'm speaking for myself and my wife. Honestly, you can get her signature afterwards.

It's our belief that first past the post is not working for the majority of Canadian voters—only 40% of them. First past the post is not

working for potential voters who choose not to vote because there will be no representation for their views. First past the post is not working when it leads to governance that breeds an us against them mentality, as in majority versus opposition. First past the post is not working when any viewpoint not represented by the two main parties will have little or no influence in the House.

I have friends from Holland and family in New Zealand. They all strongly support proportional representation, especially the way New Zealand has made provision for its aboriginal citizens. I think this could very well apply to our aboriginals as well.

My wife and I strongly support the adoption of proportional representation in the Canadian election process. As to which form of PR it should be, that is possibly not as important at this time, because it should be given the opportunity to be tweaked over a period of time. Canada is a unique place with unique needs, and the rural-urban plan sounds like a good plan to start with.

I believe that mandatory voting would be unnecessary if PR were adopted, because every vote will count and all beliefs will have representation. As a former teacher, I'd like to say that the students who took part in a governance project and voting system where they had consequences for what they did, respected voting. It should start in the school system, although incentives are good. Thank you.

• (2050)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Degen, please.

Mr. Gene Degen (As an Individual): I have a couple of points I would like to make in favour of mixed member proportional representation, which probably looks to me like it would meet my needs best. I'm one of those folks who has voted federally for a long time, for over 45 years, and my local candidate has never won or even come close to winning. I don't live in a tuxedo and I have worked for my candidate, and neither of those things has made my efforts all that effective. I do want a system that gives better representation of my values and views.

There is actually one exception. In the last election, I voted strategically. I had no idea how difficult it would be in the voting booth to do that. I felt like I had just about had a heart attack in doing that. I never want to be in the situation of doing that again, so, please protect my health. I'm getting old, and I have to watch my heart. It's on your heads if that happens.

The other point I want to make is that Mr. Thomas said that we're not in any kind of crisis, but jeez I've sure felt like we were in a crisis the last number of years. It really alarmed me that a majority party, made up of a minority of votes, has the ability to reshape our democracy in ways that degrade it and benefit their own party. It it really has felt like a crisis to me.

I believe that our democracy is safer if power is less concentrated in one or two parties.

The Chair: I'll call up Mr. Beddome to the mike.

Mr. Taliesin, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Karl Taliesin (As an Individual) : Thanks very much for coming to Winnipeg. I appreciate your coming out here.

I don't speak with a lot of evidence behind me. I'm a citizen in the west end of Winnipeg, and in the west end I have never cast a ballot that elected my candidate. The problem of wasted votes is one of the largest problems that you can help to solve, especially in the west end, where we have one of the poorest neighbourhoods. It is very disenfranchised when the people don't go out to vote. When you have a voter turnout that's less than 50%, then something wrong. It's not about having the right candidates. It's not about political malaise. It's about their vote counting, and proportional representation would be a very good answer.

Paul Thomas mentioned accountability a lot, and that really resonated with me. Combined with what Carlos Sosa was saying, in the perspective of a person with a disability, an able-bodied person cannot see the barriers that are put in front of them, but a person with a disability experiences the barriers. In this case, the accountability is the barrier. When our members of Parliament are not accountable to our citizens, that's when voter turnout goes down. Our voter turnout is our second biggest problem; we need to increase our participation. I think that accountability can greatly be solved by not putting the onus on citizens. If there's a mandatory rule to vote, the citizens shouldn't be penalized; the members of Parliament should.

If the members of Parliament can't get their voter turnout up, penalize them, kick them out of office, since they haven't done a good job to get in there in the first place. That's the perspective when you have a disability of accountability.

• (2055)

The Chair: I'll call up Mr. Menard and we'll go to Mr. Beddome.

Mr. James Ro Beddome (As an Individual): I just want to thank the committee for coming here to discuss this important issue. I also want to acknowledge that we're on Treaty No. 1 territory as well as the homeland of the Métis Nation here.

Perhaps I could simply encourage this committee to move forward now. I think we've heard it. There are some people who had different opinions, but the vast majority of people want proportional representation now, not proportional representation later. They want to see this committee implement much needed changes.

There's no such thing as a perfect electoral system. We could look at the different ways in which we could implement proportional representation. I am a bit partial to the single transferrable vote, and I know we had it in Winnipeg from 1922 to 1958. So when Mr. Thomas, with due respect, says we can't just go ahead and change the system, we did it. In fact, we had it here in Winnipeg. We had an alternative vote in rural Manitoba, and I think we should move beyond an alternative vote, but we had it for almost 40 years. So it can be done.

Alberta had a similar experience. It can be done, and that experiment doing that right now will create that opportunity. That will create that driver. We can play around with a truly proportional system. A system in which we aim to achieve proportionality in terms of the overall percentage of votes cast would be somewhat

similar to the number of seats that we're going to see in Parliament, or in the legislature in the case of a provincial context.

I should say, just for the sake of being honest, that I'm speaking as an individual citizen, but I am also leader of the Green Party in Manitoba. I have never run federally, but I've run provincially several times, and I want to make a comment. A number of people have commented that if you don't vote for a party that wins, your vote doesn't count. I want to say that as someone who ran as a long-shot candidate, your vote counts because you're sending a message and you're putting issues forward. I think it's really important that people recognize that.

That said, there are a lot of ridings. I see Mr. Maguire nodding along. Quickly, I ran my first campaign in 2007 in what may be known as a yellow dog riding, in that sense that, generally speaking, the election doesn't actually take place at the time of the election. It takes place in the nomination party of the leading party. That's what we need to change, and that's what I think people have said resoundingly they want to see here today.

Thank you.

[Applause]

The Chair: Thank you.

Would Mr. Lobson like to take the other mike while Mr. Menard speaks? Thank you.

Mr. Menard.

Mr. Allan Menard (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm not going to go back over everything that's already been said numerous times. I am going to say that basically our system, for all intents and purposes, is an oligarchy. It's a two-party system; it goes back and forth between the two parties. To bring it into the realm of those who cannot afford to make it to vote and who are facing barriers to expressing themselves, the oligarchy is not going to work. They must have a voice, and so far we've seen one side making sure that our society sticks to looking after those who are at the top, and then we have the others who are saying, well, we need the middle class. Well, unfortunately, the vast majority of Canadians are of neither of those two persuasions. They are the underclass. They are the lower class. That is where the vast majority is. If they can't make it out to vote, and if they're disenfranchised, which, granted, they likely are, then they're not going to be out to vote. So you have to make sure that we start fighting poverty and that we look after those people and bring them up so they're able to vote. That is where we're going to have the majority of change.

PR is definitely going to see that. I myself weigh towards the urban-rural only because it combines the two systems and takes the best of both. But that's for you to decide.

[Applause]

• (2100)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Hoepfner, would you take the mike.

Mr. Lobson, the floor is yours.

Mr. David Lobson (As an Individual): Thank you. I just want to make a couple of comments on the meeting itself. I had to show my ID to get in here, and we've talked a lot about ID and the requirements for voting and so on. Perhaps we could have a medical ID card in this country and you could get around the privacy and find a way to get that solved. I'm not sure why I needed ID to come in here tonight and speak. Without it I don't know if I could speak. I'm a little bit disappointed that we could only speak for two minutes. I'm also a little disappointed that I had a really hard time finding out about this meeting. It came through back channels. I wonder why.

My other point is that I'm very non-partisan, and belong to a group of people among whom there are different views but who come to a conclusion a lot of times. Anyway, where I want to go with that statement is that I noticed there are mostly proponents here and that if 60% voted for the NDP, Green Party, and LPC, then I would think that we'd have six here and four, but I'm not seeing that. Are we really getting a cross-section here, because to me that's what democracy is about. It's hearing everybody, even your opponents.

I could clamour about whether it's democratic or not and referendums and all that. I am for a referendum. I go back and look at when we were dealing with the Fair Elections Act and the outrage I saw from people in response. It was fair outrage too; I think the Fair Elections Act should never have occurred, but I see the same thing occurring now with electoral reform. I'm seeing the same thing happen. It seems that a lot of people just say, "No it's not the same thing", but it is for me. I think a lot of other people see it the same way, as a sort of a railroading.

I am for a change in the electoral system, but I'd like it to happen democratically, which is by a referendum. I hear nobody wants that, but at the end of the day, that's my opinion. I don't think that skipping it is going to hurt anything. I'm not going to recite Emmett Macfarlane's column, but he put a really good column out covering everything from constitutional law, all the way through on that.

Anyways, thanks for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Keating.

Okay, Mr. Hoepfner, go ahead.

Mr. Dirk Hoepfner (As an Individual): Hello again.

I'll be very brief here. There's just something I forgot to mention and you guys didn't have time to do so in St-Pierre-Jolys. I was contacted by Dr. Susan Roddy, who had conducted a town hall meeting in Brandon. I think it was at the University of Brandon in the riding of Brandon—Souris. I don't mean to put words in her mouth, but she did want me draw your attention to the report that she has submitted to you guys about that town hall meeting. I believe part of her reasoning was that she was unsatisfied with the town hall that was conducted or not conducted by her sitting MP. She just wanted to stress the urgency of her report.

I have a bit of an addendum. I think I've heard the comment multiple times before saying that our democracy has worked for 150 years and that we don't need to change it. That's often followed by a call for a referendum. But I have to question when women would

have got the right to vote, had we had a referendum on it. That's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: Could Ms. Shona Rae Boris come to the mike.

Now we'll hear from Erin Keating.

Ms. Erin L. Keating (As an Individual): Thank you for coming to Winnipeg.

I want to start by talking about the last federal election. I was involved in working with a strong group of youth with Leadnow. We worked immensely hard to deal with the emergency situation we felt we were in. I believe we truly did have an impact on voter turnout. Our message was that we were begging you to vote strategically to get out of the emergency we were in, and then we would never do this again because we were promised a change in our electoral system. It would be very interesting to me to find out how many people voted for the first time last time with the idea in mind that this was the last time. It was embarrassing to knock on doors and ask people to strategically vote. It was really hard. It was not something I felt proud to do, but we were in an emergency.

I work in sustainability, and from what I can see when I'm doing research every single day, the countries that are sustainable—and when I speak about sustainability, that's environmental, but that's also social, community, and economic; I'm actually an accountant—are at the forefront of that work within a PR system. That, I believe, is the truth for the most part.

I do actually hope that you're going to fact-check some of what Mr. Thomas was saying. I lived in Scotland in 1996 and 1997. I don't believe it was a very progressive place at that time. I'm shocked to see the stuff that's coming out of there right now, and I do believe it has something to do with the change in their system.

As I say, I'm an accountant. We're talking about federal politics with federal issues, so when we're counting votes, counting them at a federal level and making that work makes sense in this system.

• (2105)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Harney, please.

Go ahead, Ms. Boris.

Ms. Shona Rae Boris (As an Individual): First of all, I would like to say that every vote does count.

I'd like to make a recommendation for people with disabilities. I am a former health care aide for over ten years. I've worked with paraplegics and quadriplegics, and I would say it is very difficult to get out and vote. My recommendation is to have the nurse or the health care aide go and do the vote with them and then put it in an envelope. I think that would be a good recommendation.

For mothers with young children as well, it could be really difficult to get out to vote, so on mandatory voting, I would say no. This is Canada, and we all have our rights to vote. In addition to that, I believe voting is important, but it's not who we're voting for; it's what changes we are voting for.

I believe we are here to work in collaboration as a team together.

I want to add that I have done some petitions about families staying together. I really appreciate the people who have signed my petition because I'm still making progress with the changes. To me, that is a vote.

I believe that when we stand together, we're working together for a better change and for a brighter future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. LaTouche, please come up to the mike, and we'll hear from Mr. Harney.

Mr. Niall Harney (As an Individual): My name is Niall Harney. I'm another community organizer here with Leadnow.

I wrote these notes with a bit of a rhetorical flair that seems misplaced at the end of such a long meeting. I'll try to keep it short and take just a few points out of what I wrote. Like most people here, I'm here to voice my support for proportional representation and immediate change to our electoral system.

To the Liberal MPs in the room, I, along with many other Canadians, have reserved judgment on this government until you've had a chance to prove yourselves on your progressive politics. This is now the time to prove yourselves.

I also want to echo Joe's comments. I urge this government to take this opportunity to put forward real change for this country, not more incremental change like Mr. Thomas was calling for, but real system change. I know that young people will be behind you 100%.

• (2110)

The Chair: Mr. Andrew Park, please come to the front.

Ms. LaTouche, go ahead, please.

Ms. Ann LaTouche (As an Individual): My notes are kind of all over the place; I was making them as I was listening. I have a few points.

First I want to comment on the response of Paul Thomas to a question about voter apathy. I don't think it's enough to talk about mandatory voting and accessibility. Carlos Sosa touched on it. Poverty is a big problem. People in desperate circumstances are worried about immediate needs: food, clothing, shelter, or some means of escaping the mental and physical anguish. This needs to be addressed first, and then literacy, teaching people what governments and elections are for and why they should care. You talked about a decrease in participation, and I think it's partly due to the increasing problems of poverty and illiteracy. It's no accident that revolutions aren't started by the poor.

I have another concern. It's the influence of corporations over government, especially corporations that undermine our social, health care, and welfare systems, and destroy the environment. I would hope that some form of proportional representation would mitigate those kinds of problems and the negative effects of corporate influence.

At any rate, I would feel somewhat re-enfranchised...and I think such a system would make politicians less inclined to abandon their

partisan ideologies, racing toward the centre in order to attempt to steal votes from rivals.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bailey, to the front, please.

Mr. Park, the floor is yours.

Mr. Andrew Park (As an Individual): I feel like some sort of Tragically Hip cover band. Everything has already been said by people with a lot more talent than me. Nevertheless, here we go.

When I dropped into these committee proceedings, I felt like I was dropping into some sort of alternate universe where actual decisions were as illusive as the infamous Higgs boson.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, you were chosen to make a decision. The Liberal government, which is enjoying a huge majority in Parliament, was elected to make a decision, and it promised that it was going to enact a system of proportional representation.

Now, I too am waving around my copy of Irwin Cotler's 2004 law society report, and in it they came out solidly in favour of a mixed member proportional system. That isn't necessarily my favourite system, but I can live with it because it has the elements of true proportionality.

Ranked ballot and alternative vote systems are another form of majoritarian system, and they will lead to more false majorities. They may ensure a majority within a riding, but they cannot ensure a majority across the country. Please, Liberal Party of Canada, and with all due deference to the ladies in the room, it's time for the federal government to grow a pair, make a decision, enact the legislation, educate the voters, and let us all move forward together by the next election.

Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Andrew Park: In that case, I'll generously donate 15 seconds to my friend Alon Weinberg, who clearly needed them.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: The last person after Mr. Bailey will be Shauna Lei-Leslie.

Could Shauna Lei-Leslie come to the mike?

We'll hear from Mr. Bailey now.

• (2115)

Mr. Michael Bailey (As an Individual): You got my name right. It is Bailey like Baileys Irish Cream. If you want to increase voter turnout, behind the voter screen you'd have those little pencils, a big bottle of Bailey's, and those little shot glasses. Actually, never mind shot glasses; go with beer glasses. Voter turnout: 125%, guaranteed. Vote early; vote often.

At any rate, the problem with our system does not lie with how we select our MPs. At least, that's not the biggest problem. The problem is what happens to those MPs once they get to Parliament Hill. They cease to be representatives of the people of their constituency, and they become representatives of the party whip, the PMO, and the party leader. That's where the democratic deficit lies.

Our MPs should not fear the reprisals of their leaders, but they should fear the reprisals of their voters. My MP is Doug Eyolfson, a swell fellow. I didn't vote for him. I like talking to him. I have no doubt that if 20,000 people came to him and said, "You know what, we don't like this party line; we want you to vote against it", he'd be happy to do it, except that the government whip is sitting there ready to crack the whip if he doesn't do as he's told.

It doesn't matter how we select who we put there. If they're not representing the members of the riding, there's no difference, whether it's proportional representation or first past the post.

So I will put to you that the first step should be to make our Parliament functional. The government is the cabinet. The entire rest of the Parliament is the House of Commons. They are representing the commons, and they should be holding the cabinet to account on behalf of the people who elected them, whether we voted for them or not. I didn't vote for Doug, but I have absolutely no doubt he would represent our wishes if he could. He's not the person I voted for, but he's my MP, and I'm happy to have him as an MP.

Am I done?

The Chair: You have 15 or 20 seconds.

Mr. Michael Bailey: Then, I actually have very little else to say, other than...it's kind of odd to hear that thing about "my voice wasn't heard; democracy is in danger; don't have a referendum". That is very backwards thinking. For this kind of major change, we must have a referendum. Why do we not want to hear from the voices of the people who are going to be affected most by this change?

Thank you.

The Chair: That brings us to Ms. Leslie.

Ms. Leslie, go ahead.

Ms. Shauna-Lei Leslie (As an Individual): This is not part of my presentation, but the town hall meeting for the sitting member for Brandon-Souris is this Saturday, the 24th, at Trails West. Someone has said it wasn't happening.

I'm in the minority, here, because I do not understand all these methods of voting. I have read and researched, and I still don't understand.

I attended a town hall meeting for an MP in Winnipeg. That's not my riding but I attended, thinking that these methods were going to be explained to me. They were not. He had a slide presentation. He told us he was doing the Coles Notes version. When he got to

proportional voting, he said it was too confusing to explain. Mixed proportional representation is more confusing and it's very complicated.

When and how are we going to learn how a new system would work? Low voter turnout has been talked about. I would think that if people do not understand how the system works, they will not even bother to show up to vote.

From what I have read, in my riding I could end up with an MP I have never heard of, let alone met. This person could potentially know nothing about the area or the makeup of the riding. How can that be good for the local riding? I think this would further increase low voter turnout.

As for mandatory voting, Canada is still a free country, and I think that would go against the charter of rights. However, aside from the charter, I believe that if people are forced to vote, you will see a lot of rejected and spoiled ballots because people won't want to participate.

Online voting is an issue that scares me. If someone can hack the CRA website, how do you think they're not going to hack our voting and skew all the data that might be in it?

• (2120)

The Chair: You have a couple more seconds.

Ms. Shauna-Lei Leslie: Okay.

New computer programs are run in parallel with the present system, so how would you do this to make sure that the bugs are worked out?

The Chair: Those are all good points.

Ms. Shauna-Lei Leslie: My recommendation—and this is only going to take me a couple of seconds—would be to slow down this whole timeline, do public education over the next three years, set up and promote a website that's strictly for the education. You can do that by TV and print media. Then ask the Canadian public through a referendum, after they have been educated, and hold it in conjunction with the next election.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Applause]

The Chair: That brings us to the end of a really great evening, a very lively open-mike session. It was great. The people, I thought, were very to the point and told it like it is, and that's what this process is about, so I thank you all for participating.

We're off to Toronto tomorrow morning to hear from people there. In the meantime, your comments have been recorded. The analysts have also made notes. You have made an impression, so thank you very much.

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