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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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• (1415)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Welcome to everyone. Welcome to our witnesses, and to members of the public who are here this afternoon.

This is the third day of our three-week cross-country tour that will take us to 10 provinces and three territories. We started in Regina on Monday, we were in Winnipeg yesterday, and today we're in the great city of Toronto.

Your comments will be recorded and transcribed, just as we do when we're in Ottawa. We have two witnesses, and each witness will have 10 minutes to present. This will be followed by one round of questioning. We've been doing one round on the road, where each member is afforded five minutes to engage with the witnesses. That five minutes includes questions and answers. Please don't be offended if your time is cut off when you haven't necessarily completed your answer. It's just the way it has to be in order for things to run smoothly.

The same goes for those who come to the mike during the open-mike sessions. We're allotting two minutes per intervenor. Some of you may say that two minutes isn't really enough, but it worked very well yesterday in Winnipeg, and it worked well in Regina. It's just a question of communicating directly your thoughts and feelings on the issue, and I can guarantee you that everything will work out well.

Unfortunately, there was a bit of a mixup at the airport and Mr. Reid is on his way. He's on another flight, but through no fault of his own. He'll be here very shortly, and of course, his expertise on the subject is very important to us.

Today, we have Mr. Justin Di Ciano, city councillor, Ward 5, Etobicoke-Lakeshore; and Mr. Greg Essensa, chief electoral officer for Ontario. Each of you has 10 minutes, and then we'll have a round of questions.

We'll start with Mr. Di Ciano.

Mr. Justin Di Ciano (City Councillor, Ward 5 Etobicoke-Lakeshore, City of Toronto): Thank you, and good afternoon, Chair, and committee members. Thank you for the invitation to address you today on any potential changes to Canada's electoral system.

The choice of electoral systems is one of the most important decisions any democracy can make. The long-term purpose of any electoral system is to develop institutions that are strong enough to

promote stable governments, and flexible enough to react to changing circumstances.

According to the OECD's better life index, Canada is the envy of the world for our quality of life; our prosperity; diversity; health status; environmental quality; education and skill levels; civic engagement; and most importantly, our strong, stable governments.

For many Canadians, including me, the question is, why? What issues or problems are we trying to address with electoral reform? What imbalances currently exist in our electoral process that require such a change? Most importantly, what long-term consequences will result from our short-term political and partisan interests?

With recent polls showing that barely 3% of Canadians are engaged in this topic, the question I ask this committee is, are we searching for a solution to a problem that does not exist? As a politician in Canada's largest and most diverse city, I can assure you more than 3% of Canadians would be engaged if we were discussing a clear plan to strengthen the middle class, and build an economy that protects and creates better-paying jobs.

If we want to engage Canadians on issues, then our governments need to engage Canadians on the issues that need fixing. Our voting system works well. It provides representation from a geographical, descriptive, and ideological perspective. It produces stable and efficient governments capable of enacting timely legislation. It is simple to understand, ensuring every voice is heard, every ballot is counted, and a citizen's right to vote continues to be fully exercised.

The potential alternatives being proposed fall into two broad categories: proportional representation and ranked choice voting, or hybrids of both.

Proportional representation is purpose-built for instability. Say goodbye to stable, majority governments that think and govern long-term, and in the best interests of Canadians. Say hello to coalition governments, similar to Italian, Israeli, and Australian-style parliaments with constant protests, upheaval, and elections where single-issue parties, religious fundamentalists, anti-immigrant, and personal vanity parties must be courted to create coalition governments.

Did I mention constant elections? Italy has had over 30 prime ministers in 40 years. Australia has had three prime ministers in four years. Yesterday, Prime Minister Trudeau spoke at the UN about the dangers of politicians exploiting people's anxiety. Proportional representation systems regularly provide single-issue or extreme parties a disproportionate influence over who forms government, and under what conditions. When you have a problem, who do you call? You won't have a constituency MP because legislators are picked by parties on lists. Say goodbye to local representation.

Is Canada really better off replacing an electoral system that produces stable governments capable of governing long-term in exchange for short-term coalition governments whose fringe parties hold the balance of power?

Alternatively, ranked choice voting has been shown to suffer from a number of democratic shortcomings that cannot be overcome. Data from jurisdictions that have changed to ranked choice voting clearly shows that it produces drastic increases in voter error by disadvantaged, ethnic, elderly, and non English-speaking voters. It is costly to administer, and requires massive education campaigns, not just once but before each and every election. It requires high-tech voting machines that use complex algorithms that make scrutiny and confidence in the system questionable. Say goodbye to hand counting ballots in exchange for a black box that spits out election results.

Empirical data shows that ranked choice voting continues to have a negative effect on voter turnout. A further review of ranked choice voting election results in the United States over the past 15 years shows no evidence to suggest that ranked choice voting helps elect more women or minorities to public office. There is also no concrete data that supports the argument that ranked choice voting reduces strategic voting and negative campaigning.

A quick Google search into any RCV race in the U.S. will show results in multiple media articles that demonstrate strategic voting and negative campaigning are alive and well in ranked choice elections.

Most importantly, contrary to media statements and coverage, ranked choice voting does not produce a majority result. Ranked choice voting is a plurality system just like first past the post. The U.S. ninth district federal court of appeals has gone as far as ruling that ranked choice voting is not a majority system and in fact remains a plurality system.

Under our current first past the post system, every ballot is counted, every voice is heard. Under ranked choice voting, only continuing ballots are counted. This means that in an election with multiple candidates, if you did not choose to rank the candidates who continue to the final runoff, your vote is eliminated; or if you made a ranking error somewhere along the line, your vote is eliminated. It is put into the trash can. Your vote is not counted anywhere. This is called an exhausted ballot. The ultimate winner does not get 50% of the original votes cast; they get 50% of the continuing ballots. That is not a majority.

Let me be clear. I am a lifelong Liberal. When the Prime Minister committed to electoral change, I was intrigued. I was for ranked ballots before I was against it; however, when I analyzed the data in

jurisdictions where they have tried alternative voting systems, I realized there were serious flaws and drawbacks. After extensive time studying this issue, I have concluded that no system is perfect, but that Canada's first past the post system has served Canadians well.

I believe that any potential changes to our electoral system must build on the success of our electoral process of the past 100 years by continuing to ensure voting is kept simple and most importantly, a citizen's right to vote continues to be fully exercised.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Di Ciano.

Mr. Essensa for 10 minutes.

Mr. Greg Essensa (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Ontario): Thank you for inviting me to appear today. I am pleased to provide whatever advice I can on the important questions before this committee, and I'd like to offer you my thoughts on four topics: one, citizen expectations; two, the governing principle; three, modernizing elections; and four, public consultation.

The first thing I will advise you is this, Ontarians are facing across-the-board changes in the electoral process. Municipalities may now choose to elect their mayors and councils using a ranked ballot system, provincial contribution and spending reform is being debated, and changes to the administration of elections are promised to follow. Federally, this committee is mandated to consider the adoption of a new voting process and other innovations.

I believe that all Canadians expect that there will be congruence in their election laws when it makes sense. However, I also know from speaking with my colleagues across Canada that citizens look to their electoral agencies and to their legislators to learn from, build on, and improve on what they see in other jurisdictions. While change may sometimes be daunting, the interest in these issues speaks to the vibrancy of our democratic institutions.

Earlier this year I appeared before a committee of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I spoke of Ontario being at a watershed moment. I noted that provincial legislators have an opportunity to strengthen the integrity and legitimacy of the electoral process. Canada is at a watershed moment, too, and this committee has the same opportunity. Legislative debate, by necessity, involves the sharp clash of ideas. I believe citizens expect and encourage this from their lawmakers. However, I also believe that citizens want partisan rancour and short-term political self-interest to be set aside when their election laws are written.

Election laws are supposed to put the interests of electors first. This simple proposition upholds the principle of responsible government. As Chief Justice McLachlin noted in a landmark voting rights case, "In a democracy such as ours, the power of lawmakers flows from the voting citizens, and lawmakers act as the citizens' proxies. This delegation from voters to legislators gives the law its legitimacy or force."

Our election laws must, above all else, respect and serve the democratic rights of electors.

In serving, the public election agencies must remain non-partisan; thus, I cannot come before this committee to say that Canada must keep or change its voting system. As an election administrator I must remain neutral; however, based on my 32 years of experience administering elections, I can advise this. Electoral reform, be it a change to election finance laws or a voting process, is best accepted by citizens when there is a widespread understanding of and agreement with its principles.

Academics can tell you that there are a variety of voting systems used in Westminster-style democracies. As a chief electoral officer I can tell you that a voting system works best when there is public consensus, and the electoral outcomes are thus legitimate.

The question of whether a nation, a province, or a local community should keep an existing system or adopt a new one is really a question for democratic debate. That debate can be in a legislature, an election, a referendum, or some other process. From my perspective, the most important outcome, whether or not the voting system is changed, is that electors have an electoral process that they know and believe is legitimate. An electoral system will be legitimate if, in putting the needs of the electorate first, it maintains a level playing field. All participants vying for public support or attention during an election should compete on an equal footing.

The concept of the level playing field must be applied in all aspects of elections, both in voting rules and campaign finance rules. Over time our electoral system has grown and changed to adapt to modern challenges. As an election administrator, let me speak of what this means.

We live in an era of innovation and transformation. There was only limited use of the Internet 25 years ago. Now, global connectivity is the norm. The applications and devices we use are replaced at a rapid pace. The ability of electoral agencies to keep pace is rightly questioned. We need to serve voters in modern ways, but must also be mindful of the opportunities and risks of technology. We are all aware that network voting applications and equipment do exist. The challenge is not the lack of technology, but the questions concerning the privacy, security, and reliability of these technologies.

Online access is a reality of everyday life, and so, too, is hacking, and large-scale data breaches. I have no doubt that everyone in this room, through no fault of their own, has experienced the inconvenience of a financial institution cancelling a debit or compromised credit card. It would be exponentially more frustrating to have your vote cancelled or compromised. There is little public appetite for election results to be annulled because of security or data breaches.

As I publicly reported in a 2013 report to the Ontario legislature, election administrators around the world are grappling with this question, and there is no commonly adopted solution.

I believe in change and innovation. I have piloted the use of technology and am requesting further authority to do so on a regular basis. Canadians must prepare for the day when network voting is a reality. That day is coming soon, but has not yet arrived.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to speak for a moment about the process of electoral reform. At the outset, I mentioned that there needs to be an opportunity for public debate when considering electoral reform. In Ontario we have seen all manner of debate on election laws over the last decade, and let me talk about three of these experiences from the perspective of my agency.

The first experience dates from 2007. Provincial voters were asked whether or not they wished to adopt proportional representation. This choice was put to them in a referendum, run in conjunction with the general election. That recommendation was formulated by a citizens' assembly comprised of representatives from every electoral district. John Hollins, my predecessor, was mandated to select members of the citizens' assembly, and our agency was then mandated to run a public education campaign on the referendum question during the general election. The referendum outcome was that Ontarians chose to keep their first past the post voting system.

The second experience involved the review of the Ontario election act that resulted in amendments in 2010. In 2008 the Legislative Assembly struck a select committee to examine Ontario's election laws. It commissioned research and held public hearings. Following its report, the government introduced a bill that enacted many administrative improvements and accessibility-focused measures. The process allowed for full public debate, incorporated the majority of my office's recommendations, and improved public satisfaction in the administration of general elections and by-elections since 2010.

The third experience involved recent changes the Ontario government proposed to our province's election finance laws. For many years, I have recommended that an expert commission be appointed to propose necessary changes to our election finance laws. Instead of establishing a commission, I was invited to sit with a legislative committee and asked to provide my advice. I am not aware of another independent officer in Ontario ever having been asked to sit with a legislative committee hearing a bill.

The bill is still working its way through the legislative process, and to date the committee has failed to reach consensus. I hope this changes. I think Ontarians share my hope.

I am sure the way the federal and provincial governments have chosen to embark on electoral reform will be debated by pundits and political scientists in the years to come. As an election administrator, let me share my perspective on two key points, one involves process and the other involves substance.

In terms of process, there are a variety of ways governments can consult citizens about electoral reform. Sometimes that process may require the involvement of an election agency, as it did in Ontario with the citizens' assembly and the referendum. If and when the process does require the involvement of an election agency, legislators need to afford the agency sufficient time and resources to implement those requirements. The process also needs to respect that election agencies can and should have a role in providing public education about elections.

By necessity, however, they must remain strictly non-partisan, especially if the agency is also required to administer a referendum or plebiscite on the issue. I firmly believe that an agency can only supplement a larger partisan debate with basic factual information. It must not be tasked with commenting on the ideological merits of electoral reform. To do so would violate the neutrality that agencies must, by definition, maintain.

Finally, when it comes to making recommendations on the substance of election laws, I can tell you that chief electoral officers across the country think long and hard before doing so. Government and opposition legislators may be focused on the immediacy of an upcoming election; however, electoral administrators take a more inclusive and longer-term view on the broad implications of proposed changes. I think citizens recognize and listen to what their election administrators recommend and the public questions when, without adequate explanation, those recommendations are not reflected in our election laws.

Thank you for inviting me to speak.

Before I conclude, I would like to publicly thank Mr. Marc Mayrand for the leadership and advice that he has provided to my agency and to all agencies across Canada. As Mr. Mayrand has announced he is retiring, I want to let Parliament know the great contribution he has made to this country.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

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

I will now go to our round of questions.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey, for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you both, Mr. Essensa and Mr. Di Ciano, and everybody here in Toronto for the warm welcome. It's lovely to be moving back eastward on what will be a quick stop in Fredericton this Saturday before we head up north.

Mr. Essensa, in your comments you talked about citizen expectations within their electoral systems. You mentioned that citizens may expect a congruence of systems. Can you expand on that a little bit?

I suppose there is a value of simplicity in voting that's tied into that. Can you talk to that expectation and your view on that in the context of other presentations that we've had from election officials in Scotland, sharing the experience of voters voting within a variety of different systems for different levels of government?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I will begin by answering that I do believe citizens expect some form of congruence. When electors go out the door to vote, they expect that if they turn left to go to their community centre to vote municipally, that they would turn left to go to the community centre to vote provincially, federally, etc. When they show up at that location, the same requirements for identification, and the same process is involved in the actual voting process.

When that does not happen, it creates confusion for electors. Those who sometimes face barriers to voting especially feel that confusion and sometimes feel intimidated to come to vote when they see different systems that are at play among the three levels of government.

I do believe citizens as a whole would expect congruence when it does make sense.

In my travels throughout the various jurisdictions that I've seen, and I have seen many jurisdictions, including Scotland's, they do offer a wide variety of differing manners in which to exercise one's right to vote. I'm not sure that it provides, though, the fairness or the equality that our system does because in some of those circumstances, it affords some individuals the ability to vote independently, to vote from home, or to vote in some other capacity, where others are thus forced to actually go to a physical voting location.

There is some merit to looking at the advancement of technology. I highly expect that as our elections reform and advance, technology is the next rightful inclusion to the process that will allow for greater access by all who want to exercise their right to vote.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Di Ciano, two of the values that I picked up in your testimony, which you see as important in the electoral system, are the ease with which the voter is able to cast a ballot, and the value of stability in government. That came through clearly.

In your experience as a representative of a local constituency, can you talk about the aspect of local accountability and the relationship between elector and elected, and what value that should have within electoral systems?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: I think it's everything. In my constituency, when I walk the streets or go to community events, people know me, and that I represent our ward. When they have concerns, they call my office, and my office is able to address those concerns and provide follow-up on those concerns.

I think all of us at this table and in this room have become used to having local representation where we know who represents us in our riding, and that they're able to help us solve our differences.

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

The Chair: Mr. Rayes, for five minutes.

[Translation]

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

My thanks to the witnesses for being here. I also thank all the people in the audience for being here.

Mr. Di Ciano, you said that changing the voting system may be the most important decision in a democracy. And you, Mr. Essensa, you said that public consensus was essential to changing the voting system in our democracy.

Justin Trudeau was very clear in announcing that he wanted the October 19, 2015, election to be the last under the current system. If the Prime Minister decides to change the voting system, should the public be able to have a say in that, through a referendum, of course?

[English]

Mr. Greg Essensa: As I indicated in my remarks, any change to our electoral system, I believe, is only going to be accepted by citizens when it is truly understood and accepted by all citizens. There are various means by which Parliament may wish to engage citizens. I am not advocating for one over another, but I do believe that the legitimacy of our elected representatives and of our democracy only occurs when the process and the manner in which we elect those representatives are well understood and fully accepted by all Canadians.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): On a point of order, Chair, from speaking with a member of the public I think some of the testimony and questions have been hard for some folks to hear. Maybe just repositioning the microphones for the MPs and the witnesses would help.

• (1420)

The Chair: If people could simply be conscious of where the microphones are, but also if we could turn up the volume, that would help.

There are also headphones, which connect with the microphones. They're not just for translation; you could hear better in either language when using them. I use them in the House of Commons all the time, even though we're sitting next to each other. It's like a shopping mall in there; you can't hear anything.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Mr. Rayes.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Chair, would you like us to allow those who want to settle in more time?

[English]

The Chair: Does anyone need time to get these headphones? We can give you a couple of minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Do you want me to start again?

The Chair: Yes, we are starting over.

I'll use the opportunity to get a coffee.

• (1420)

(Pause)

• (1420)

[English]

The Chair: For those of you who have these headphones, I should mention that channel one is in English and channel two is in French.

We seem to be ready to start again.

[Translation]

Mr. Rayes, you can ask your question again.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I will be a little quicker.

Mr. Di Ciano, you pointed out that changing the voting system may be the most important decision in a democracy. Mr. Essensa talked about the importance of reaching public consensus before changing the voting system.

If the Prime Minister and the Liberal government decide to go ahead and change the voting system—as the Prime Minister has announced before—would a referendum be a good way for all Canadians to have their say on the matter? More specifically, would that be a good way to consult everyone and make the change legitimate?

[English]

Mr. Greg Essensa: I believe the legitimacy of our democracy depends upon the understanding of all Canadians of how their elected representatives are elected and the process and means under which that happens.

In Ontario, after every election we are mandated by law to do a large survey of Ontarians. In every single election we ask Ontarians, what's your confidence in the integrity of the electoral process in Ontario? Every time, the numbers come back off the charts high—98% or 99%—because they understand the simplicity of our system. They understand the core covenants of our democracy—integrity, transparency, one vote per voter, secrecy of the ballot.

That is well understood in our country, and I think that whatever means Parliament and government choose to change or alter our electoral system, ensuring that there is widespread belief in and understanding of the system and widespread support is paramount.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: What do you think, Mr. Di Ciano?

[English]

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: Without a doubt I believe that a referendum needs to take place, if the way we elect our representatives is to change. As Mr. Essensa has stated, the process not only needs to be understood but needs to be accepted.

When I hear that 3% of Canadians are listening to our discussion today, even if after the summer and into the fall it becomes 10% or 20% of Canadians, in three years' time 80% of Canadians are going to have to learn a totally new way of voting. The question is going to be why. Why did we change the electoral system? What was wrong, and what are we trying to solve? Those questions haven't been answered.

If we're going to change the system, certainly the time to begin the education process with the majority of Canadians is through a referendum.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

My second question is still for both of you.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister announced that he wanted to change the voting system. However, before consultation was under way, before the committee was formed, and before a decision was made, the Prime Minister already rejected the status quo as an option. He expressed his personal preference in various interviews and on various occasions.

Do you think it is fair that, in this process that some see as legitimate and others not so much, the status quo is rejected even before the process is under way?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would repeat my answer, though. I think it is paramount that there be widespread acceptance from all Canadians, whether we choose to change the voting system or whether we retain the current status quo, and that Canadians have confidence.

In the many elections that I have travelled to worldwide, the actual democratic institution itself is the one that, when.... Democracies evolve and become fully democratic countries when the citizens fully accept the voting system that is put before them and accept the legitimacy of the government and of the representatives they have elected.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

Mr. Di Ciano, what do you think?

[*English*]

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: Prime Minister Trudeau is my prime minister, and I have great faith that he's going to listen to this committee as they travel the country to understand what Canadians are looking for.

I can tell you that in the City of Toronto, in the last term, our council voted to bring forward a ranked choice voting system for all residents of Toronto. Following that decision, in the new term that started at the end of 2014, as more councillors started to understand the complexities and the shortcomings of the ranked choice voting system, the council changed its mind and brought forward a motion that said that they did not want to move forward with that, and that if they did so, residents were to be consulted through a referendum.

So the council changed its mind, and I'm pretty confident that other people have the same ability to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rayes.

[*English*]

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here, and a very warm welcome to the public who have gathered concerning this to us critical issue.

One thing I want to set out, which may not have been said yet, is that the mandate of this committee is, "...to identify and conduct a study of viable alternative voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system...." That is what we are engaged in. That is the frame in which we operate: to identify and study those.

In terms of Mr. Essensa's comment—I think he said "think long and hard"—I absolutely agree. I believe Parliament started thinking about this in 1921, with the first study on changing the voting system. We have had 14, 13—Elizabeth will correct me—national studies, by the Law Commission and others. I'm not sure that number 14 or 15 is going to do the trick in terms of evidence or of being able to study alternatives.

The frame I operate in is that we're changing. The questions are to what and how. I think those are legitimate comments brought up by both of our witnesses today.

Mr. Di Ciano, I want to start with a couple of things you said.

Your concern, particularly around the ranked ballot, the alternative vote, is that votes are wasted—as you said, put into the trash can. As you go down the voting process, some votes are simply not counted.

Am I misrepresenting what you said?

● (1430)

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: No, that is correct. They are what is called "exhausted ballots".

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let me offer this then.

Under first past the post, just in our last election, a little north of 18 million votes were cast, and more than half of those votes didn't go towards electing anyone to Parliament. One could argue, in a similar vein, that those nine million-plus Canadians who went in and made their mark do not see that will expressed anywhere in the House of Commons. We are trying to find a voting system that allows both.

I think you underlined the importance of having local representation. Is that correct?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: That is correct.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Are you aware of proportional systems that maintain that direct connection, that geographical connection between a riding and a member of Parliament who represents that riding?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: Well, there are hybrids in different countries.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This committee hasn't heard a proposal yet, from all the experts we have heard from so far, that would break that link, which is interesting. I think a so-called made-in-Canada model is important. Our geography matters. Our regional differences matter. It is certainly the view the NDP is taking.

In terms of stability, we had a presentation on an OECD study of the developed nations of the world, comparing proportional systems to majoritarian, first past the post systems over the last six decades. In fact, proportional systems turn out to be slightly more stable than the first past the post models. What is your concern?

You mentioned stability quite a bit in your testimony and painted a picture of political chaos and upset, of constant turning to the polls. However, we see with countries that have adopted this model—with the exception of the Is, Italy and Israel, which are constantly held up as models we are not considering—that plurality systems, proportional systems, are incredibly stable and are able to produce very good and long-term policy.

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: I just don't see it like that. I see—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is that based on evidence that you can offer the committee, or is it more of an opinion?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: It is going to be my opinion. I look today at Germany, where Angela Merkel was instrumental in bringing one million Syrian refugees to her country, and now she is facing serious backlash by minority voices and fringe parties. I look at Australia, which now has a prime minister who has to govern with a fringe party whose senators dispute global warming.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Interesting examples. I would also say, look at the United States, which seems open to the idea of voting in someone who is a racist under a first past the post system.

The modelling of the system is important. You mentioned earlier that the system works well. We had testimony that said Canada has been a success, not because of our voting but despite it.

We rank 64th in the world right now in terms of women in Parliament. Proportional systems do better at having women in Parliament. That is the evidence we have. We have a terrible record in dealing with long-term policies like climate change and poverty. We have evidence that shows empirically that countries seeking proportional power-sharing arrangements have done better on both of those issues, which don't typically serve a four-year perspective; they are longer-perspective issues.

Do you have evidence you can give us that would counter the evidence we have heard from those witnesses?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: All I can tell you is that every country is different. Every country has its own dynamics. In the countries I have looked at and analyzed, I do not see the evidence the same, that proportional representation elects more women and minorities into government. I have read a lot of research on the topic, and I do not see or agree with a lot of what I've read on that topic.

• (1435)

The Chair: We are out of time.

We have to go now to Mr. Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you all for coming to meet with us today.

I would like to say hello to my colleagues and the team. I would also like to greet Mr. Boulerice, who is joining us today, and the people in the audience. Thank you for coming to listen to us. We look forward to hearing from you later today.

I have some questions for Mr. Essensa first and for Mr. Di Ciano afterwards if I still have time.

Mr. Essensa, according to what you said, for a change to be successful, a broad consensus is needed, which takes time. You said that the reform or the new system has to be clearly understood, accepted, and legitimate in the eyes of the people.

The government made a commitment to change the voting system by the next election. However the Chief Electoral Officer in Ottawa told us that, to do so, the system had to be voted on, agreed upon, passed in the Senate and referred back to the House by next spring.

In your view, is that realistic?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: Having run elections for 32 years, I would concur with Mr. Mayrand's comments, which I did read with great interest when he appeared here before the committee. I believe he indicated that he would need approximately two full years to implement any significant change.

Given the nature of the change, and the uncertainty of what the change would involve, I would concur with his assessment that it would take at least two full years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Okay, thank you.

In your presentation, you talked about the financing rules for political parties.

In your view, should this aspect also be studied in order to improve democracy?

Should we go back to a form of public funding that would allow groups with less economic clout to be heard through parties?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think it's imperative that this committee consider all aspects of the reform in ensuring that not only the populace understands how the reforms are going to be implemented and operated, but as well the other political actors: the candidates, parties, third parties, etc. Political financing is an important element in those reforms. Yes, I would encourage this committee to take some consideration into what political financing reforms would have to be put in place and dependent on the model you would wish to recommend or adopt.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Di Ciano first and then for Mr. Essensa.

If a reform is passed, what could we do to ensure that it is legitimate for the public?

Earlier, my colleague Mr. Rayes talked about a referendum.

Gentlemen, do you think there are other ways to make the process legitimate?

Do we need a referendum before we change the voting system or at the same time as the election to prevent people from making a trip only for that purpose?

Do we need a majority of members of Parliament or a consensus among all the parties represented in the House?

On which criteria would the reform be legitimate?

Legally speaking, only the government, which has a majority, could change the rules. There would be no legitimacy in that case.

[*English*]

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: I think that's an interesting question.

Ultimately, I think that a referendum is the only way to get the legitimacy of Canadians. Even if the majority of MPs were to decide on a format moving forward, I think the vast majority of Canadians would say, "But why are we changing our system?" I think a referendum is the only way to get the conversation going in this country, to talk about why we're changing our system and how it's going to benefit us. I don't see that education coming forward without a referendum.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Essensa: Very briefly, there are other means beyond just a referendum, but I believe that a referendum probably provides the most widespread ability for Canadians to participate in the process.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today and thank all the participants from Toronto who've come here. I hope we'll hear from as many as possible in the open-mike session.

I was pleased before we began this session, in chatting with Greg Essensa, to hear from you, sir, your appreciation for the fact that this committee is doing extraordinary outreach and more than parliamentary committees usually do in terms of open-mike sessions and travelling the country. It's certainly my hope that we'll provide the increased legitimacy in the course of our work.

I also want to thank you publicly, as Ontario's electoral officer, for standing up and offering your views on the Fair Elections Act as it was going through Parliament. It was important, I think, to focus

attention on problems, like barriers to voting, and not on fake problems, like extensive voter fraud in Canada.

I wanted to ask a question first of Mr. Di Ciano. In your opening testimony you said that barely 3% of Canadians are engaged on this topic. I wanted to help you out with this. This is, I think, a misunderstanding of evidence that we had from Darrell Bricker, who's a pollster. He broke down a series of questions about how many people knew about the promise that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post. That was a bigger number, and then it got smaller when he asked how many people are aware that there's going to be a public process on electoral reform. Then the smallest sample was about how many people know this process has started. The concern I have, frankly, is the lack of national media interest, or even local media interest, as we travel the country. It's hard for Canadians to know a process has started if a parliamentary committee travelling the country can't get even a local reporter to come to the hearings. The role of our media is an important part of democracy.

I just wanted to clear that up for you. You don't have any other source of information for the idea that only 3% of people care about this issue?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: No, I do not, but I do agree with you that the media should be more in tune with what's going on with this issue, and many more Canadians should be aware of what's happening.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I want to return to the core principles, the five principles that govern our committee. I hope to get in two questions, one for Mr. Di Ciano and one for Mr. Essensa.

First, have you read those five principles, Mr. Di Ciano?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: I have not.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay, well then you'll be very relieved to know that one of the core principles guiding any recommendations that come from this committee is that we must preserve Canadians' traditional affection for, and familiarity with, the principle of local representation. I want to give you my word right now, as a member of this committee, that from all the evidence we've heard, and knowing my 11 colleagues, I don't think there's a snowball's chance in hell that we could possibly recommend the systems used in Italy or Israel. They are completely inappropriate for Canada and they don't meet the threshold of the minister's five principles.

I know you're involved in a campaign called Keep Voting Simple. I hope you'll not use Italy and Israel as examples of PR because they are pure list systems with no local representation, so they can't possibly ever be recommended by this committee or the Government of Canada. I want to reassure you and I urge you to read those principles.

Do you feel better now about that? You don't have to worry about those things at all. Okay, good.

Mr. Essensa, one of our other core principles is public trust and integrity in the voting system.

One of our earlier witnesses, the head of the Institute on Governance, Maryantonett Flumian, spoke of democracy and voting and electoral reform as an ecosystem with many variables. You've raised one of them, namely campaign financing.

I know you've also been concerned about the ability of our federal elections officers and the elections commissioner to investigate crimes during an election. You, sir, I understand, have the ability to compel testimony in an investigation.

In the half a minute I have left for my time, could you speak to this issue of what Elections Canada should be able to do to investigate crime?

• (1445)

Mr. Greg Essensa: You are correct. As chief electoral officer of Elections Ontario, I do have the ability to compel testimony, to compel documentation, to compel the production of any information that I deem necessary in an investigation.

As a chief electoral officer, I would suggest that all my colleagues across the country feel this way. When we are sworn in as chief electoral officers, we take an oath to uphold the core principles of our democracy. I take that very seriously. In fact, I had to give up my right to vote here in Ontario to do so, and I believe strongly in that ability. I am the watchdog. I am the one who is responsible for ensuring that our democratic institution operates and has the legitimacy of force that Ontarians believe it should have. They have great confidence in our process, and I think it's inherent that the legislature provides individuals in this type of role with all the abilities and means necessary to do their jobs appropriately.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Sahota now.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): My first question is for Mr. Essensa.

I'd like to know a little bit more about the 2007 referendum that took place here. What was the question that was asked? I know it was in connection with the provincial election at the time. What was the rate of response? What were the results? The rate of participation is what I mean.

Mr. Greg Essensa: The actual question that was asked was a two-part question: whether or not the electorate should elect members of the provincial legislature either using our current system, or the alternative electoral system proposed by the citizens' assembly, which was a mixed member proportional system. It was a separate referendum ballot. It was in conjunction with the 2007 general election.

To become binding in the next legislature it had to be approved in over 60% of the electoral districts with more than 60% approval in those districts, so the threshold was quite high. We did not meet that. We did not have the turnout to support that. Right away, the turnout numbers did not allow for that to move ahead, and it actually lost in the referendum. First past the post did win. Forgive me, I don't have the exact numbers with me, but I can provide that to you.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Why do you feel we didn't get that turnout for that referendum?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I was not the chief electoral officer at the time, but in reviewing all the documentation, Elections Ontario was mandated to do public education. I think for any type of system to reform itself there needs to be great interest and engagement from the political sector. In Ontario, we did not see that. The major parties effectively backed off from taking a real position. For the electorate, they didn't have the support from their potential elected representatives advocating for one system or another. It was somewhat left to Elections Ontario to be the purveyor of information, not only of the factual information, but of the benefits of both yes and no. I'm not sure an electoral agency should be put in that position. I believe the political element should purvey the information.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm going to put this question out to both of you. In order for whatever proposal we come up with in this committee to have legitimacy, and for us to have validity in our process, what would you suggest take place in terms of outreach and in terms of the committee's work right now? Do you have any advice for us?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: I would simply state that a referendum would be the only way to have Canadians engaged in an issue where it would be a discussion point in the mornings and afternoons at work and at the dinner table. Let Canadians educate themselves and figure out what best suits their needs.

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would suggest strongly, should this committee decide to alter the voting system in Canada, that it mandate Elections Canada specifically to be the provider of factual information on what the new system is. It would afford them enough time and resources to do an extensive outreach program to highlight for all Canadians what the new electoral system entails, the benefits, and the issues.

I would also recommend to Parliament that it provide funding for a yes and no campaign. If there is going to be a referendum on the issue, it should provide equal public financing for both yes and no campaigns so those campaign offices could provide the appropriate information to Canadians.

• (1450)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I was wondering if you could shed some more light on your opinion on the process of citizens' assemblies and why you think Toronto city council chose to present that motion to have ranked ballots. What was the incentive and motive behind that to even change?

Mr. Greg Essensa: The citizens' assembly was mandated through the Ontario Legislature, and Elections Ontario was mandated to choose the citizens. There was equal representation. There was one citizen selected for each of the 103 ridings. There were 52 females and 51 males, with backups so there was equal representation. There was also the assurance that there was at least one aboriginal member of the citizens' assembly in place.

Having read and understood the challenges, I would strongly suggest that if you are looking toward a citizens' assembly that you provide it ample time to prepare the selection process, as well as allow time for its deliberations. What we saw in Ontario was a little rushed. The citizens' assembly did not report its final recommendations until March or April of 2007, and the final question was not put in place until June of 2007 for an October election, which, quite frankly, was quite late in the process.

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: I can't speak to why council originally voted to bring ranked choice voting forward. I can say, though, being on council in the latest term, and more to Mr. Essensa's comments, this time around councillors were presented with accurate information, which I think is imperative. That information led, I believe, nine councillors to change their positions on ranked choice voting.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Maguire now.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to our witnesses for your presentations today. They were very informative.

Mr. Di Ciano, I want to start with you. I'm of the same opinion as you that Canada is one of the best places in the world to live. You mentioned that in your opening remarks, and whether it's 3%, or 6%, or 10%, any of those numbers is enough of the population to know what's going on out there today in regard to this process. I agree with that.

I was struck by a couple of comments, which I wrote down. You asked, are we searching for a problem that doesn't exist? You also said our voting system works well. For sure, it's simple. You raised a number of concerns about changing it, one of them being "hello to coalition governments". Could you expand on your experience with that?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: Just from seeing minority governments work here in Canada, I'm not a big fan of minority governments. I think we politicians ultimately are forced to govern by popular whim or what the populism of the day is and are restricted from making decisions in the long-term best interests of Canadians. I see it on the council level when we say "we're not going to talk about that just before an election".

I think that these coalition governments are not stable. Anything can bring them down, and you're not governing with the long-term interests of Canadians in mind.

Mr. Larry Maguire: You also just commented that the ranked choice is another plural system; it's not a majority system. Can you elaborate on that as well?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: Yes. The United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed it. It is not a majority system; it is a plurality system, just like first past the post. It's not a one-two-three system, and if a voter doesn't correctly pick the final two candidates on their list on the ballot, their vote is exhausted.

In an election of first past the post, if 100,000 people voted, on the television screen, then, among the first, second, third, and fourth people there should be 100,000 people who voted. In first past the post, they're exhausted. You left dinner on the table, you left work early, you got a babysitter for the kids, you did what you had to do to go and vote, and under first past the post, if you didn't guess or select the right people, your vote is discarded; it's put in the garbage.

So it is not a majority system. They changed the denominator of majority. First they say the majority is 50% plus one, and then they say, well, candidates get taken off the ballot until someone gets a majority of the votes.

Well, it's a majority of the continuing ballots; it's not a majority of the total ballots cast. To me, it's just disingenuous to say that it's a majority system.

• (1455)

Mr. Larry Maguire: I don't believe it's fair for me to ask those two kinds of questions to a chief electoral officer, Mr. Essensa, but I was very interested in your comments about process and substance, sir.

I agree with you about the legitimacy of our democracy being based upon the system we have and the clarity with which people understand it and the education process of it. You've indicated that you feel it would be good for Elections Canada to be the distributor of that information, if it were to be done that way.

Could you elaborate more on the amount of time required? Chief Electoral Officer Mayrand has indicated a couple of years, as you indicated here to us as well. But is there more to it than that? How much more time would we need for that opportunity to become very clear concerning how everyone was going to have a say in the next vote?

Should we be rushing to do this? It seems like a long way away, but if it takes two years to do that, from your end or Elections Canada's end, would it be feasible to realistically have this done in the near term, for this election?

One person made the suggestion that we should probably just go ahead and implement something, have two elections, and then have a referendum on it to see whether we like it. Do you have any comments?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think the challenge for Elections Canada, as Mr. Mayrand indicated in his testimony, is the uncertainty around what system is going to be in place. Based on understanding the mandate of this committee, that you look at a variety of alternatives, I would say that many of those alternatives come with some inherent changes that have to happen. Does there have to be a redistribution, which takes a considerable amount of time? Are you going to implement technology? In some of the systems that you're considering, technology is the only way, I believe, that you could actually implement them in a successful manner. Implementing technology, based on my own personal experience, having done it, is a significant overhaul and would be a significant overhaul doing it Canada-wide.

I concur with Mr. Mayrand that not understanding the actual system that this committee is ultimately going to recommend hampers somewhat his ability to give an accurate reflection as to how much time it really will take. I think two years is the absolute minimum, to be perfectly honest. Even at that, I think Elections Canada will be significantly challenged to make those alterations and be ready for 2019.

The Chair: Thank you

Mr. Aldag.

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

This question is for both of our witnesses.

I don't think I heard an answer to the idea of a referendum after—implementing and then letting people, to use an analogy, test-drive the car for one or two cycles. What would be your thoughts on that, if you could both make a comment?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: I don't think that is the road to go to. I think Canadians should be informed today and make their choice today whether they want to move forward or not.

I know that in the United States there have been six municipalities that have repealed rank choice voting. There are definitely those who have repealed it. Why wouldn't we pose the questions to Canadians up front, first, and let them decide how we are going to move forward?

Again, Mr. Essensa said it, that the legitimacy of our elections depends on the buy-in of the Canadian people.

Mr. John Aldag: Mr. Essensa, do you have a comment?

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would concur with my earlier comments. I think it is paramount that there be legitimacy in the process up front.

Mr. John Aldag: I would like a bit of clarification, Mr. Essensa. I heard you talk about the strong role of Elections Canada if there was a referendum. What I didn't get from you is, would you see limitations on the role of others?

We have heard from some witnesses that a complex issue like this can get clouded and convoluted. There would be roles going into a referendum to perhaps limit some of that. If we are going to go in that direction, would you say Elections Canada would have the exclusive role, or how would we go about ensuring that there is an informed discussion? Would you just throw it out to the free market to do whatever it wants, pony up on this and let it go?

• (1500)

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would encourage this committee, in its set of recommendations, to mandate that Elections Canada be the provider of factual information, and strictly factual: that they not be asked to comment on the ideological merits of one way or the other.

Parliament should either consider that the political parties themselves be the advocates, or establish a yes and no campaign and provide adequate public funding to allow those campaigns to advocate for the benefits of whichever system they are being measured against.

Mr. John Aldag: Would there be spending limits within that, if it was a publicly funded campaign: “That's what goes into it, and that's what we are able to do”? Never having been through a referendum, I don't know what would work in that situation.

Mr. Greg Essensa: I have seen several in our country, in B.C., where there was a yes and no referendum campaign that was publicly funded by the government. They put limitations on the money for the yes and no campaigns, so there was equal ability for each side to campaign, to politic, and to advertise the merits of each of the systems. I would encourage Parliament to ensure that both sides have adequate resources, as a core principle of levelling the playing field.

Mr. John Aldag: In your opening comments, you talked about online voting and electronic voting, and you made a comment that you see it as being imminent or coming at us.

Are you looking at it in Ontario? I didn't catch it if you said. Is there a timeline? We have heard from other witnesses that there are concerns with cybersecurity and other things. How far out do you think we are going to be looking?

Mr. Greg Essensa: In 2013, I submitted a report to the assembly. We had spent two years looking at online voting, and I reported that I currently don't see that online voting meets the core democratic principles of our current system. It can't ensure secrecy of the vote, one vote per voter, integrity, and transparency to the same standards that our current model does.

I did, however, say to our assembly that I see the day coming. In the technological realm, there are a number of entities looking at digital authentication and digital ID. Once we get to that point, I do believe there will be the opportunity for online voting. I would also [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mr. John Aldag: [*Inaudible—Editor*] the elements you have raised that it isn't only a technological piece. There are a lot of other pieces, and we will need to go into that—as you say, the secrecy of the ballots and how we actually do that. There is the technological piece, and then the other packaging that goes around that.

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think it is important for the other packaging to come from Parliament, and that is direction on the principles that our democracy sits upon and how Parliament would view those. I think it is not possible for a chief electoral officer to determine what the standards are on secrecy of the vote, one vote per voter, or transparency. They should be upheld, and Parliament should give clear direction.

I believe Mr. Mayrand indicated he would be looking for such direction before going any place.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Boulerice, welcome to the committee once again. I am pleased to see you.

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

Thank you, everyone; thank you for your very interesting presentations. My thanks also to those who came here to participate in this essential and fundamental discussion on the quality of our democratic life.

Mr. Di Ciano, you may have wanted an electoral reform at one point, but I think you have since lost faith.

I have two comments. First, you said that our system must remain simple. We in the NDP believe that a very simple rule is to give a party that has 30% of the vote about 30% of the seats. It's simple, it's called proportional representation.

You have also suggested that the proportional voting system could lead to further political instability and more elections than the majority system we have known for 149 years.

I have some figures in front of me. Sweden, which has a proportional voting system with a distribution of votes called the “Sainte-Laguë method,” has held 21 elections since World War II. Ireland, which uses the single transferable vote system, has had 20 elections since World War II. Germany, which has a mixed member proportional representation voting system, has had 18 elections since World War II. Meanwhile, Canada has had 23.

So there is no correlation between the type of voting system and the number of elections that a country might hold, except perhaps Italy, which is the only example that keeps coming back.

Mr. Essensa, could you tell us about your experience as the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario? What are the reasons generally given by Ontarians for not going to the polls, for not voting?

• (1505)

[English]

Mr. Greg Essensa: After every election, we do a large survey of approximately 5,000 to 7,000 Ontarians, and one of the questions we ask of those who did not vote is, why did you not vote? We see probably 35% to 40% who say that simply they're too busy, they have too many other things on the go, and that they just didn't get around to it. We probably see another 20% to 25% who articulate barriers to voting. Sometimes it's cultural. Sometimes it's that they feel intimidated. They might be new to Ontario, and new to Canada, and they feel that the process doesn't speak to them. We see some who, quite honestly, just don't see any value whatsoever in voting in the province. They feel the outcome has been predetermined and their votes mean very little. That's probably another 10% to 12% of those.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Okay.

The last item you mentioned is interesting. We often hear people wondering why they should bother voting, thinking that their vote will not make a difference and that there is no point. I think, earlier, Mr. Cullen specified the number of votes that we can consider lost in a first past the post voting system, in which a member can win an election in a constituency with 30% to 35% of the votes. This ensures that the voices of 65% of people who voted are not represented in Parliament. That concerns us.

We also know that, in Canada, the voting system and the electoral process are not being taught much in our schools, in our colleges. So when we ask people whether they would like to have a new voting system, we are generally starting from scratch, with the exception of the experts present here.

If we ever had to consult Canadians on a new voting system, do you think it would be important for the federal government to launch an education and awareness campaign to expand people's knowledge about the options available to them, and even about how the current system works?

[English]

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would wholeheartedly agree with anything that parliamentarians do in the public education of our democratic process. Like most electoral agencies across the country, the most difficult demographic group that we try to get out to vote is the 18- to 24-year-olds. Those numbers still are lagging in the 30 to 35

percentile. Statistically, and academia research has shown, if we get someone to vote when they're 18, they're likely voting for life. If we miss them, then we're likely not seeing them until they're 30. That's a challenge for us. Elections Canada and Elections Ontario have a joint program for the grade 5 and grade 10 curriculum that we provide in Ontario that is advocating for democracy. It's a curriculum-based set of lesson plans that we built. Over 3,000 teachers in Ontario use them.

We are also advocating in Ontario—and I would also suggest that my federal counterpart should advocate the same thing—that Parliament consider authorizing the preregistration of 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds so we can begin to engage with them prior to them reaching the voting age so they understand their rights as Canadians, they understand the electoral process, and they can engage right away at 18.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, and thank you both for being here today. To our audience, thank you for coming out on a sunny afternoon here in Toronto. It's a delight to be back in the city. I spent a couple of summers here, and it's great to be back.

I have a few questions, and I'll start with Mr. Essensa.

You mentioned the importance of measuring the understanding of the electoral system by citizens prior to making that change. Could you elaborate for us on how you would measure the understanding? The reason I ask this is that we've been going through this process, and some of us have also held our own town hall meetings with constituents, as per the recommendation of the Prime Minister. I've been to other meetings where you could see that it was set up. It was one stakeholder group at the table talking to citizens and only saying the wonderful things about a certain system, and not telling them the full picture about the ramifications, the good, the bad, and the ugly.

My worry is that inaccurate information is always getting out there. I'm a firm believer in getting all the facts from all sides and then making a decision. How can we ensure, first of all, that people are getting the right information, and how would you test it, before going forward?

• (1510)

Mr. Greg Essensa: I think it's paramount that you provide a vehicle. My recommendation to you is that it be Elections Canada. Give them adequate time and adequate resources to provide a fulsome outreach and factual information package to Canadians at all levels, and in all sectors of our great country, so they have an opportunity to fully understand and test it. I envision that would include online campaigns, advertising campaigns, town hall meetings, and a variety of different outreach initiatives that would touch upon all Canadians so they could fully understand and embrace whichever new voting system is being contemplated by this committee and by Parliament.

Getting that information out, and in a means that is digestible by every segment of our society, is a massive undertaking. I'm not here to say that I have all the answers to that, but it would take considerable thought and some congruence between Parliament and Elections Canada on what those factual elements need to be, how they need to be disseminated, and with what frequency to provide a lot of opportunity for Canadians to engage in that format.

I would also recommend there be some focused measurement tools, whether that be some form of polling, or some form online, or other engagement activities to measure the acceptance of the new voting system you're contemplating.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

I have a follow-up question about getting out to vote. Mr. Di Ciano, you'll appreciate this, as a politician.

As for the reasons for not voting, I have heard, and we've mentioned today, that 35% to 40% of people say they didn't have time. To me that's something that has nothing to do with the voting system. If you break it down, you didn't have time, okay, why is that? Is it because the election is held on a day when folks are working? Is it because there are long lines at the advance polls? Is it because there are long lines on election day? What motivates people to say, "You know what? It's not worth my time to go"? It's not because of the fact that they don't want to go and vote, but that they don't have time.

I'm just throwing that out there. Is there something we can be doing that will make it worth people's time to go and vote? Can we make it much simpler, much faster, and much more expedient so that people will treat it as a given, know that they're going, and it's not an issue?

Could each of you elaborate?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: Yes, I would say that has nothing to do with the electoral system. It has everything to do with being relevant as a government and bringing forward and discussing issues that matter to Canadians. This is obviously a very important issue. Is it top of mind to people's daily issues, whether it's making ends meet or getting the kids into the right opportunities? There are so many pressures put on families today, job security.... Let's try and address those issues that families care about deeply each and every day, and have a meaningful impact on those issues. Then I think we'll get more and more people voting even at an earlier age.

Mr. Greg Essensa: I would suggest to you that our electoral system is not evolved like the rest of society. Twenty years ago, if I wanted to have a suit, I had to go to a tailor and have it made. Today I can phone a call centre, I can go on the Internet, I can order the suit, and I can get it from a variety of purveyors.

Our electoral system, for the last hundred years, has not relatively changed. We effectively tell you where to go, on what date, between what hours, and then expect you to vote. We haven't provided the convenience that the rest of our society expects today. I think that involves us looking at technological advances, the manner in which we provide the vote to individuals, and the channels through which we provide the vote to individuals. I think it all has to reform as we move forward into the 21st century, so we can engage more

Canadians through a variety of means to allow them to exercise their democratic rights.

The Chair: That ends the round of questioning. I want to thank both of our witnesses for being here. We gained some new and interesting perspectives on the issue.

I just have one question, or more of a comment, I guess. When people say they didn't vote because—I forget what the term or the phrase is—"my vote isn't going to do anything" or "count", is it possible that they could be saying one of two things? One is that it's not being directly translated into the seat count and that this bugs them; I can see that. But could some people also be saying—and I've heard this from people—that nothing is going to change anyway, that all parties are the same, that they can't solve the big issues, that we're a globalized world, that governments can't do anything?

Could it be that when they are saying it's not worth their time to vote, or whatever it is, they could be saying one or the other of these; that it's not necessarily all one or all the other?

Do you see it that way, either one of you or both?

• (1515)

Mr. Greg Essensa: I could definitely see that this is a possibility. I think that's why you're seeing campaigns in Ontario and other jurisdictions in which candidates run as "none of the above". Even here in Ontario, we had a candidate change his name to "ZNoneofthe, Above", so that we he could run as an alternative candidate. I think there is potentially some legitimacy to that.

The Chair: Okay. What do you think, Mr. Di Ciano?

Mr. Justin Di Ciano: I would agree with you wholeheartedly. A lot of Canadians feel that government cannot do anything for them anymore. I'm not old enough, but I hear stories of when, at one time, politicians were highly respected in their communities. Today, they're not.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: On that note, we'll thank you for being here.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: No, really, thanks very much. It was very good.

We're going to suspend for a couple of minutes and then we'll get going with our other panel.

• (1515)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1525)

The Chair: The meeting is now engaged. We have a second panel and we have three presenters who will present for five minutes each, starting with Ms. Laura Stephenson, appearing as an individual. We also have Diane Bergeron, executive director of strategic relations and engagement from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind; finally we have Donna Dasko, a researcher with the School of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Toronto, here in Toronto.

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

Ms. Laura Stephenson (As an Individual): Thank you. I should say that I'm a political science professor at Western University.

The Chair: Sorry, I didn't have that information.

Ms. Laura Stephenson: When I speak about electoral reform at all, certainly to my students, the devil is in the details. Of course, any change is going to involve many small decisions that will affect the trade-off between accountability and representation.

Today I'd like to provide comment on two aspects of representation that I think are really essential to consider when thinking of any kind of change, especially to a PR system.

The first is local representation. This is one of the principles outlined in the committee's mandate, and it's a fundamental feature—many would say a benefit—of our current system. I think it's very important to Canadians. Voters are used to knowing that there's a specific MP they can go to with comments, questions, or concerns, and having a local MP really gives a personal face to the government. The voter-MP link also facilitates accountability, because voters know who to blame in the next election.

Beyond that, having local representation is also very important for the activities of parties. Parties cannot ignore ridings if they want to be competitive in them. Campaigning matters. Furthermore, who the local candidate is can matter. Many voters take who they are electing into account, not just the party that they represent.

If Canadians were to lose that link between voters and local MPs, an important aspect of campaigning could be in jeopardy, and this would be detrimental to how much voters know about politics, how engaged they are, and whether they even care about elections. Political science research shows that personal contact is important and can mobilize. Given that engagement is also a principle of this system, it seems that the issue is quite relevant.

How does local representation factor into electoral systems? If the goal is simply to maintain the single-member districts we currently have, then the options are severely restricted: first past the post, ranked voting, or mixed system.

But it's not true that local representation cannot exist in PR systems. What matters is the magnitude or number of seats per district. Any number greater than one would lead to more proportionate outcomes than our current system, and many systems around the world have districts with low magnitudes. Experts would suggest that between three and seven is an ideal number.

Multi-member constituencies would certainly be a change for Canada, but they have been used in Canada before, and they would not necessarily eliminate all the types of local representation that Canadians are used to. Accountability is certainly clearest in single-member districts, but it can still occur when there's a small number of MPs. Further, constituency ties would be weakened in a multi-member district, but the need for candidates to campaign wouldn't be completely eliminated.

In fact, in multi-member districts, the incentive for candidates to encourage personal voting or to appeal to voters with their own credentials to represent the riding could be stronger. As most parties would put forward more than one candidate, there could be an incentive to distinguish oneself from others, depending on the nature of the ballot. This could actually increase the amount of riding-level campaigning that occurs.

In my estimation, it's very important when choosing an electoral system to be concerned that the incentive to campaign in individual ridings remain very strong, because it's an important aspect of our current system.

The second aspect of representation I want to mention has to do with under-represented groups. Earlier witnesses to this committee have made the point that electoral reform is neither required nor a guarantee that representation of such groups as women and visible minorities will increase. They are absolutely right—I shouldn't disagree with my colleagues, should I?—but there are several steps that could be taken even under our current system to improve representation. It's important to think that if we do move to a new electoral system, the features of those systems that make representation more likely need to be thoroughly considered.

We know that there tend to be more female representatives in PR systems. This outcome can occur usually by virtue of simply greater representation on candidate lists. This means that the identities of the candidates put forward by the parties are extremely important.

The extent to which representation would drive the construction of candidate lists could vary, but in a society such as ours, in which voters and the media pay attention to such issues, I think it's highly unlikely that it would go unnoticed if a party put forward an all-white, all-male set of candidates. Nonetheless, it could happen. The recommendation of supplementary policies to ensure that it didn't is a very important component of electoral systems.

Such policies, or how extreme they need to be, would depend upon any electoral system chosen, including our current system. Any financial incentives to comply with such official policies—or quotas, especially—would be a good idea.

● (1530)

In any system that involves a list of candidates, we have to start thinking about the placement of those names on the list. In a closed system, where the parties have full control over the order in which the candidates would receive seats, it's important that there is some kind of alternation, or that at least the under-represented groups aren't placed in winnable positions. In open list systems this is not as important. In some research I've done with colleagues, we found that letting people vote in an open list system, where they get to choose, increased the representation of women, which is of course good news, right? The disadvantage that women supposedly represent has not been supported with evidence.

An audience distribution of representation is more likely to happen in multi-member districts, but it's important that we be aware of any loopholes that exist. Parties want to win office, they want to govern as they desire, and this would include having their party stalwarts as part of their team. Without policies in place to prioritize representation over possible party interests, the representation benefits of a PR system could be lost.

•(1535)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Ms. Bergeron.

Ms. Diane Bergeron (Executive Director, Strategic Relations and Engagement, Canadian National Institute for the Blind): Thank you.

As mentioned, I'm here to discuss issues pertaining to people with sight loss in Canada. It is important we remember that every Canadian has a right to vote independently, to be able to check the ballot to make sure that it's been correctly marked, and to be able to do this in secret. This is a right of every single Canadian.

I'd like to tell you, although I'm about to give you my age, that in the 51 years that I have been on this planet, I have never once been able to vote independently and in secret in a federal election. The election process currently as it stands is not accessible to people who are blind in Canada. We have Braille ballots, or at least the names in Braille, but the ballot is still a paper ballot. We have templates that we put the ballot into, but unless you're a Braille reader—and only currently approximately 3% of Canadians who are blind read Braille—you're not able to use the template. Even if you are, like me, a Braille reader and someone who can use the template, I can mark my ballot, but I cannot check it. I still need to have somebody with me in the polling booth in order to check the ballot.

Often what happens is I go to the polling station and the people there say, "Oh, we didn't realize that there was a Braille ballot", and I now need to ask for assistance to vote. Often that person is provided to me. They're a perfect stranger, I have no idea who they are. I go into the booth, I tell them who I want to vote for, they check my ballot off, and we go and vote. In fact the last time I voted, somebody said to me, "Tell me who you voted for in the last election", and I said, "Well, I can tell you who I thought I voted for, but I can't tell you who I voted for because I have no idea where the check mark was on the ballot".

The person helping me, despite the fact that they take an oath.... May I remind everybody that a marriage vow is an oath, and that is not always upheld—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Diane Bergeron: —and maybe neither is the oath of the people who are voting for me. I don't know, they are perfect strangers, so their oath means little to me.

I think that as we look forward into the electoral process it's important to look at pieces like electronic and online voting. It needs to be accessible. Technology and adaptive technology has made the world open up to people who are blind or partially sighted. This doesn't mean it's going to resolve the problem for everybody, but it is definitely going to give the majority of Canadians who are blind and partially sighted the opportunity to vote independently in secret, check their ballot, and be considered equal citizens within this country, which I believe it's time that we are considered.

The other piece is mandatory voting. Although CNIB does not take a position on mandatory voting, I think it's important to remember that if you are not going to make the system 100% accessible to every Canadian, exceptions need to be put in place. I

don't think it's right to tell me that I have to go vote, and then tell me, "Oh, but by the way you're not allowed to do it in secret because we don't have this accessible."

First, I encourage the committee to consider electronic and online voting, but to please make sure it's accessible to everybody and to make sure that it is tested by people with adaptive equipment to make sure that it does work and it's not just a system that somebody says works. Second, please make sure that there are exceptions, so that we're not being told we need to vote when we're not being given the same rights as everyone else.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for communicating so clearly the experience that a visually impaired person might have to go through. It's very informative for the committee to have listened to all those steps that you've gone through and have to go through.

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

Ms. Donna Dasco (Fellow, School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto): First, thanks to the committee for inviting me to speak today. I'm honoured to be here.

I am here as an advocate for more women in politics. I'm one of the founders of an organization called Equal Voice, which is a multipartisan organization that promotes more women in politics. I'm past national chair of Equal Voice and I'm also founder of a group called the Campaign for an Equal Senate. We're fighting for a gender-equal Senate for Canada. I'm also a pollster, a former senior vice-president of Environics Research. But I speak here today as an individual, not as a representative of any group.

I am not an expert in electoral systems and I dare not debate the very fine points of electoral systems. I look at our systems through the lens of how they help us advance women in politics. That is my lens for looking at our institutions.

I'm here to remind what the sad facts are of female representation in Parliament. Today only 26% of Parliament is female, and that has gone up only one point since 2011—over four years, only a one-percentage-point improvement. We must do better.

As well, Canada now ranks 64th. I just looked up the ranking in the Inter-Parliamentary Union stats. I can say that in all of my decades of being an advocate, I don't think we've ranked as poorly as we do today. We must do better.

Why do we care? Women's voices have to be there. It's a matter of democratic representation. Decisions are made in our Parliaments. Women have to be there. I also know from my career as a pollster that there are a number of issues on which women and men differ in their opinions, and if women are not there, their opinions, their views on public policy matters are not adequately represented.

How do we solve the situation? Electoral reform is one key to change, and we now have, with a government committed to change, a historic opportunity to put in place a system that would enhance women's representation.

As we know the facts of women's representation, we also know a great deal about the research concerning which systems are better for electing women. We know this from a report that Equal Voice recently did. Fair Vote Canada has done tremendous work. The IPU has conducted research, as well as the Library of Parliament and many other organizations.

The conclusion: majority systems, including first past the post, are poor at electing women. According to the IPU, women won on average only 14% of all seats in these systems in the year 2012. Overall, women hold fewer than 20% of seats in countries using these systems. When it comes to alternatives, preferential voting is no better. PR systems are best for women, and such mixed systems as MMP are somewhere in between.

According to a summary prepared by Equal Voice, women hold more than 25% of seats in countries using various PR systems and about 23% of seats in mixed systems. Of the top 10 countries in the world in terms of women in parliaments, nine use either PR—five of them—or a mixed system, four.

I also think we have to recognize that PR systems, whatever their elements, do not guarantee that more women are elected, and it is a fact that many countries with more women in their parliaments have adopted some form of quotas. According to a new Inter-Parliamentary Union report, more than 120 countries have some form of quotas for electing women, and among the top 10 countries in the world, seven have some form of female quota.

Even on their own, PR systems, I would argue, make it more likely that women will be elected. We can see this, for example, in Finland and Denmark. Research also shows that the act of changing a system is likely to increase the numbers of women elected, as we have seen in New Zealand.

Last but not least, we also have the possibility of creating our own Canadian system.

• (1540)

I'm not sure whether this committee has called former prime minister Kim Campbell to speak, but Ms. Campbell has proposed dual-member ridings with one female and one male representative for each riding and she has put this forward as a simple and effective way to guarantee gender equality. What Ms. Campbell says is that she feels that this system fits very closely our current system, and she speaks passionately and at length about the benefits of a dual-member system. In this system, we all vote for both candidates. It's not that women vote for the women and men vote for the men, but all of us vote for a female and male candidate in a riding. I urge you to speak with Ms. Campbell about her proposal, which I think is very innovative and of course Canadian-made.

In conclusion, we have the opportunity to change the way we elect Canadians, with a federal government that has committed to this. Let's choose wisely, and let's focus on a system that much better represents half of our population.

Thank you very much.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dasco.

We'll go now to Mr. DeCoursey to open up the round of questioning.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you, Ms. Dasco, Ms. Bergeron, and Professor Stephenson for presentations here this afternoon.

Professor Stephenson, let me start with you. I want to pick up on an article that you proffered in *Policy Options* back at the end of June, talking about the connection between voter behaviour and different electoral systems or electoral reform. Admittedly, I'll pluck a few things out of there, but that I'll ask you to contextualize in more detail.

The general premise that I gathered there was that the consequence of electoral reform will largely depend on how voter behaviour either remains the same or changes to varying degrees. In that article, you talked as well about the arguments for greater or more equal representation under PR relying on specific expectations about citizen behaviour. You also touch on the prevalence of strategic voting in Canada right now.

Can you start from your view on how prevalent or how limited strategic voting is and then elaborate further on expectations of voter behaviour and how they can impact electoral change within Canada?

And Scott Reid's here.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: We were really worried.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I couldn't imagine that all the rustling was because of interest in my questioning.

Ms. Laura Stephenson: I guess I'll start with strategic voting first.

Strategic voting, I would say, is far less prevalent than people might expect. I think the estimate I've heard from the past election is about 10%, but typically it's more like 3%. It's not as high as one might expect.

When we think about electoral systems, what we have to remember is that any change we would make, if we're trying to estimate what's going to happen, is based upon preferences as we know them today. But people's preferences change with the candidates and the parties on offer. If more parties are going to contest an election, we need to take that into account. It is really a big black box, such that we can't perfectly predict what is going to happen. No political scientist would really predict that Canada would have as many parties as it has.

That's, I guess, the biggest point. I can definitely start on that. Was there a specific aspect of the rest of it?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I think you touched on the fact—and we've heard it from other witnesses as well—that we can't ideally take past voter behaviour as an indication of what it would be under a new system.

The second part is we've heard time and time again that our electoral system is part of a larger system of governance, a system of Parliament wrapped up in a political culture unique to Canada. I guess this clarifies for me a bit, once again, your thoughts there. So thank you for that.

Ms. Bergeron, I wonder whether you could offer us one or two top-of-mind recommendations that we can be mindful of when considering the experience of Canadians living with a visual impairment and how they interact with the voting system.

• (1550)

Ms. Diane Bergeron: I believe it was in 1937 that blind people were actually given, through law, the right to vote, so I think we started a long time ago with getting that process forward. We just haven't been able to find a way to have it happen in secret and independently.

Technology is humongous. There are many electronic systems we are able to use through audio, electronic Braille displays, and other types of devices. People who are even deaf-blind can use electronic Braille displays in some of these systems.

Online voting is also very important. Again, it should be accessible, through things like ZoomText, JAWS, and other screen-reading software and technology for electronic Braille.

It also helps with the issues around transportation. People who are blind or partially sighted living in rural or remote areas have no way to get to the polling stations to do their voting. That is a big issue, but if you have access to the Internet and the ability to use your equipment.... Using your own equipment—the equipment you are used to and not the equipment where somebody says, “Here, try this”—would be the best way to do it, keeping in mind, of course, that we understand this system has to be safe.

The majority of the people I know who are blind or partially sighted in Canada do online banking and online taxes. We do so many things online, and yet somehow we just can't seem to get the system in place to allow people to use their adaptive equipment with their own computer technology.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Monsieur Rayes, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, Mr. Chair

Ms. Stephenson, you mentioned the importance of local representation. I completely agree with you on that. You say that it is essential and that people want to keep it. Proponents of the change are proposing a mixed member proportional voting system, but we see some tension between local representation and the representation in Parliament, which reflects more the percentage of votes won by all the candidates in all the constituencies.

According to you, is there a mixed member proportional voting system that would help us keep our local representation? Or do we really have to consider increasing the number of MPs in the Parliament of Canada?

[*English*]

Ms. Laura Stephenson: A mixed system isn't my recommendation at this point, just because of the types of MPs that are created, the two different classes of MPs. I think that we would have to look—if you were moving to any kind of multi-member system—at having either small districts, and then increasing the number of MPs, or slightly larger districts by merging some together. It is possible to do, obviously, and it has been done in the past. It is a bit difficult sometimes, with some of the larger ridings that already exist given our geography, but I think it is instantly doable. It is just a matter of deciding what principles we want to put forward for that type of representation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

You also mentioned that, in the case of representation that better reflects the make-up of the population—more women and minorities represented in Parliament—changing the voting system would not necessarily improve the situation. Could we, through tangible ways in elections, improve the representation of minorities, women and people with disabilities in Parliament without actually changing the voting system? Can you give me one or two examples?

[*English*]

Ms. Laura Stephenson: What it comes down to is that parties put forward candidates, and then the voters choose among those candidates. If there were laws or incentives, let's say, put in place for parties to have more diverse slates of candidates, that would improve the representation as we have it. There are a lot of concerns about simply having candidates put forward. If we had a quota that there had to be 50% female candidates, for example, and that if a party did not reach that quota it would lose some of its financial support from the government, that would be a fairly concrete way of making sure that it happened.

The other thing would be where they have placed candidates. Even when you do have equal numbers, there is something called a sacrificial lamb—the idea that you would place the candidates from under-represented groups in ridings that you are unlikely to win. That is also part of the problem. When it comes to the root of how you improve representation, I believe it means you have to improve the representation among the candidates themselves. That isn't necessarily a system-dependent issue; that's wider.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: You have studied and written about referendums. A number of people are opposed to submitting the question to Canadians and asking for their opinions on the matter. If people vote against the proposal for a referendum, does that automatically force us to maintain the status quo? According to you, if there were a referendum and it were rejected, would it be because people are resistant to any change? Could it simply be because they are happy with what they have?

[*English*]

Ms. Laura Stephenson: It's always difficult to try to interpret the outcome of any referendum. There's an issue of information and there's an issue of the limited amount of time that voters have or want to put into learning about an issue. It's very hard to know.

We do know that when referenda fail, we often find that it is related to the fact that people don't know much about an issue. Mobilization is important. Turnout in any election is important, and we know that if people don't turn out to vote, they can't support an issue. If you are in favour of an issue or feel passionately about an issue, you're more likely to turn out. If you don't, then you're not going to get there. If you like the status quo, then you're less likely to invest the time to go out.

It's hard to say that a failed referendum is actually a vote for the status quo, even though that's what happens, in effect, but I do think that for any referendum the value of it needs to really depend upon the amount of information that is circulated about that issue, and on how informed the public is in order to cast their ballot.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Cullen now.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thanks, everyone, for being here.

Professor Stephenson, are you aware of Bill C-237? It's been put forward by my colleague Kennedy Stewart. It's called the "Candidate Gender Equity Act". What it would do is link existing public subsidies for political parties to gender equity measures.

When parties run and spend money, they get a subsidy. This bill would suggest that parties that seek parity would get full refunds, and for those who choose not to or are unable to, there's a degrading of that subsidy. That's essentially what the bill does.

Is that in line...? You've made some comments about incentivizing.

Ms. Laura Stephenson: That would be right in line with what I was saying.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Good. I'll give you a petition.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: As for the state of affairs, as Ms. Dasco pointed out, we're 64th in the world for women in Parliament. I'm going to focus on this because I believe this is our first all-female panel. It only took us 27 meetings to get here, but we got here. Twenty-six per cent women in Parliament right now is 2% better than the American Congress. We shouldn't be too smug about ourselves.

We have evidence to suggest that changing a system to a proportional system sees about a 3% to 5% improvement. It's not the whole solution, though, but yet a no-brainer, if that's one of the goals and if you care. As Ms. Dasco said, women have different opinions than men do. I'm going to take that as expert testimony. Then you should care about only a quarter.... Our Parliament doesn't look like our country, I guess, is what I'm trying to say.

Is there any particular field of policies...? I'm trying to get this through the eyes of the voters. If we change the system, what does the voter get out of it? How does their world change? How does their world get better or worse? Particularly around the issues of policies and being able to nominate and elect women to Parliament, what are the policy gaps that you think would need most earnestly to be addressed?

Ms. Donna Dasco: Mr. Cullen, it certainly is true from the research I've done as a pollster that there are a number of issues in which men's and women's opinions tend to differ. I would say those cover areas such as spending on health care, for example, and social services in general and those kinds of issues. Women tend to be more supportive of those kinds of programs in almost all polls that I've done at the national level, and we find that at every other level.

One area that people are not really aware of where we find very significant gender gaps is in attitudes towards military. For almost every question we've ever asked about military spending or about taking action in various theatres around the world in a military sense, women are less supportive than men of almost every endeavour in spending on the military. It's an area that I don't think a lot of people are aware of, but there are most certainly gender gaps.

The idea here is that if women are not represented equally, then those views may not be represented as they should be, that being one of the arguments to increase the numbers of women in our parliaments, because these are views that may not be heard as much as they should be if women aren't there. Of course, the first argument is that it is a matter of fairness. It's a matter of democratic representation. We're talking about our democratic institutions. We're talking about decisions that are made and that affect the entire society and the entire country.

● (1600)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's not the board of the local curling club, which is important—

Ms. Donna Dasco: Exactly. It's not your bridge club or your tennis club. I don't really care how they are run, although I would like to see women there too. But we're talking about our Parliament, and decisions are made there that affect everybody. For women not to be there in fair numbers is a failing of our system, in my view.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you.

Professor Stephenson, you talked about local candidates mattering. I don't know whether you heard the earlier testimony and the reassurance that this committee was guided to only pick systems that maintain a local presentation, a local connection between a community and a member of Parliament.

Do you feel assured about that, or do you remain concerned that we're going to come up with some sort of system that breaks that link?

Ms. Laura Stephenson: I wasn't particularly concerned that it would be broken, because I think everyone agrees with it. The point I wanted to make was that PR systems have enough variance that sometimes that link can also be maintained.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Ste-Marie, the floor is yours.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Good afternoon. Welcome, everyone.

I'll start with a comment to Diane Bergeron. By the way, you have the same first and last name as my grade 6 teacher, who was an extraordinary teacher.

Your testimony is very moving—I think I am speaking for the group. It is incredible to hear that, in your entire life, you have never been able to vote properly and confidentially in a federal election. I think that needs to change. We have taken good note of that today.

However, I will express some concern about online voting, which might eventually lead to fraud. We have heard a lot about cybersecurity, intimidation, identity theft and even vote buying. So we must remain cautious on that front.

I now have a comment and a question for Ms. Dasco.

The fact that we don't have 50% of the elected representatives in the federal Parliament and in the other levels of government speaks partly to the failure of the voting system, but primarily to the failure of our society. A host of measures need to be considered. This needs to change. I think the private member's bill from my colleagues' party is a step in that direction.

I would like to ask you more about the system put forward by Kim Campbell, who was actually in the only party that had perfect equity, with as many men as women. As we may recall, she was elected with Jean Charest at the time. In her model, the size of the ridings would be literally doubled and there would be two representatives. Is that correct?

[English]

Ms. Donna Dasco: That is her proposal, yes. Of course, the ridings could be larger than they are today, but each riding would have two representatives, a male—

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Would there be some sort of proportional representation, which would still be difficult to achieve with two representatives only, or would there be a risk to have a man and a woman from the same party?

[English]

Ms. Donna Dasco: I don't think her proposal has proportionality in it. I've spoken with her many times about this. I'm not the best person to relay her point of view, but I don't think it had proportionality. She felt that such a system would fit very closely with what we have right now, and it might include larger ridings, but it would essentially just double the number of members of Parliament—but it wouldn't necessarily double it, if you made the ridings larger.

That, essentially, as I recall, is her proposal. She's spoken about it very extensively, and she feels that it would fit Canada very well, although it does not have proportionality as part of the proposal.

• (1605)

[Translation]

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

In closing, I would like to ask you a question, Ms. Stephenson.

You are absolutely right in saying that the devil is in the details. All the details of a possible reform could benefit some parties and hurt others. Unfortunately, partisanship may hide in the details. We take good note of that.

You talked about the importance of personal contact with the member. You said that the largest ridings, which would have between three and seven members per regional constituency, could be functional.

In your view, in a mega-constituency with, say, five representatives proportionally assigned, would the contact with them be good, given that the riding would be five times larger?

[English]

Ms. Laura Stephenson: Some contacts can occur, certainly. It wouldn't be the type of contact we know now, where there is a single person, but if you think of it in terms of wanting to do constituency service, you have five people trying to serve the constituency, right? From the voter's point of view, they're getting a lot more contact going on. Certainly, during campaign time, when mobilization is most important—and let's be honest, most Canadians are interested in politics at that time—you're going to have even more activities going on in these areas.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: This model could reconcile accessibility to members and a form of proportionality.

[English]

Ms. Laura Stephenson: Yes.

The Chair: Madam May.

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

I want the panel here today, particularly Donna, having founded Equal Voice, to know that my colleague, Nathan Cullen, is a wonderful feminist and has raised with almost every witness the problem that we rank 64th in the world for women's representation.

But I think you're the first witness to point out that our ranking has been falling. I can only suppose that since our numbers inch up, other countries are making improvements by leaps and bounds. Do you want to comment on that?

Ms. Donna Dasco: That is exactly what has happened. Other countries are moving ahead of us. That is why our ranking is falling.

I want to add something very interesting in regard to the most recent report from the Inter-Parliamentary Union. They pointed out this fact back in 1995 at the Beijing convention. That motivated a lot of countries to aim for a 30% target for women in their parliaments. Sometimes we call that a "critical mass". In their recent report, they're saying that in fact the new trend is to set 50% as a target. We're seeing that in a number of countries: European countries, African countries, and Asian countries.

When I read that, I thought, here we are in Canada and we haven't even reached 30% yet, and the rest of the world is striving for 50% through setting goals and targets and so on. Of course, it's not that they've reached them, but they're moving there, and here we are at 26%. I find that very disappointing for a great country such as Canada. We rank so highly on so many other dimensions, such as our standard of living and our quality of life. We are one of the top countries in the world for all of these things, and yet we're 64th when it comes to women. It's hard to believe.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you for the work you've done with Equal Voice.

I want to turn to Laura Stephenson. I note that you're very involved at Ontario's Western University in political science and research. I found a reference to an article back in 2011 that referred to a broader project of making electoral democracy work, as described at the time, with 20 researchers from around the world looking at five separate democracies. I wonder if that project is ongoing and which democracies you were studying.

Ms. Laura Stephenson: In fact, you heard earlier from the leader of that project, André Blais, at the university of Montreal. In fact, it has expanded to six countries. We looked at Germany, France, Spain, Canada, and Switzerland, and then we added Belgium.

Ms. Elizabeth May: We have heard a bit about that study. Have you looked at the 36-country study that Arend Lijphart has put in the book *Patterns of Democracy*? Is that something you've looked to as a model around comparative democracies? What have you taken from that? How would you adjust it for the six-country study you're doing?

• (1610)

Ms. Laura Stephenson: Professor Lijphart's book was one of those that I learned about in graduate school, so it's certainly influential.

We haven't come to firm conclusions in our projects. Some of the most interesting work we've done has actually been in Ontario. We ran a very interesting experiment, in which we gave voters different ballots to see what would happen. We were able to hold constant preferences but change the way in which people would cast votes.

More recently, we ran a study around the European Parliament's elections, where we created fictional ballots made using real people—real European MPs—and we gave them different options. This is what I spoke of in my notes. It was about letting people vote in an open list system. This is where we found that everyone, females and males, voted for more female candidates as lists became more open, for women at a greater rate, so nonetheless, it was increasing.

Ms. Elizabeth May: With the little time I have left—and forgive me for leaving this until last—for Diane Bergeron, I've been told by colleagues in the Greens that in New Zealand, since they moved to PR, they've been electing a lot more people with disabilities to Parliament. I'm wondering if that aspect of electoral reform is one that the Canadian National Institute for the Blind has looked at.

Ms. Diane Bergeron: Before I answer the question, I want to point out that my guide dog is also female, so you surely do have a fully female panel.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Diane Bergeron: CNIB does not have an opinion on one particular system or another. I would suggest that the issue of having fewer people with disabilities or people with sight loss participating in political life is less reliant on the electoral system and more on the attitude of the political parties, the attitudes of people in general, and the stereotyping of people with disabilities as not being as capable or competent. If we change the attitudes, no matter what electoral system we use, we're going to find more people with disabilities, more women, and it's going to be more proportional regardless of how that system works out.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Sahota now.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

Previously I wasn't able to give a shout out to my city, but it's nice to be in Toronto, and have our first female panel, and have all our committee together.

I was born in Toronto and I'm the member for Brampton North. I'm quite proud to say that in Brampton we outnumber the male MPs. We have 50% representation at the provincial level for the MPPs, and our mayor is a strong female role model, as well. We're doing quite well in the city of Brampton and I'm proud of that. I think mentorship is important, and since I've become a member of Parliament I've been mentoring a lot of young women to come up to Ottawa and spend time with me there to get some intrigue into politics.

When I first ran, I had a lot of people who weren't even in politics saying “Oh, I don't think you should run for federal politics. You would have to move away. Maybe you should look at the provincial level or the municipal level”. At a younger age I had people saying to me, “Oh, you're going to become a lawyer, and you're going to get into politics? Maybe you should be a school teacher. That's a good job for family life”. Throughout the campaign you hear stuff like, “Are you going to be able to handle the heat?” Those are the kinds of comments that are made to women often.

We are simplifying some of the things we're looking at here by saying one electoral system over another. We've had comments made that we'd have more compromise, or the political process will become more tame and more women will get involved. I think we're also perpetuating a stereotype once again that women don't want to be involved in politics, but there is a big problem. I put this question out to you, Ms. Dasco. Are women wanting to get involved, or are women not wanting to get involved, and if so, why are they not being elected in equal numbers? Do you think it's the electoral system, or do you think it's the quota that we need to get in place first and foremost, or a combination? What are the other barriers and factors that are preventing us from having an equal number of female representatives in the country?

Ms. Donna Dasco: I do believe it's institutional factors, including the electoral system. We would see a change if we had a system that was more conducive to electing women. If political parties, even in our current system, took it more seriously and devoted more thought and leadership to it, then we would do much better. I do not believe it has almost anything to do with attitudes in the public or the electorate, which are favourable generally to electing women. Sometimes we hear that women don't want to step forward, but I've looked at the data from the last election, and of Canada's five parties in the House of Commons, together they had 471 female candidates. There were more women running than there were seats in Parliament to hold them if they had all won. They all wanted to win. Obviously women are running, and we have to keep that in mind. Sometimes we hear people say that women don't want to run and all of that, but I believe they are there.

In the last provincial election in Ontario I was told Equal Voice had Patricia Sorbara come to speak with them after the election, and she said that Premier Wynne specifically made a point of calling women and asking them to run when she was Premier. She is reaching out and asking them, and the result was that many women stepped forward and they ended up winning those seats. We ended up taking Ontario from 29% to 36% women.

In Ontario, 51% of the New Democratic Party caucus is female. It can be done, and the women are there to step forward. In some cases they may need a little more coaxing, but if we have leadership like we see in some cases—and I want to say that many parties have made various efforts to do this—then I think that is the answer to your question.

• (1615)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Professor Stephenson, do you have anything to add to that?

Ms. Laura Stephenson: I agree that women do want to be involved in politics, but I think there are still some systemic barriers to becoming candidates that need to be considered. I agree that it's not that the public doesn't want to elect women; we don't find any evidence of that.

However, there are things to be thinking about. A simple one to think about is child care. The difference is in provisions of making sure that all candidates would have access versus not. There are also personal costs, obviously, to being involved in politics, and the extent to which those are unfairly or unequally distributed on men and women needs to be considered.

There are some general policies that could be put in place that might encourage more women to get involved.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank you for your presentations today as well.

Ms. Stephenson, I have a question. I apologize for not hearing the first part of your presentation. The comment that you made that caught my attention was about the open and closed lists. You made the comment that the placement of names on those lists is very important, and I totally agree.

Can you elaborate a little more on your thoughts around that open and closed...and how the lists would be prepared, and your comments about the party people voting on that as well?

Ms. Laura Stephenson: Certainly.

In a closed list system, the parties have full control over the names that are put forward. In such a case, it's very important that parties are cognizant of how many seats they're likely to win, and then to put a good, equal representation of various types of candidates in those positions. That's very important.

Some systems may have quotas, but quotas actually aren't going to go the whole way. If it's a list of 10 candidates and you put the females at the bottom five and you know you're only going to get three seats, that's not going to work out.

On the other hand, open list systems do allow for personal voting. My research would suggest that you might have more people in fact voting specifically for women or whichever candidates appeal to them personally, for whichever reason that might be, whether it's because they're part of a minority group or something like that.

So the construction of the list is very important.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

To your other comments about the type of system we would have, there was a suggestion earlier that there was only 3% of the population looking at this particular issue right now. I said earlier in questions with the previous panel that it doesn't matter whether it's 3%, 6%, or 10%, I still don't think that's enough, given the number of Canadians we have looking at the system. It's not really something that's top of mind compared to the other issues that the government is dealing with today.

Would you agree from your research—regardless of how it should be structured—that the Canadian public is engaged in wanting this right now, or is it politicians who want it?

• (1620)

Ms. Laura Stephenson: It is my job to study this stuff, so from my point of view there are lots of people engaged. My Twitter feed says that lots of people are engaged. On the other hand, when I speak my family, I have to explain what the heck I'm doing.

I would agree with you that this is not a pressing issue in the minds of Canadians, as it has been in other systems where there are very particular reasons why electoral reform has jumped to the top of the policy queue.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Can you elaborate on what those would be?

Ms. Laura Stephenson: For example, in the Atlantic provinces, we know that Prince Edward Island is going to have another plebiscite coming up. The impetus behind looking at changing the system again, because it failed the first time, is that they have very unequal results.

We know our parliamentary system is built upon the idea that there's an effective opposition, but if one party sweeps the entire province then they don't have an effective opposition. Their legislature is not able to function the way it should. That's a pressing issue. I think that's exactly why the government has been moving forward to bring about this plebiscite.

In other situations that we've seen at the provincial level, there has been what they call a "wrong winner" election, which is that one party gets a greater proportion of votes than it gets seats, so it's vice versa. We assume that the party that gets the most votes should also get the most seats, whether or not it's perfectly proportional. When that happens, that's often a reason as well that the public get quite engaged around the idea of changing the electoral system.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, and Ms. Bergeron as well.

I was very interested in your comments, particularly around even the number of blind persons who understand Braille. There are educational processes there. Previous panellists have indicated that we would need to have education in regard to the type of system...

Perhaps more panellists would want to answer this. When you're looking at the types of systems that are there, you indicated there would be particular comments to be made around mandatory voting. I wonder if you could elaborate on that a little more. You indicated, of course, that if there's mandatory voting, you would either have to provide exceptions or make it completely available for everyone. Being very interested in the disabilities part of our society myself, I certainly would like you to expand on that.

Ms. Diane Bergeron: I truly believe that if we're going to make voting mandatory, then we also need to make sure every person has the same rights in the voting system going forward. If we are going to do mandatory voting, then I don't think I should have to have somebody with me in the polling station who I do not know and who could mark my ballot for me. I think I should be able to do that independently. I should be able to check it myself to make sure that I haven't unintentionally spoiled my vote, and also to make sure that it's in secret. If I don't have those rights upheld, then I don't think I should be forced to go through the same process as everyone else.

If the voting process is made completely 100% accessible to everybody, then that would be different. I truly don't believe that mandatory voting should be put in place without the exceptions to allow people to have the right to back out if they are not being considered equally or treated equally within that process.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

I'm going to start with Ms. Bergeron.

After you finished your presentation, I had a quick look at the CNIB website. It's interesting to note that the estimate is that 500,000 Canadians are living with vision loss. To me, as you were talking about the barriers you've encountered and the barriers that exist for your community, that's a huge number.

One person excluded from voting because of a disability, or one person having the right to a secret ballot violated because of our system, is one too many.

Do you have an idea, of the 500,000 Canadians living with a visual disability, if there are some who are able to participate in the process, and it's awkward? What percentage of Canadians from your community are completely excluded?

Ms. Diane Bergeron: I would say that for the components of voting in secret, 100% of people who are totally blind are excluded, because there is absolutely no way to be able to verify your vote. You have to have somebody else there to verify the vote.

As everybody else does, I can take it in, I can use the Braille template, and I can check my mark on the piece of paper, but it's important that we all check to make sure that we didn't accidentally spoil the ballot. I would say it is 100% of the people who are totally blind.

People who can read large print, and people who have some ability to read with magnifiers, would have the ability to do this on their own, but I couldn't tell you exactly what that portion is.

• (1625)

Mr. John Aldag: Okay, that gives me a sense.

I appreciate you sharing your personal experience with us today. It was a powerful testimony for me.

I'm going to move now to Professor Stephenson.

I had read the same article that my colleague, Mr. DeCoursey, had read. In your concluding comments, you indicate that moving to a different system will generally benefit small parties. I've been sitting here mulling it over, and I'll give you a bit of a preamble, but ultimately I'm asking, to what magnitude would small parties benefit?

I'll give you a couple of examples of what's been going through my head.

In the neighbouring riding to me, the Libertarians ran a candidate. In my riding, there was a Conservative, a Liberal, an NDP, and a Green. A number of people who voted Green, for example, said that truly was their first choice. A number of other people voted Green because it was their protest vote, and they felt that it was the only way they could say that they were disillusioned with the system. They weren't going to support any of the main three parties.

Through the research that you've done, did you get a sense of how many people might move from that protest vote? You said strategic voting is 3%. I've seen strategic voting being more like somebody who decided at the last minute to vote for Liberal versus NDP so they could get the Conservatives out.

On the question of the protest vote, in the research that you've done, have you looked at that? I'm trying to understand if it could harm some of the small parties where people would say that under a proportional representation system they could win a seat. Would that swing them to a different party or to go in to vote a ballot spoilage instead of the protest vote? Does your research support any of that or provide any indication of what voters are thinking?

Ms. Laura Stephenson: I have never really thought about it that way. It is an interesting point.

Where my comments came from, or where my conclusions would have come from, is that when electoral systems are more permissive, which usually means that more parties will get seats, you tend to see more parties forming, or at least more parties getting the support, because they now become viable players.

Whether or not there is a lot of strategic voting going on, we have to recognize that electoral systems also create incentives—or not—for parties to enter the arena. Some of the very small parties we have are a little out there, so—

Mr. John Aldag: Your research indicates 23 registered parties in the last one. How many of those would actually become players, and how many of them are at the fringe of the electoral process?

Ms. Laura Stephenson: That is exactly the point there. When we are talking about protest voting currently, we are talking about these small players, but perhaps there would be groups within our existing parties that would splinter off to create more specialized, let's say, interest parties, more directly related to their own interests. Those would be smaller parties, but they would be more likely to get the support.

The idea is that parties have the incentive to enter the electoral arena if they are more likely to get elected. Voters have the incentive to vote for those parties when they are more likely to get the seats. You tend to see a greater spread of interest being represented in seat-earning parties in more proportional systems.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Boulerice, the floor is yours.

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

Good afternoon. Like my colleague Nathan Cullen, I am very happy to see that our first group of witnesses is predominantly female. That is important; it is a value that we share. Nathan is not the only male feminist around the table. I am very proud of the fact that the NDP caucus is 41% women. It's true that it's not by chance and that it is the result of political will and recruitment efforts to have candidates who reflect our society.

Professor Stephenson, you talked about the importance of a relationship between voters and representatives, the local, somewhat organic, connection between the two. The system that you are supporting maintains that connection. That comes up quite often; it is a concern for the people and it is understandable. People like to know who they have to call to complain.

The system you are presenting makes me think of the Irish system. I think they have between three and five members per constituency. I find that very appealing, but one of our problems is the geography of the Canadian Confederation. We often say this: Nathan's riding is 330,000 square kilometres, which is larger than Poland, and my riding is 11 square kilometres. We can easily imagine that, on the Island of Montreal, it is possible to amalgamate and merge ridings to make bigger ones, but it would be more difficult to do so in other parts of the country. Can you see a Canadian solution with multi-member constituencies in large and mid-sized cities and with the traditional one-member constituencies in less populous regions?

• (1630)

[English]

Ms. Laura Stephenson: We certainly could have a made-in-Canada system, by all means. The distinction to remember is that any single-member district system will necessarily be a first past the post system, so it would not be proportional. You could have single-member districts as well as multi-member districts, just recognizing that the only proportionality would come from multi-member districts. The extent to which that is going to be liked across the country is something to consider.

Certainly, geography is a challenge in these issues. It is made to work in other systems. There is no perfect way of looking at it. You

could do a mix of first past the post and PR, but it might raise some other issues. To be fair, I have never seen that anywhere else.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: You pointed out something that I thought was very interesting. It seems to be a fairly well-known fact, except for some witnesses, that proportional systems increase the presence of women in parliaments. We have often heard about quota systems or closed lists where men and women alternate on the ballots. However, this is the first time I have heard that more women are elected in open list systems. I have not heard that before.

Can you explain why open lists in a proportional system would have more women elected than the first past the post system?

[English]

Ms. Laura Stephenson: What I was referring to there was the research we did with an experimental study. It hasn't been tested in the real world, but we have a lot of faith in those results nonetheless. What my colleagues and I—I have several co-authors on the piece—think occurred is, literally, that the individuals wanted to vote in more females. Remember, we used real MP names, so they were real politicians. We found that women and men both increased their votes for female candidates in these systems, although more women did than men. Maybe men are disadvantaged.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have 40 seconds left.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Can you imagine a system with two votes: one for a local representative and another for a list? The representative from the list would do the work with the people and the community organizations in their city or region.

[English]

Ms. Laura Stephenson: Yes, I would assume so.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Good, good, we're all happy.

We'll go now to Mr. Reid. Good to see you back here.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Could you show some ID, though, please?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I get the sense everybody knows my story at this point.

The Chair: Not really, but we've been insinuating it.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

The reason for my absence—it was not intentional disrespect to this panel, let alone the earlier panel that I missed completely—is that at Winnipeg we were all going through the airport, and I had the misfortune to be in line directly in front of somebody who decided to steal my ID and my cellphone. At any rate and from a prudential point of view, it is not a good idea to steal somebody's ID when you're in a place that has cameras on all the time. The RCMP located him. He was on the same flight as us. He was arrested when he got to Toronto, and I came on a later flight.

Thank you, by the way, to our extraordinarily competent staff, who organized and arranged everything.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Mr. Scott Reid: Having said all that, I have listened in to some of what you've said, and I just have a question for Professor Stephenson in particular.

You made reference to a study. Have you submitted that study to the clerks?

• (1635)

Ms. Laura Stephenson: I have not. It is not yet fully accepted for publication. It's in the second stage of things. It's out there in working paper form.

Mr. Scott Reid: Does that mean that the evidence is there? You've been referring to it, so I assume it is. Are you able to share any part of the working paper with us? Is that permissible under your publication rules?

Ms. Laura Stephenson: Oh, yes, certainly.

Mr. Scott Reid: In that case, could I ask you to submit it? It sounds like very interesting evidence.

I have, personally speaking, a prejudice in favour of open lists and against closed lists for other reasons. I don't like the idea of party bosses having control, however good their motivations may be, over who gets chosen. I think it's better to have a system that is more free and open. Therefore, anything that moves us in that direction, as we look for some sort of list system as a possible partial replacement for the current system, is something that I want to encourage. Your evidence would help in that regard.

I did hear reference as well—again, I apologize for not knowing the whole context—to a model that had been proposed, I gather, by former Prime Minister Campbell. Is that right? I have not heard of this before. But I gather that each riding under this model would have one female and one male member of Parliament.

Ms. Donna Dasco: Correct.

Mr. Scott Reid: Is the idea that they would run as male-female teams, or is the idea that you would have a male-only candidates' race and then a separate female-only candidates' race? Those are the only two alternatives I can think of that would actually guarantee you'd have an outcome where there's one female and one male candidate. There's no way of doing it otherwise, at least that I can think of.

Ms. Donna Dasco: Correct. I think the idea is that there is a male list and there is a female list and that all citizens vote for someone on the male list and someone on the female list. So all citizens have two votes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Sorry, are they lists? The impression I got was that it's not really a list system, but that it's ridings, each with two members of Parliament. Effectively, they're either on tickets or they're separate races and two ballots.

Ms. Donna Dasco: They're separate races. There is a race for the female candidate, and there is a race for the male candidate. People vote for both. You have two votes and you have two representatives elected: you have a male representative and a female representative. I'm pretty confident that's the model that she has described.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid.

Finally, we have Mrs. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much. I am delighted to have an all-female panel, and I just have to highlight that the government side of this committee did name two women MPs to this committee.

I hear a lot of testimony where folks claim that it is the electoral system that prevents women from running. No one has ever asked me, "Why did you run? How did you win?" I can guarantee that first past the post, MMP, or whatever had nothing to do with my decision to run for office, nor did it have anything to do with my winning. It was hard work; it was grit. I ran in my home riding, which was never going to go Anglo-Liberal, but I did it. I proved them wrong. I worked hard, and I did it.

As for the comment about the military, well, as the mother of two sons currently serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, I am also sitting on the national defence committee, so I can guarantee you that military spending is top of mind for me as well.

My point is that I really do not believe that our electoral system, the way we vote, has anything to do with women pursuing public office or winning. If we want to have more people, regardless of whether it is women or families with young children...we heard testimony that it is geography, location. If you live in B.C., flying 10 hours to get to Ottawa, twice a week, back and forth, has a huge impact on work-life balance. The fact that there is no maternity leave for women serving in the House of Commons is a problem. The fact that we only now have put in a day care is a problem. It has nothing to do with first past the post. In fact, I loved the competition: bring it.

I want to make sure we clarify that it has nothing to do with the voting system. I firmly believe that. If we keep trying to blame the voting system for it, we are never going to address the real problems.

I would like to get your ideas on this, because we heard testimony from Melanee Thomas that it has nothing to do with it. I would love to hear your feedback on that.

• (1640)

Ms. Donna Dasco: I think the research is pretty convincing. If you look at the top countries in the world, they don't have our system. Almost all of them have some sort of PR or mixed system.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: [*Inaudible—Editor*] mentioned that 25% of seats are held by women in PR systems. We are at 26%. We are not doing too bad then.

Ms. Donna Dasco: Well, look at the countries at the top of the list. They are all PR or mixed systems.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: What are their social programs? How is their House of Representatives? Do they have maternity leave? Do they have all those other things that motivate or support women in politics? We need to look at all the factors, and I don't want to put a pair of blinders on for that.

Ms. Donna Dasco: You are making a good point, but I always go back to the research, which shows that these systems tend to do better, and also—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Did you check with Canadian women politicians here in Canada? Did you ask us? No one has ever asked me.

Ms. Donna Dasco: You are talking about geography. Women don't actually do any better in the small provinces. If you look at P.E. I., Nova Scotia, or New Brunswick, women don't do well, and the distances are like small compared to travelling to Ottawa. I don't think it is related to travel.

I think women are there, and they are interested in running. So many political scientists have talked about the importance of the characteristics of the system as being a factor in this. I mentioned quotas earlier, and they are also a factor. They encourage women, because they set numbers for women to take spots in their Parliament.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: You mentioned that 471 female candidates ran—

Ms. Donna Dasco: Yes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: —so the quota system.... We had enough women running. The fact that they didn't win is another issue, but we had enough women running.

Ms. Donna Dasco: They didn't win because they weren't running for parties in winnable ridings.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I wasn't, and I'm here.

Ms. Donna Dasco: Yes, and that's great that you're here, but for the most part those women were not. They were not running in winnable ridings for their parties. They were running in other ridings. The fact is that if you looked at the winnable ridings, you didn't see all that many women running. Our system is a factor and it is an important factor in this. We're looking at the opportunity now. The government has promised to change. They've promised to change, and that's why we're all here. What are we going to change to?

What I'm saying is that when we choose a change, or when you put forward a change, I hope it's a system that has some evidence that it's better for women than this system.

The Chair: We're over time, but I'll give you a bit of time because you might have some interesting insights to give us.

Ms. Laura Stephenson: Professor Thomas and I agree on this issue completely. I don't think it's our electoral system that is necessarily meaning that we have fewer women in office. I do think it's the opportunity to vote for women that matters, and hearing from

people like yourself who have made it all work and who have won is an excellent way of encouraging women. I do think that it's the more systemic issues that come forward.

The point about women not being in winnable ridings is pertinent to this because that has to do with the party incentives that need to be put forward so that more female candidates are on the list.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you to our excellent panel. It was rivetting. I think you could tell that members were intensely interested in what you had to say. Thank you for being here, all of you.

Of course, you're welcome to stay for the public input session that begins now. We have a list of about 30 people who wish to make comments.

I'm appealing to people in the audience to help me ensure that everyone on this list gets a chance to share their views. All that means is that I'm asking that everyone limit their time to two minutes. If I have to rush things along at the two-minute mark, please don't be offended. It's just the way it is. We saw last night that people were able to get it into two minutes. What I said to everyone in the audience was don't worry about hitting us directly with your comments. You don't need a preamble to soften the blow. We can take it. If we do that, then I think we'll be fine.

We'll start with Mr. Wilfred Day, please. I'll have two people at the mike at all times, the person speaking and a person getting ready to go next. Mr. Day, go ahead for your two minutes please.

I'll call Mr. Henschel to speak after Mr. Day. Go ahead sir.

Mr. Wilfred Day (As an Individual): Thank you. *Bonjour*. I think you all have my package. I'm going to show you two ways proportional representation could work. This is a practical question. I was elected four times as a school trustee. I do know what voters want from representatives. I'm from Northumberland County. It is half small towns, like Port Hope, where I live, and half rural.

Please look at the MMP ballot from P.E.I. The top-up MPs are the party's regional candidates with the most votes. Next, I have two practical PR models. First—

The Chair: Our translation seems to have been interrupted, and we have to proceed in two official languages. Are we good now?

Mr. Day, why don't you start from the top?

• (1650)

Mr. Wilfred Day: My first MMP map shows the ridings between the GTA and Ottawa as one region electing three regional top-up MPs and the 10 ridings in the bilingual Ottawa-Cornwall region with four regional MPs. The second MMP map shows 12 local ridings, each with one local MP, six local MPs from each region. Voters have more than one MP. A regional MP based in one centre would likely have additional offices, like Scott Reid used to have in Napanee, Perth, and Carleton Place, and like Scotland's regional MPs, who hold office hours across their regions.

The next pair of maps is for the new rural-urban PR system inspired by Sweden's system and by Jean-Pierre Kingsley. Fair Vote Canada announced this new model last month as an option for you to consider.

The first map shows how the ridings from the GTA to Ottawa become eight local ridings. The Reid ridings in Ottawa-Carleton become two regions, each electing four local MPs.

The final map shows the whole region electing three regional top-up MPs. For rural-urban you could use a simple ballot like Sweden's. Voters mark a simple *x* for local MPs. There is no list and no second ballot. Parties whose voters deserve top-up seats are filled from the strongest runner-up candidate in the most unrepresented district within the region for each party.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Day. We appreciate that. We appreciate the succinctness of your presentation as well.

Now we'll have Mr. Henschel, and then we'll have Ms. McGrail come up next.

Go ahead, Mr. Henschel.

Mr. Mark Henschel (As an Individual): Thanks for inviting us all to speak to you today. In a 1991 opinion, firmly rooted in sections 3 and 15 of our charter, then-Justice Beverley McLachlin wrote, "Ours is a representative democracy. Each citizen is entitled to be represented in government. Representation comprehends the idea of having a voice in the deliberations of government.... The first [condition of effective representation] is relative parity of voting power."

Democracy in Canada is predicated on equality. That's a human right, right? Equality requires inclusivity. You cannot get the one without the other. Everyone should get a rep they voted for. Every MP should represent the same number of voters. Every voter deserves a stakeholder voice in the debates and decisions that matter—those in our parliaments.

True accountability also depends on inclusivity. It is only voters who have voted for an MP who can hold that MP to account. No other voters hold that stick and no other voters are truly represented. Our charter may not tell us which system to use but it is crystal clear on the results an effective electoral system must deliver. It must produce equal legislative power for voters. That narrows the field dramatically. Indeed, it constrains us to a system very much like STV, with its equal high percentage mandates for every MP.

On the other hand, two-tiered party function systems continue to divide us from them and thumb their noses at our charter. Our MPs must be charter equals so that we can be equal.

Chief Justice McLachlin also observed, "the Canadian tradition [is] one of evolutionary democracy, moving us in uneven steps toward the goal of universal suffrage and more effective representation...."

Please take the giant step forward to equal, effective representation with STV for Canada. Thanks for listening, and thanks for asking.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Henschel.

I would invite Mr. Scott Allardyce to come up to mike number two while Ms. McGrail speaks.

Ms. Patricia McGrail (As an Individual): Hi. Thanks for the opportunity. I want to mention that I feel particularly represented on this committee with Ruby Sahota, one of our MPs from Brampton.

I want to start with my bottom line. Canadians need and expect equal and effective votes, and only a proportional voting system will provide this. We look to you, our MPs, to provide the leadership to get this job done. Canadians have many concerns: job security, providing for their families, the environment, health care, and so on. However, we cannot move forward on those urgent needs until we fix the foundation of our governance. We must have a government that's working for us and not against us.

I have to come to show you what one of the privileged 3% who follow electoral reform look like. I don't know if I'm typical or not, but I hear a lot about us.

I'm a retired tax accountant. Until I went on sick leave, my days were occupied with work and taking care of my three children as a single parent. I voted against PR in the Ontario referendum because that's what I gleaned from the media that I perused over my lunch hours. Now I have plenty of time to wonder why my children will not have the same opportunities that I had. I wonder why there's still so much poverty in our wealthy country, why the gulf between rich and poor is increasing, why climate change remains such a threat, why precarious employment and disappearing pensions have become acceptable, why corporations choose to park billions offshore instead of supporting their communities with their tax dollars.

Working in a Big Four accounting firm, I learned something about the culture of large institutions. In my experience, two things matter: the foundation and the leadership. We cannot have good governance based on a foundation that divides Canadians into winners and losers, that was intended to preserve a master-servant relationship, that frustrates our natural inclination for collaboration and compromise, attributes that have served Canadians so well in the past.

Proportional representation is a small change that can change the culture of our governance, that can make it truly representative of and accountable to Canadians. PR makes other badly needed changes possible. PR is a basic civic right that we expect. Canadians need PR now because we have so many other urgent needs and concerns that must be addressed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before Mr. Allardycce speaks, I would invite Allan Gary Shaul to take mike number one.

Meanwhile, Mr. Allardycce, you have the floor, sir.

Mr. Scott Allardycce (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

My name is Scott Allardycce. I am the founder of the Canadian Disability Alliance. We are an advocacy group for people with disabilities. You can find us on Facebook. We have about 1,300 members across the country. We've existed since 2009. We don't support any political party and we're not opposed to any political party.

We've come up with five recommendations. I'll go through them very quickly. Even though I know the committee's mandate is to examine PR or other forms of electoral change, we would also like to impress upon the committee....

I think the previous panellists who were at the table with you talked about some of the barriers we face as people with disabilities. We would like to see the voting method changed to allow people to vote with other than the paper ballot. My recommendations, which I'll give to the clerk on my way out, spell out all the different examples we give.

We would also like Elections Canada to look at how polling stations are chosen to ensure they're as accessible as possible.

The most important thing is that we believe that Elections Canada should establish an accessibility ombudsman, so that when people with disabilities have difficulty in voting or difficulty at the polling place, there is a specific contact they can reach out to at Elections Canada to say, "Here are the problems and I couldn't vote" or "I felt uncomfortable in voting".

Those are basically the recommendations we have.

I'd like to thank all the members very much. I think what you do is great. I know it's hard work. I wish you luck in your deliberations. Thank you very much.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Allardycce. Personally, I think the idea of an ombudsman is an excellent one, because problems arise on election day. Right now, as I understand it, there's no specialized person you can appeal to at Elections Canada to act quickly in some situations.

Ms. Lacroix, if you could come to the mike, please, and Mr. Shaul.

Mr. Gary Shaul (As an Individual): I'm a recently retired Ontario civil servant. I here on my own behalf, but I'm also a national council member of Fair Vote Canada.

Working in the province, I've seen many governments come and go and many shifts in policy. I've seen how first past the post works at the provincial level. I've voted in every federal election, and in every election in my life, and I've never voted for a winner. I'm a perpetual political loser who found out later in life that this affects almost or more than half the voters in every election when we don't elect anyone. This results in a lot of democratic and practical issues when you have a government that cannot have cabinet members from certain regions of the country and when you have regions of the country that can have no opposition voices in Parliament. These are all things that are fundamental, in my view.

I'll go back, because I don't have much time, to this thing about voting for a loser in my riding every election. That's local to me, so I find it rich that people—I see this in the media, and we heard it today from the first speaker on the first panel—that somehow proportional representation is going to do something to that special bond between the constituent and the member. I've never had a member represent me, so what is it that I'm going to be losing here? I don't get it.

Voices Hear, hear!

It's a phony, disingenuous argument. Please don't fall for it. I appreciate the seriousness with which all of you from all parties are taking this issue. I implore you to continue to put your heads together and find that made-in-Canada solution that will lead to political equality, so that no matter where a Canadian lives, and no matter which party they support, their vote counts equally. Whether it's in opposition benches, or in government benches, they can see themselves reflected in Parliament and they can have local representatives and will have more local representatives than we have now, where half the voters have no one.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would ask Norman Smith to come to mike number two.

Ms. Lacroix, it says here that you're also representing the Toronto clubs of the Canadian Federation of University Women.

• (1705)

Ms. Sheila Lacroix (Canadian Federation of University Women): I am representing approximately 900 women from six Toronto CFUW clubs. We are a non-partisan, self-funded women's advocacy organization, and we've been around since 1919. We have a national office, as well.

We are here in support of change from our first past the post electoral system. It results in false majorities, wasted votes, and strategic voting. Even the 3% that's come up in the discussion can be a significant number in a marginal riding, and there are marginal ridings in Toronto. It also creates adversarial election campaigns, which may be challenging for some, but they can be nasty, too.

Ranked voting in single-member ridings being another "winner takes all" is no better.

CFUW joins many other organizations in the Every Voter Counts Alliance in support of PR. We also stress that countries that use PR models routinely elect more women to parliament. This has been discussed, so I won't repeat the data.

What about Toronto, since we're here, and I am representing Toronto clubs? Toronto holds 7.5% of the population of Canada, according to 2011 census data, and Toronto is a perfect example of lack of proportionality. Torontonians have voted overwhelmingly Liberal and NDP in recent elections. In the former false majority Conservative government, the majority of the Toronto population was not represented in Ottawa.

As a result of the 2015 Liberal sweep, which is also a false majority, NDP and Conservative supporters are under-represented in Toronto. Toronto is a driving commercial force in Canada and a centre of innovation and diversity, like some of our other urban centres. All Canadians are affected by Toronto representation.

To the committee, we thank you for this opportunity, but we need fair representation from Toronto and government, which PR can deliver, and a higher representation of women in Toronto and across Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lacroix.

I would ask Mr. Bednarski to take mike number one, and I'd ask Mr. Smith to share his views with us.

Mr. Norman Smith (As an Individual): Hi. Why do we vote? Why do we have elections? Some people would have you believe that it's to choose a government; in other words, the function of voting is to divide us up into winners and losers, which would be a few winners and lots of losers.

I would suggest to you that, even if that is what you think voting is about, our current system is not well designed for that purpose, because sometimes the party with the most votes actually loses the election. This has happened a number of times in Canada, in federal and provincial elections.

In fact, an election is not a hockey game. The purpose of having an election is to allow us to choose our representatives, and we are all entitled to be represented by somebody we actually voted for. To me, that is the definition of proportional representation.

Our current system does not do that for us, as has been pointed out. MPs get elected with 40% to 45% of the votes on average. Some of you get 70%. Some get elected with 26%. On average, 40% to 45%, which means that most of us are "represented" in Parliament by somebody we voted against. It's a screwy system.

Most MPs represent people who voted against them. When you're supposed to stand up for your constituents, which ones do you stand

up for, the 40% who voted for you or the 60% who voted against you?

Proportional representation is *sine qua non*.

I would like to recommend to the committee that when you start your deliberations, do what the Ontario Citizens' Assembly and the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly did. Right away decide that, of course, we need a proportional voting system. Let's start with that premise and the rest of our deliberations will be about what sort of a proportional system we need, because there will be a thousand decisions to make about the bells and whistles.

The Chair: I would invite Ms. Naureen Fatima Rizvi to go to mike number two.

Mr. Bednarski, the floor is yours.

• (1710)

Mr. Michael Bednarski (As an Individual): When I got here today, I heard Mr. Justin Di Ciano, a Toronto city councillor. He talked about considering the effects on ethnic groups, the elderly, and people with disabilities, when thinking about changing the voting system. He wants to keep the current first past the post system.

In a city like Toronto, with a visible minority population at around 50%, we have to look at the MPs in Toronto, where nine out of the 25, or 36%, of the MPs come from visible minority backgrounds, and of course they're all Liberals. I congratulate the Liberals on getting a decent number, and hopefully it will get better.

On city council, and Mr. Di Ciano is a councillor, only three of the 43 current councillors, or 7%, are visible minorities, and they were elected by first past the post.

If we want to keep the system, let's consider the effects on visible minorities and the numbers they may or may not get. I'm hoping that the committee will consider some kind of proportional system. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Michael Ufford, please go to mike number one, and Ms. Rizvi, the floor is yours.

Ms. Naureen Fatima Rizvi (As an Individual): Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Naureen Rizvi. I live in Milton, in the Halton region. I am a mother of two: a little girl in grade 2 and a little boy entering senior kindergarten this year. I am also the Ontario regional director for Unifor. Ontario has 160,000 members of our 310,000. I was elected in my regional council to represent and advocate for our members and speak on their behalf on issues that affect them. This includes, of course, education, working on social and community issues, campaigns and solidarity, and participation in elections at all levels. That is why I am here today.

At Unifor, we see all of these components as part of our democratic engagement, and I want to share some thoughts with you today.

I am here today because I believe electoral reform is the single most important issue to be addressed in Canadian democracy, especially for the generations to come and for the young voters who are so disenfranchised by the current system.

The opportunity is now. It will be a long time before these conditions come around again. I am here to tell you that our membership is ready for change and expecting you to lead that change. All of our political parties, except the Conservative Party, have already concluded that it is time for Canada to join the majority of the civilized world by holding elections on a proportional basis.

In my community, in Milton, the political outcome of the last election does not reflect the real wishes of voters. The Conservatives in Milton did not win majority, yet they are in place. While actively campaigning during the federal election, I had many conversations with neighbours in the community who confirmed that they were forced to cast a ballot not for the person they wanted to vote for, but for the candidate best positioned to defeat the candidate they disliked the most.

Canadians deserve to have a system in place where they actively campaign, support, and vote for the candidate they feel would best represent them. The integrity of engagement in our electoral process needs to be restored.

We want elections that make every vote count and that make extreme false majorities very unlikely or impossible. We want more co-operation in Parliament and less partisanship. We want fewer reasons to vote strategically and more opportunity to vote for a hopeful, progressive future. We want more reasons for young people, and all those who have been alienated from politics, to engage and participate.

My union, Unifor, has deliberately avoided focusing on a detailed model to replace the FPTP. Our national convention in August of this year overwhelmingly endorsed electoral reform as a proportional system that allocates seats in every Parliament in a way that gives weight to every vote. We expect this all-party committee to reach a consensus or a majority to recommend a PR system that is understandable and explainable to our members and our community.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Ms. North, please take mike number two.

Mr. Ufford, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Ufford (As an Individual): My name is Michael Ufford. I am a retired city planner for the City of Toronto, and I represent myself.

Good afternoon and *bonjour*.

I oppose proportional representation systems, and I would like to explain how PR fails at least three of the tests that your mandate mentions.

First is voter intention, which a lot of people say PR is better at than first past the post, but I would like to say that PR produces

coalition governments. Coalitions, as you know, are put together in closed-door negotiations to divide up cabinet posts to make accommodations and sometimes even reversals in party policy or priorities. All this occurs after the election, when further input from the electorate is not possible. It is in this phase, the coalition creation, where the voter intention often goes wrong.

Germany, an MMP country, is currently governed by a grand coalition, which—the politicians will know—is where the main party from the right and the main party from left get together and run the country. Equivalent in Canada would be a government of Conservatives and Liberals together at the same time. The voters who voted Conservative end up getting Liberals; the voters who voted Liberal end up getting Conservatives; and the NDP gets its worst nightmare, probably.

The second test is undue complexity. The complex single transferable vote requires mathematical formulas and models to establish the quotas that are necessary for candidates to win, and to deal with the complicated transfer of votes from the winners and the losers, and so on. You have the Borda count, the d'Hondt method, the Hare quota, and the Droop quota.

A lot of people will say that it doesn't make any difference, because they are just bells and whistles, or details, as I was hearing. I am not a political scientist, but the political scientists all say that election results vary depending on which one of these formulas you use. I am not sure I would want to rely on a system that had that kind of variation.

Third is local representation. I think everybody agrees that first past the post is best at this.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Ms. North and then Mr. Stewart, who will be represented by Ms. Karen Thriepland.

Ms. North.

Ms. Bonnie Louise North (As an Individual): Hi, I'm here from Barrie, Ontario.

I came for three reasons. First, I'm here to listen to the committee and see how this process works. Second, I want to convey to you the results of a town hall that we held in Barrie. I've handed these notes to someone who promised me they are going to get translated and given to you as a group, so watch for "Non-partisan ER Town Hall Discussion". That's the title. Third, I'm here to speak for myself as an individual.

You'll be able to see the notes of the results of our town hall, so I just want to summarize. We invited people from about five different ridings, and those who attended the meeting came from three federal ridings that included people affiliated with the NDP, the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Greens, and the Marxist-Leninists. We had members representing seven community groups including Barrie Pride, the Simcoe County Elementary Teachers' Federation, the Ontario Secondary Schoolteachers' Federation, Canadian Federation of University Women, the Canadian Association for Retired Persons, Fair Vote Canada, Fair Vote Simcoe County, and Environmental Action Barrie/Living Green. While we didn't have a lot of people at our meeting—we had 24—we sure packed a punch when it came to a broad spectrum of points of view.

What happened was that only one individual in the room spoke in favour of first past the post. Everyone else wanted some electoral reform and primarily some sort of proportional representation. I'm not going into all the reasons why people didn't want first past the post. I want to say, though, that once your committee decides on what we're going to do, people have to be educated. The media certainly aren't going to do it. There is no media representation here today. Elections Canada under the Fair Elections Act is not, as far as I understand, allowed to teach adults about our electoral system, so I'm not sure who's going to teach Canadians.

Thank you.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. North.

I would ask Mr. Kalevar to come up to mike number two while Karen reads Mr. Stewart's statement.

Ms. Karen Thrieland (Coordinator, Logistics Services, House of Commons): I'm Karen Thrieland, and Mr. Stewart asked to have someone read this on his behalf:

Hi, I'm Michael Stewart. I represent only myself at this committee and I am standing to voice a concern. Many of your witnesses have quite sensibly advised that a timeline for implementing a new system should not occur before the next election. I am concerned a hurried timeline would not allow for the required legislation Mr. Mayrand spoke of, proper design and implementation of the system or the much needed education program. I worry that we might get rid of one unrepresentative voting process and replace it with a rushed and flawed one. There are too many dependent moving parts to this, and they all have to go near flawlessly to achieve this protracted timeline. I would offer that is unrealistic. I also believe if this is rationally explained by dedicated men and women to Canadians it would not be perceived as breaking an election promise but as a sincere attempt to get whatever system is best right.

I hope you continue your important work.

Thank you.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would invite June MacDonald to come up to mike number one.

Mr. Kalevar, the floor is yours.

Mr. Chaitanya Kalevar (As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Chai Kalevar, and I come from planet earth. I hope that most of you do. My Twitter handle is planetrypatiate, so if you want to know what I think, you can follow that.

I think we have a problem here. I'm very glad that we have so many people here, but we also have so many empty chairs. Coming in and out, we have to striptease a bit. It's not exactly a friendly situation. Even to go to the washroom, we have to striptease. If you have to also go for food, it is doubled. So please try to make it more friendly for participation.

Having said that, participation is a problem too on election day, because people are too busy, they say. Well, if they're too busy, what we can do is have election day as a holiday. Why can't we do that? We have Labour Day. We have Family Day. We have this day and that day. Why not an election day holiday? That's the first suggestion for you.

Having said that, I will say that if we are going to have some kind of referendum, I'm very sorry to see that Ontario's electoral officer is not here. He should have made the point that Ontario did a shoddy job by having the election and the referendum on the same day, for heaven's sake. The election took away from the referendum. The least you should do is confirm that you will not let that happen. The referendum day should not even come close to election day. They should be a year apart or at least a good six months apart.

Second, I will say that since we have trouble getting the young ones involved, because they don't understand it, we should have good civic education classes in high school, which we don't have. Why can't we get that done? The federal government gives money to the provinces. Make sure that civics is a primary responsibility. After all, on election day we spend our tax dollars, so for election day we should be spending our tax dollars in a way that gets people involved, especially the young ones. As they say, if you vote at 18, you vote the rest of the time, so let them get involved.

Thank you.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before I ask Ms. MacDonald to speak to us, I would invite Ms. Rowlands to come to mike number two.

Go ahead, Ms. MacDonald.

Ms. June MacDonald (As an Individual): My name is June MacDonald. I'm one of those rare breeds. I'm in a minority. I was born in Toronto. There are not too many of us.

I'm a retired college teacher of medical microbiology. About 20 years ago, I attended a talk by a woman named Doris Anderson. She said that women in European countries had better policies for women than we did. She said it was because they elected more women, and they elected more women because of proportional representation, or PR. I had never heard that. I had no idea that we voted differently from the majority of other democracies, so I got interested in this issue.

I am pleased that I am able to address you and that you are a committee based on how we voted proportionally. That is really very nice, but you're not proportionally based on demographics. If you were, six of you would be women. I think there are three. We need a few more. This is such an important committee, and it is an important committee for women.

It was mentioned that we're at 26% in Parliament and that the average for PR countries is 25%. I'd just like to point out that that is across almost 200 countries. It ranges from 63% to maybe 6%. It's a straight average. I think what Canadians expect and want is to be in the top 10 or 20 countries. The top 10 countries range from 63% to 41.5%. I think we should be at around 40%, considering the number of women in the workforce, their education, and their ability. We're really not using our human potential by not having at least 40% women in Parliament.

The Chair: So just to wrap up, is there a particular system that you favour?

Ms. June MacDonald: I like the European system where they have list PR, because that's most effective in getting more women elected. But practically speaking, I think mixed member would work better in Canada because we're used to single-member constituencies. As long as it's compensatory PR, it compensates for the disproportionality of first past the post.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I invite Edelgard E. Mahant.

Ms. Rowlands, it's your turn now.

Ms. Joyce Rowlands (As an Individual): I'm Joyce Rowlands. I'm here representing myself. I am a Toronto resident and part of the same minority born here. I agree with the views presented by the Toronto city councillor who was the first witness here this afternoon.

I'm here to express my concerns about the committee's rushed process on an issue critical to our democracy. The level of consultation and citizen engagement is wholly inadequate from what I can see so far. Even a tiny largely homogeneous country like New Zealand conducted an extensive multi-year process of public education and consultation before holding a series of referendums on a new voting system for that country. If Canada adopts a new system it may be with us for decades, and therefore it deserves a more robust process.

I agree with a column in last weekend's *Globe and Mail*. Gordon Gibson urged the government not to wade into these "constitutional swamps"—his words. In his view, any change to our voting system is so fundamental that it should not be made by the government of the day in a rushed process but must be made by the people who are, after all, the owners of the Constitution, and it should not be done to meet an arbitrary deadline set by an ill-advised election promise. I say that as a lifelong Liberal. I think Canadians deserve better. I don't think this should be rushed.

On the question of electoral reform itself, I don't favour any system likely to promote the proliferation of small, single issue, or regional parties and the likelihood of perpetual coalition governments. Various systems of proportional representation may produce a House of Commons more reflective of the popular will, but do they result in better government? Coalitions often dissolve into political

gridlock and result in frequent elections. Spain, for example, is likely to hold its third election in the space of one year.

I also believe that the possibility of a majority government is a good thing. Majority governments can make certain tough decisions that reflect the popular will that might be next to impossible with coalitions.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thanks so much.

Ms. Sheppard, please come up.

Ms. Mahant, go ahead please.

Mrs. Edelgard Mahant (As an Individual): I have three points to make, and I'll try to be brief.

Every international ranking of democracy places Canada among the top 10, but those top 10 also include countries such as Sweden and Finland that use proportional representation. My point is that not every electoral system is good for every country.

Can a large and diverse country such as Canada need single-member constituencies? That local MP provides a vital link to Ottawa that makes government visible to people in, say, northern British Columbia or rural Quebec. Larger constituencies would be completely unwieldy, say in northern Ontario.

France provides a good example of a country that found an electoral system that suits its geography and its culture. For decades, France struggled with unstable governments and proportional representation. Along came President de Gaulle. He divided France into single-member constituencies with an alternate vote. That suits France very well. It has had stable and effective government for the last 50 years.

My second point is the fact that a diverse society such as Canada needs local MPs and constituencies. I love elections. I love going to the office of a candidate and seeing people work together to elect a local MP. You have someone in a wheelchair making phone calls; you have young people rushing out to put up signs; and you have all different people with different abilities and ethnic backgrounds working together.

If you have a list system in Canada that is so diverse, it wouldn't be long before you had a Muslim list, a Sikh list, a women's list, or whatever list there is, and it would divide our society. It would be very dangerous. We have had such success in integrating diverse populations. That's my second point.

My third point refers to the issue we've heard so many times about getting more women elected. I think it's very important in a Liberal democracy that every vote counts, that every voter is theoretically equal. Therefore, it doesn't matter. A male MP can represent women; a female MP can represent men. People from different ethnic backgrounds can represent each other. If we started having quotas for women, maybe we should have quotas for indigenous people, and then maybe we should have quotas for visible minorities, then maybe quotas for people with disabilities. Before long we would divide our electorate into different little segments.

The Chair: Thank you.

Meredith MacFarquhar, please come forward.

Ms. Sheppard, go ahead.

Ms. Linda Sheppard (As an Individual): My name is Linda Sheppard. I'm here because I've been involved in grassroots politics for many years, as you can tell from my hair.

I've been very frustrated at how difficult it is to make change. It's as a result of that experience that I'm coming here today to advocate for change to a proportional voting system.

Like a lot of Canadians, until about 12 years ago, I didn't actually think much about the voting system. I didn't realize that we could elect a majority government with 39% of the vote. At the same time that I started to be aware of what kind of a system we were using, I also learned about countries that use a different system, countries that I highly respected for their social policies and for the fact that they did elect more women regularly, countries like Sweden, Norway, and New Zealand.

As you know, in those countries, if a party got 39% of the vote, they ended up with 39% of the seats, which means that there is a broad base of political views represented in the Parliament regularly, much more so than under first past the post.

But for me, like other women who have spoken here, one of the cruxes of this is that many systems in countries that use proportional voting regularly elect more women, and certainly more women than countries that use first past the post. I think that, since we're over 50% of the population, I want a legislature that's about 50% women. That's not unrealistic, and we can do it. I think the best way to get there is to start with a proportional voting system because that facilitates parties putting up more women candidates, and we will elect more women.

I ask your committee to recommend change to a proportional model to facilitate this change and many of the other positive ones that will result when everyone's vote elects someone to represent them.

Thank you.

●(1735)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. MacFarquhar.

Ms. Meredith MacFarquhar (As an Individual): Members of the committee, thank you so much for this opportunity to make a very brief statement.

The point I would like to speak to is that of a referendum, and I would like to explain why I question the need for a referendum. My first point has to do with the composition of this committee. When I look around the committee, you are members of Parliament who represent many parties. This is not a committee representing only one point of view. I think that's critical. The reason I think that's critical is that presumably in the course of your deliberations the diverse points of view of the Canadian population will come out, because you're not all of one mind. Hopefully, in representing the people you represent, the kinds of healthy debate and discussions that need to take place will be representative of what Canadians will be thinking and talking about.

The second point I want to make has to do with committee work. It is my belief that committee work is an effective way of doing business. Why? As a committee—and you are all being paid by us—you are our representatives. This is your job. Most of us have other jobs. We have families and so forth to look after. You also have families to look after, but this is your job. You have the time and structure to thoroughly investigate, to discuss and debate and hold consultation meetings such as this on the various models, so that the recommendation that comes forth for a new voting system for Canada can be an informed decision and not one based on uninformed opinion.

Thirdly, we can't have referendums on every contentious and complicated topic. I would then hold a referendum on abortion, on assisted end of life, and I could go on and on naming issues. Referendums are hugely costly and time-consuming, and it seems to me it would be much better to spend money and time on a carefully thought-out education campaign that makes clear the voting procedure and the reasons why the new system will ensure that every vote will count and be heard.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I guess Mr. Wheaton is not here anymore.

Mr. Flower and then Ms. Howarth.

Go ahead, Mr. Flower.

●(1740)

Mr. Jason Flower (As an Individual): Thank you. I'm extremely grateful that this committee exists, and that you are a voting member, Ms. May. This is hugely important.

I don't believe we are here to debate whether proportional representation is a more equitable, fair, and just electoral system, for it is that by definition and practice. Rather, we are here to debate whether we, as Canadians, are ready for such a system. For my part, I am, and to me it's overdue.

What I mean by “definition” is only about the terms of reference. “Proportional” is equitable and comparable to, by dictionary definition, i.e., one vote equals a more equitable or comparable representation. That’s it. It’s more equitable than the current system, not perfect—we don’t need to be perfect, just more equitable—but more proportion of our votes being reflected in representation.

Acceptance by Canadians is dependent, not on a unified understanding of any given system prior to the adopting of a new system, but rather a more unified will towards a more equitable and comparable system in general.

We humans are both resistant to and equally adaptable to change. Referendums of provincial pro-representation failed in B.C. mainly due, in my opinion, to having to have a 60% majority to pass. Election rules of a normal first past the post system of 51% majority to win were arbitrarily changed for that referendum. Let’s not make that same mistake here.

One last point I want to make, since we have been talking about various systems, is about the idea of members of Parliament, whether it’s three, four, five, or even one in any given riding—whatever you come up—moving about. You would get Conservative members who are now in Northwest Territories talking to and representing constituents who are mostly native. Then they go and they represent people in Shaughnessy, and then they go to the Downtown Eastside. When you have members listening to and having to talk to various different people in the country, they’re going to start to learn how to work with those people.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aysan?

We’ll start with Ms. Howarth.

Ms. Sharon Howarth (As an Individual): Thank you. I am representing myself, but I felt that I alone could not get my voice out, so this is why I am a member here.

In all the elections I was voting in, I realized that I was voting for somebody I didn’t really like, because the third person was even worse. A neighbour explained to me how there are different voting systems—and I went “What?”—and how proportional representation works—and I went “Wow, okay, that sounds reasonable; the voter is at the top of the pyramid.”

Somebody gave me the studies on electoral reform. They are just unbelievable. There was one by the Law Commission of Canada, and it said, way back in 2004, that proportional representation was the best. Who else do we have to listen to, even though there are tons?

Then PM Trudeau and the Liberal Party promised, prior to the election, that it was the last one with first past the post, and that we would have every vote count. It had been my experience that my vote didn’t count. The voters agreed. They brought them to power, and they brought out a lot of young people because they believed in those promises.

On this electoral committee, you represent the public, because you are now the popular vote, which is proportional representation. You

have been educated by experts. How can we possibly offer that to the public? We can’t. You are legitimately representing the public as you sit here now, as a committee structure. There are many important issues. There were women’s votes and health care, and those were legitimate acts of Parliament. That is why this issue could be a legitimate act of Parliament to bring in the new voting system.

A referendum is \$300 million, and it could be wasted.

People in the Liberal Party, you hold the power to fulfill the promise you made and to bring in a change to first past the post. Do not disappoint and discourage these young people who had faith in you. You actually hold the power. Please be brave and courageous, as you were when this promise was made.

Thank you.

• (1745)

The Chair: Mr. Aysan, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Zach Aysan (As an Individual): Before I start, can I take a quick poll? Has anybody on the committee ever hacked a computer system? Nobody has. We have women, we have men, and we have no computer professionals—and one of the things we are debating is whether to include computers in our electoral process.

I own two software businesses. One of my clients is actually Elizabeth May. She doesn’t know it. She probably doesn’t know the business by name—it’s Guestlist, but that is not the point. My other business has worked with the federal government. During my time there, I disclosed multiple security vulnerabilities of a very serious nature, including the census and aspects of our military apparatus, as well as those of allied countries. We are not at the point where we can trust the computer systems we build with something as important as our election.

If you are choosing electoral systems, please consider non-computerization. If you must computerize it, please note that there is a difference between an Internet computerized voting system and a non-Internet computerized voting system.

There are four types of attacks: fabrication, theft, surveillance, and denial. Fabrication is impossible to stop with Internet-connected voting systems.

Russia is interfering in the American election right now, and it will interfere in ours unless we safeguard this process. If you must have an electronic voting system, make sure it goes outbound only—so radio or UDP connection outbound—and make sure you have a mandatory paper ballot that goes into the voting box and can be verified by any observer who can request a physical count at any polling station. Even using techniques like statistical sample sets will not guarantee a fair election, because an attacker can observe what polling stations to hit by using complex statistical number systems.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you for the benefit of your expertise. It is a very complex area, and it is interesting to hear someone who is well versed in technology say, "Wait a minute, don't go there right now."

Is Ms. Danley here? No.

I would ask Mr. Deverell to come to the mike.

Mr. John F. Deverell (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm John Deverell, a retired *Toronto Star* journalist, a national councillor of Fair Vote Canada, a member of the Green Party of Canada, and speaking entirely for myself.

This isn't the first time you've heard it, but the basic fact is that half the voters in Canada under the current first past the post voting system elect nobody. This is a travesty. This is not representative democracy. It is inexplicable, except as propaganda for hiding a very ugly reality, why anybody would actually call a system "representative democracy" when half the voters have placebo ballots that have no effect on the House of Commons.

Now, fortunately, at least three political parties in this country have appreciated this fact and have promised to make every vote count. That would be the New Democratic Party, the Green Party, and as of June 2015, the big breakthrough, the Liberal Party of Canada. Justin Trudeau stood, surrounded by applauding Liberal candidates, and said, "We will make every vote count." That is wonderful. That is what we are calling the historic opportunity.

A great majority of the members of Parliament committed to make every vote count. That leads me to a question for the Liberals on the committee. Why in all the town hall meetings that people are going to, town hall meetings organized by Liberal candidates, are we hearing a heck of a lot of discussions about the pros and cons of first past the post and the possible advantages of the alternative vote, which is first past the post's sister on steroids? There's no reason to be having those discussions. The discussions should be about how to make every vote count. I really wish the Liberal Party was showing more leadership in that respect because that is what you and your leader promised.

For the New Democrats, we know that you are strongly in favour of mixed member proportional representation. The question is, working as an all-party committee, are you really flexible, are you really devoted to getting rid of first past the post, and therefore, are you open-minded to other ways that make every vote count?

For all of you, could you please put aside partisan obstructionism and get on with making every Canadian's vote count?

• (1750)

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Deverell.

Mr. Showler, I guess, is not here.

Mr. Ben Trister, could you come to the mike? Is this the same Ben Trister that I knew many years ago?

Mr. Ben Trister (As an Individual): Yes. Actually, I was wondering about that myself. Nice to see you again.

The Chair: Nice to see you.

Mr. Ben Trister: It's only been, what, two or three decades?

The Chair: Forty years maybe? No, 35, I think.

Mr. Ben Trister: Here I am.

My name is Ben Trister. I have had the pleasure of appearing before committees of the House of Commons and the Senate on behalf of Canadian Bar Association, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and the Coalition for Secure and Trade-Efficient Borders, but it's my first time here as a retiree, and I thank you for the opportunity.

Electoral reform is, in my view, the most important issue facing Parliament today, because the results of our elections shape our policies on critically important and even existential issues, such as climate change. Our electoral system, of course, is the very foundation of our democracy. I've looked at the various systems in use in other countries and I've found them too problematic for our purposes.

One of the issues with the electoral reform movement in Canada is that the proponents of reform have not been able to come together behind a preferred system because there are too many problems with them and they keep fighting among themselves as to which should be put in place. If our so-called democracy geeks can't agree to support a single system, how can we expect Canadians to do so?

Being a concerned citizen, as well as a retiree with too much time on my hands, I decided to see if I could create a made-in-Canada electoral system for your consideration. After more than a year of work and with the help of my brilliant daughter Rachel, I filed my brief and my proposal with your committee this afternoon. Our electoral system has to be as easy as possible to understand and has to produce accurate representation. Complicated systems, though they may have some merit, offer too much opportunity for misunderstanding and misleading anti-reform campaigns. If Canadians are not presented with a simple system, they may reject it and think things are better with the devil they know, and we will have squandered a historic opportunity.

I call my system ordered proportional representation. Under OPR, votes are cast, just like they are now, one vote in their own riding. What would change is how the votes are used to determine the seat winners. All the votes would be counted across the country, and seats would be awarded to the parties based on their share of the popular vote. After the votes are counted, Elections Canada would create lists for each party, ranking their candidates based on the share of the popular vote in their respective ridings. The candidate with the highest share of the popular vote goes to the top of their party list and the lowest goes to the bottom. Say the House of Commons had 100 seats and a party won 50% of the seats. It would obviously get 50 seats and those seats would be won by the top 50 candidates on that party's list.

Under the current system, the distortion in seat allocation for the House is 21.5%. Under OPR, the distortion is reduced to 0.3%. OPR complies fully with the mandate of the committee and the five principles contained in the motion that established the committee. There are other benefits, including, but not limited to, seats that are more broadly distributed geographically within each of the national parties. The percentage of women elected would increase, the House of Commons would be made up of people who earned more votes on average than is the case under the current system, and Elections Canada could easily implement a new system. As you'll see from my brief, the entire process takes half a page to describe in detail.

I'd be grateful if you would carefully consider the proposal. You have it. I'd be pleased to provide you with any underlying data you might want.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Elizabeth May: We could hear it again if you ever get your daughter to the mike.

The Chair: We'll have Ms. Harrison and then Ms. Cox.

Go ahead.

• (1755)

Ms. Erin Harrison (As an Individual): Thank you, first and foremost, for having us here, and my thanks to the government and the committee for this consultation process. That's great.

My name's Erin Harrison. I'm the Canadian Labour Congress's regional director in Ontario. Today I want to speak about the Canadian Labour Congress's position. We represent 3.3 million members across this country. Our position has been democratically voted on, similar to what happens in Parliament. All of our positions have to be passed through our decision-making structures within the labour movement. I don't think it would be news to anyone at this table that, for a variety of reasons, we are not in support of the first past the post system.

Here's why: in the 2015 election, there were nine million votes that did not count towards electing a member of Parliament, who is supposed to express the voters' political opinion. Many people in the room today, I think, were saying similar things. Far too often a party is able to achieve a majority under this system, even though they don't get more than 40% of the vote.

Our current system also generates tensions in the House of Commons and causes people to vote for things they don't necessarily favour. It thus creates some form of strategic voting at times within political parties. In consequence, people in our country don't necessarily wind up voting for what they really want.

What we're asking for is that the new system have three principles attached to it. First of all, no party should be able to win a majority of seats in the House of Commons without winning a majority of the vote. Second, any reform should ensure that the number of seats the party receives is proportionate to its share of the popular vote. Third, reform should also take into account the importance of local representation.

I want to mention specifically that we are asking for a model of mixed member proportional representation.

The Chair: Thank you. That's good.

Ms. Erin Harrison: That went quickly, the time.

The Chair: If you have one more small point to make, go ahead.

Ms. Erin Harrison: It's just that the way mixed member proportional representation works is actually two votes on a ballot, so it is changing the current ballot system, as I'm sure you're aware. I'm happy to leave my notes behind for more information.

Thank you.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thanks so much.

Mrs. Cox, go ahead please.

Then I would ask Mr. Brown and Ms. Whitfield, who will be appearing together, to come up to microphone number two.

Mrs. Mojdeh Cox (As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity to be at the microphone.

My name is Mojdeh Cox. I'm with the Canadian Labour Congress, but just like my tweets, these views are my own.

Canadians have an opportunity to choose a fair electoral system that could better engage citizens in the political process. The simplest way to achieve a more representative system is for Canada to adopt one based on proportional representation, and so I will continue with giving reasons why it's time for that change.

With proportional representation, people get what they vote for. So a party that gets 30% of the votes gets 30% of the seats.

We also understand that our electoral system is outdated. It's sort of the dinosaur of all things democratic. Parties with less than 50% of the vote can get 100% of the power, and that isn't fair.

Proportional representation gives voters more power to set the government's agenda. It encourages people to vote for what they want instead of voting for who they think can win.

Proportional representation does in fact force parties to work together to accomplish goals. Rather than working together, parties fight for a majority of seats, which exaggerates political division.

One of our major barriers right now is that people think their vote does not count. That is a huge detriment to our democracy. Instead of voting for their first choice, people will often vote for another party. In other words, it's strategic voting, which can be almost equally disastrous.

Abuses of power are curtailed with proportional representation, as one party rarely controls all of the power. Governments with proportional representation are more fiscally responsible. Accountability is shared across party lines, and the risks of mismanagement are more costly. A party that loses support is guaranteed to lose seats and, as a result, political clout. So we need to move toward proportional representation.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Finally, Mr. Brown and Ms. Whitfield, go ahead please.

Mr. Mark Brown (As an Individual): I'm Mark Brown from Brampton North representing the Toronto and York Region Labour Council.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

At the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, we believe that every vote counts and it should count equally, but that's not how it worked unfortunately in the 2015 election.

More than nine million votes were wasted, and by wasted we mean that they were cast for a candidate who didn't win in our first past the post system. Therefore, the Prime Minister has pledged that 2015 would be the last year that an election is done with the first past the post method.

The Labour Council has long supported Fair Vote Canada in its effort to win electoral reform with proportional representation.

The vast majority of OECD countries elect their governments through PR, proportional representation, resulting in stable administrations that rule effectively.

There are different variations of proportional representation, but in 2007, the Labour Council supported a recommendation of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform to move to a mixed member proportional system, the details of which are in the document in front of you entitled *Make Every Vote Count*.

Ms. Megan Whitfield (As an Individual): I'm Megan Whitfield, equity vice-president representing workers of colour for the Ontario Federation of Labour.

We believe that a mixed member proportional system would provide the opportunity for political voices that speak for the interests of workers and their communities to be elected more often. It has also been shown that it increases both voter turnout and the diversity of winning candidates.

We believe that Canadians have had false majorities for far too long. It is time Canada moved to a more representative system that ensures every vote counts.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Thank you to everyone who participated. You were all very eloquent and extremely precise and concise. It really helped things move along smoothly and provided some good information for the analysts and for the committee. It is information that will obviously be seriously considered when the report is written.

To committee members, we'll meet back here at 6:40. I know it's not a round number, but 6:40 p.m. means that at 6:45 p.m. for sure we'll be off and running. I learned over the years that it's the best way to go. So we'll make it 6:40 p.m. for a 6:45 p.m. start, please.

Thank you very much.

● (1800)

(Pause)

● (1900)

The Chair: Okay, we'll get going. The meeting is officially open.

I don't know if some of you were in the audience in the late afternoon when we had a similar open mike session, but for those who weren't, each person who comes to the mike has two minutes to present their ideas and their opinions. Every time we have an open mike, I really count on all of you to help us get through this so that each person will have an opportunity to get their two-minute presentation in.

Do you have the updated list? No? I have up to eight. Okay, we have more. We'll start, and then I'll be getting the rest of the list shortly.

Thank you for being here. It's very exciting to be in Toronto and to have such a large crowd of people out talking to us about electoral reform.

We like to have two people at the mike. There are two mikes, one and two. While one person is speaking, the other person is getting ready to speak and waiting at that mike.

Ms. Sinclair-Waters, go ahead.

Ms. Brynne Sinclair-Waters (As an Individual): Hi. My name is Brynne Sinclair-Waters. I work in the post-secondary education sector, and I'm also a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, local 1281.

I grew up in a society that has become increasingly unequal. Canada's 100 highest paid CEOs make, on average, 184 times more than the typical Canadian worker. Far too much wealth and power is concentrated among a smaller league, while the rest of us are struggling to pay off debts and working in low-paying jobs.

Growing inequality is feeding disaffection with both our economic and political system. I believe that democracy must act as a counter against these trends, but today's political system is not servicing us well in this regard.

In my experience, even many politically engaged people who care deeply about growing inequality and are actively involved in making the economy more fair, for example, by advocating for a \$15-minimum wage, often do not feel that engaging in electoral politics is worthwhile, and that's a problem.

A proportional system can help overcome this lack of engagement and support building a fair society where political and economic power is less concentrated.

Research shows that countries with proportional systems have considerably lower levels of inequality, and when systems become more proportional, inequality actually decreases. This is because when the system is more representative, more people participate and the government becomes responsive to the demands of a wider range of voters.

Experts have also argued that proportional representation can help limit elite control over decision-making. Providing more avenues for people's views to be heard in Parliament makes it harder for governments to ignore issues that are important to Canadians.

As a young woman, I am also encouraged that countries with proportional systems have elected 8% more women to parliament. Guided by values of fairness and equality, I encourage the committee to recommend mixed member proportional representation, which could significantly improve citizen engagement and the quality of representation while also providing elected representatives with a personal connection to their ridings and the issues facing their constituents.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Clutterbuck is not here, I presume? I'll invite Ms. Spooner and Mr. Reimer.

Go ahead, please, Ms. Spooner.

Ms. Lorena Spooner (As an Individual): Hello, everybody. Thank you so much for being in southern Ontario. I truly appreciate it.

I'm your Twitter geek and democra-geek. I'm here as an individual, although I do work with a variety of groups.

I am a product of the past 28 meetings you had with experts. You heard a lot about education and the need for it. I am one of the lucky few who had civics 101 in the fifth grade. I was engaged in having an election. I ran for prime minister. I lost to somebody because I didn't promise the voters what they wanted to hear. I've been engaged in politics ever since.

Right around the Mulroney years with NAFTA is when I became pro PR. That is when I found out about it. I didn't like chapter 11. The more I've watched it all these years, the less I have liked our majoritarian system. PR is the way to go, you all know that. My reason isn't to discuss all the statistics of 39%, blah, blah, blah. I want to see consensual politics. I want to see civility, real civility. I want to see that members of Parliament are working together, like the ERRE committee has had to. I think that's what we need to grow this country the way it needs to be.

Having been married, had kids, and everything else, and being a grandmother always fighting for PR, I now live in a nation of what I see as electoral system laggards. We are the tail end of OECD countries that are willing to move to consensual politics with no more policy lurches and just people working together.

The last point I'd like to make is that while I appreciate how much has been discussed about civics 101, we also need to remember that parties and the MPs, who have had handbooks that have been written

over the last 150 years...those need to be rewritten, and citizens need to support that, as well.

Thanks.

● (1905)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would invite Mr. Gnanasabesan.

Go ahead, Mr. Reimer.

Mr. Boyd Reimer (As an Individual): Hello. There's been a lot of talk about whether we should have a referendum on whether to change our system and which system to have.

In referendums, the government that phrases the question can do a lot to shape the result. The government can also shape the result by either educating or not educating the voters. If the voters don't have an informed choice, then they have no choice at all. Huge budgets need to be set aside for Canadians to learn about proportional representation before we even vote on it. With that kind of power, the government must be legitimate.

In my eyes, the only legitimate government is one that has been elected with a system based on voter equality. You see where I'm going with this. There's a catch-22. The current government is not elected with a system based on voter equality, and they do not have legitimacy to establish a referendum to find out whether the results of that referendum will be legitimate.

The Conservative Party has said, "okay, we need a referendum to legitimize the results of that referendum", but if the government that phrases the question of the referendum is not legitimate, then we have a catch-22 situation, and we go in a circle.

Here's my solution. You, as a committee, make a recommendation that we switch to a system based on voter equality. We have one election with that system in place. After that one election, then that government, which is based on voter equality, will phrase the question of the referendum. You can have your referendum and carry on like that.

The Chair: Thanks.

I'd invite Mr. Mark Thompson up to the mike.

Mr. Gnanasabesan.

● (1910)

Mr. Sam Gnanasabesan (As an Individual): Thank you for giving me the chance. I wrote out some points to speak about here tonight. About 10 minutes ago I saw it didn't matter. I've been deceived. I find we have nothing in common. I have read about various countries having these new systems of elections—Poland, Germany, New Zealand, Australia, lots of countries. I think new systems of elections, where PR is involved. Now, I find it hard for what I wrote here is in deceit.

I will talk about balance now. This is the one I quoted from the front desk. I think it's from government, the House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform, page 3, mixed member proportional, that's the one that appears to be very sensible.

But first of all you have to remember you may be having a very high reform of the electoral system. People who vote must understand it.

I invited a friend of mine to come today; he refused. He likes Usain Bolt's type of race; run and win the election. PR, what nonsense, he just wants to vote. That's it. Many people are like that.

The Chair: Are you saying then, sir, that you favour mixed member, or you think that the voting system is...

Mr. Sam Gnanasabesan: It is not my thinking, but what I see is there are voters out there. They are the people who are going to decide. You may be talking about a very high level of discussion. They must accept. Then you put a highly complicated system of PR to a referendum. Through confusion, it may be rejected.

The Chair: If I understand correctly, you're saying you're not in favour of a referendum?

Mr. Sam Gnanasabesan: I don't have a personal opinion.

The Chair: Yes, but you're giving your sense of how people are feeling about different voting systems.

Take 10 seconds, please.

Mr. Sam Gnanasabesan: I see you for the first time. Thank you very much.

I am a Green Party supporter because I always think about the future of the earth: clean air, no pollution, good food, and this party is the one that is fighting for that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Thompson, please, it's your turn. After that it will be Ms. Elwell.

Mr. Mark Thompson (As an Individual): Hello, my name is Mark Thompson.

I have thought of what I think is a really good idea for a new election system. It's a very simple system. We run the election the same way we do now. We elect the first 338 members as is. We then add 33% more seats to the House of Commons. We then fill those seats with candidates who received a high percentage of votes in their riding but didn't win. We fill them based on their party and which province they're in, in a way that the overall result matches the popular vote as closely as possible.

What makes this a good system is that it is, one, very simple, I explained it in 30 seconds. Two, it involves very little change from the voters' perspective. There are no changes to the ballot; there's no change to the ridings; there are no lists. From the voters' perspective they don't even have to learn the system. They don't have to learn any new way of voting. They can vote exactly the way they vote now; all that changes is the result.

If you're planning a referendum, I think it's very important that whatever system you choose is very simple and easy to explain to Canadians. If it's overly complex people are going to reject it just because they don't understand it.

I'm going to suggest that you choose my system, which I call first few past the post because in some ridings you'll have two members of Parliament.

Are there any questions?

• (1915)

The Chair: It's pretty clear, actually. It's pretty elegantly simple.

Mr. Mark Thompson: There you go.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would invite Ms. Jane Garthson to come up to mike number two, and we'll have Ms. Elwell provide us her comments now.

Ms. Christine Elwell (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Christine Elwell. I live in the University—Rosedale riding.

Thank you for coming here.

I believe that the most important issue facing us is climate change and the crisis that we're facing for my and future generations. I was very happy that Justin Trudeau agreed to address this issue. He also said that 2015 was the last first past the post election. I don't think a referendum is needed. I think he has the mandate.

My concern is, I'm struggling with which PR system is the best to effectively and quickly address climate change. I'm asking this special committee, in your final report and in your recommendations, could you please screen for climate change when you're looking at the various models? I don't have one in particular in mind, but would like you to view it through the lens of climate change to assist the public and politicians in figuring out which will most effectively address this crisis.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll hear now from Ms. Garthson.

Ms. Jane Garthson (As an Individual): Thank you very much for the opportunity for individuals to be respectfully heard.

I'm Jane Garthson. I'm a Toronto resident and a governance consultant to public benefit organizations.

I care who represents me in Parliament. I'm here to support the single transferable vote, which I think can produce a Parliament very close to proportionate without the downside of list-based proportional representation.

In Ireland, STVs produce mostly stable governments, highly proportionate outcomes, and representation for small parties and independents while leaving power in the hands of individual voters. It's even helped figure out with whom to form a coalition, if need be.

I want all MPs to be directly accountable to a constituency—I've seen that constituency work matters—not to a party back room. We need to reduce party control, not increase it. I don't know a single Canadian outside of party back rooms who thinks we should increase the influence that parties have on who represents us in Parliament. Don't let lists put un-electable people into Parliament. STV will greatly improve civil discourse and positive campaigning. That matters to me. Candidates can't afford to alienate the supporters of other good candidates. That is not a benefit we would get from list-based systems.

With regard to simplicity, one of your values, I have experience with ranked ballots and found people understood them very easily. I think the same will be true for STV. Software can enable fast calculations. Just pick a system from an existing jurisdiction that has it working. Don't waste time and money developing from scratch.

I'm not an expert, but I've heard that list-based PR can be the crack that opens the door to the election of extremists, which almost all Canadians would find abhorrent. I know that many proportional representation supporters are thinking about environmentalists, but they might be skinheads instead.

Just about anything you choose would be better than the unfair and unrepresentative results we sometimes get from first past the post. I never want to be out promoting strategic voting again. I ask you to make a quick decision so that I never have to do that again. I trust you, the committee, to choose wisely for all Canadians.

•(1920)

The Chair: Thank you.

Is Mr. Hill here? No.

Ms. Vandermeer and then Mr. Stewart.

Go ahead, Ms. Vandermeer.

Ms. Elizabeth Vandermeer (As an Individual): Thank you very much to the committee for letting me speak. My name is Liza Vandermeer and I drove four hours from North Bay to be here.

The Chair: Thank you for coming.

Ms. Elizabeth Vandermeer: I consider myself non-partisan from a political perspective, although in full disclosure I did run as a Rhinoceros candidate in 1980.

I absolutely support the need for electoral reform in Canada. I absolutely feel that we need proportional representation. I do not support the concept of ranked ballot. I really hope to see the end of the first past the post system.

I want the composition of our Parliament to reflect the total votes cast. As an example, I believe it is indefensible that 3% of Canadian voters voted Green and only one Green MP sits right now. There should be at least nine, although our current one does the work of about 50.

Voices: Oh, oh!

I want to see much more outreach and education on the factual details of electoral reform. I'm very disappointed that sitting MPs were encouraged, but not obligated, to hold town halls on the subject. I applaud the work and the efforts of this committee. I've

worked in public consultation all my career and I know how hard it is to get the information out, to get people engaged. If the media is not taking the initiative to cover this effectively, I believe that federal money should be going to make sure there is better coverage, so that the people who may be vaguely interested but are confused get better information and to encourage Canadians to regard this as an important issue.

I am concerned that the timeline that the committee is working in is going to make it very difficult to do this job effectively; the fact that it took such a long time for the committee to get up and running. I know these things take a while, but the fact that it took such a long time for me who was really curious to even find anything on the web about this was really dismaying, given the fact that you have to have your report in by December 1.

On those lines I absolutely oppose the idea of holding a referendum prior to implementing proportional representation or electoral reform. If need be, I think that the New Zealand model where they implemented it and then had a referendum after the fact, when people had actually seen how well it worked, would be a far better process.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Andrew Stewart and then Jeffrey Edmonds.

Go ahead, Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Andrew Stewart (As an Individual): Hello. My name is Andrew Stewart.

Ten years ago this fall I served on the Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform, representing Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. I was at the conference of high school students from across Ontario that ran parallel to the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

As a group we overwhelmingly agreed that proportional representation was important for Ontario, and our findings were similar to the citizens' assembly finding that mixed member proportional would be the best system. I still believe that would be an excellent choice for Ontario and Canada.

I campaigned for the change during the referendum, but unfortunately the vote was a week before my 18th birthday, so I could not vote in it. In that campaign I found great support for MMP among people who were informed about how the system worked, but the public awareness and education campaign around the referendum was too little and too late and the awareness just wasn't there.

As a committee I think you're empowered to make the decision without a referendum, but perhaps there is such pressure to have a referendum that you have very broad and long public awareness and education campaigns so people really know what they're voting for and really understand the issue, so they're not voting no just out of ignorance.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Goldstein, could you come up as well?

We'll go with Mr. Edmonds right now.

Mr. Jeffrey Edmonds (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm a professor of computer science, and I'm impressed with how well you all sit and listen all day.

I have never had a person I voted for win, so I don't feel represented. I think it's important that everybody feels represented. What I'm proposing is to get rid of local ridings. Who I'm connected to in Canada is through social media, and the media is all across the country and it's not in my local riding. The advantage of that is you can have both parties and lots of independents run. The idea is that if one of those people gets one out of 338 fractions of the vote, then that person gets a win. In the various systems that I've heard about, you don't win until you get a third, or a fourth, or a fifth of the votes, but in this case you only need 0.3% of the votes to get a seat.

If you were to think about the topic that interests you the most and that you're most passionate about—maybe it's women's issues, or the environment issues, or pro choice, or black issues—then you can find somebody in Canada who you will feel represents you and can get 0.3% of the votes. That way everybody can feel represented.

There would be a huge list of candidates, but we can find them and learn about them through social media, through other media, and through political parties. You can still have political parties. I could vote for the head of the party, such as Trudeau, or a particular Liberal, and the fraction of them who get votes will still be proportionate.

• (1925)

The Chair: Okay. You're in favour of proportional, that's the bottom line.

Mr. Jeffrey Edmonds: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would invite Mr. Schreiner to come up as well.

Mr. Goldstein, please.

Mr. Rhys Goldstein (As an Individual): Thank you all for the important work you're doing.

I'd like to share an idea. Proportional representation requires fewer changes than most people realize. For example, we could stick to a single vote ballot because that's what we're used to. We could stick with a single tier of local MPs, and we could also avoid party lists. We could do all of that and still achieve proportionality.

There's one system that can do this, at least one. It's one of the five options in Prince Edward Island, and this is being looked at seriously. It's called dual member proportional. Here's how it works. You take the ridings, you make them twice as big, and each riding elects two local MPs. The first MP is the one who wins the most votes, just like now. The second MP in each riding is determined in a way that makes the overall results proportional to the popular vote.

I think this is a practical option. I like the fact that candidates will run in teams of two. Every party will nominate two candidates. I like that because I think that parties will try to nominate two candidates from two different demographics.

DMP is one of your options. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

If Mr. Arthur could come up, please.

Mr. Schreiner.

Mr. Michael Schreiner (As an Individual): Yes, hi. Mike Schreiner.

In the interest of full disclosure, I'm the leader of the Ontario Green Party—

Voices: Hear, hear!

Mr. Michael Schreiner: Thank you. Not surprisingly I'm one of those 63% of Canadians who did vote for a party that wants to end first past the post. I'm one of 51% of Canadians who voted for someone who did not get elected to Parliament. As a matter of fact, in my lifetime I've never once voted in a provincial or federal election for the winning candidate. You would think with that history of futility that I would give up on the electoral system. Obviously, I haven't, but the reality is that far too many Canadians have given up on our electoral system. They believe it's unfair, that it's anti-democratic, and that their votes don't matter. You have a historic opportunity to fix it by bringing in proportional representation.

I want to thank you deeply for taking this committee around the country to engage Canadians. I want to live in a Canada where Parliament reflects the democratic will of the people, a Canada where Parliament reflects the diversity of this country, and a Canada where every vote matters and everyone has a reason to vote.

If you think about Canadian history, some of our most historic pieces of legislation have happened when people set aside their partisan self-interest and did what was right for the people of Canada. You have an opportunity to set an example for Canadians today, tomorrow, and in the future by bringing forward a proportional system and making sure every vote counts for now and for the future.

• (1930)

The Chair: Thank you.

Would Sharon Sommervale come up to speak after Mr. Arthur?

Mr. Arthur, go ahead.

Mr. David Arthur (As an Individual): Thank you for this opportunity.

I'm obviously another advocate for proportional representation. Minister Monsef, at the town hall meeting in Kitchener, said one of the things she really wanted to happen was that Canada could be recognized as a model for democracies around the world. There are 85% of EU and OECD countries currently using proportional representation. Canada is one of the 15% that isn't, with gross distortions, frequently wasted votes, and all of the other problems that people had cited. We are not currently an example.

I would like to focus on two specific things that haven't been mentioned much so far. One of them is the business of a threshold. Most countries that use proportional representation obviously have a threshold. People talk about proliferation of a single issue and fringe parties and so on. One must remember that aside from the five major parties in the last Canadian election, 17 single issue or fringe parties gathered less than half a per cent of the votes.

That problem, I think, is somewhat exaggerated. A threshold of 5% has often been mentioned as being used in some countries. My feeling is that's too high. In the 2008 election, five million Conservative voters got 143 MPs, and almost a million Green supporters got zero MPs, instead of the 20 or so that proportional representation would have given them.

Five per cent is a fairly high threshold considering that. The threshold could be much lower and still be recognizing up to half a million—200,000 or 300,000—Canadians who deserve some representation in Parliament. That's a major consideration.

With regard to the various systems, whether they're STV with multi-member regions, MMP with top-up MPs in addition to the single-member constituencies—which has a lot to recommend it—an MMP, I think, is getting a lot of traction as something that would work in Canada.

The simulations that have been done using various systems and looking at all the results seem to be consistently showing that the larger parties gained proportional representation; the smaller parties often do not and are often still quite under-represented.

I am recommending that whatever system is used, and if it involves regions in order to use top-ups and so on, it be large enough to guarantee proportional representation. Proportional representations for larger parties and not for small parties is not proportional representation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Meslin, could you come up and speak after Ms. Sommervale?

Go ahead, Ms. Sommervale.

Ms. Sharon Sommervale (As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening, it's an honour to be here. You've been listening to folks speak all day, so double thanks.

Expert witness Professor Wiseman, whom you heard in the early part of August, I think, described self-appointed electoral reform elites. Well, here I am; I'm one of those. But I would say that ER advocates aren't born; they're made. I became an electoral reform advocate on May 2, 2011, the night that Stephen Harper won his majority government. In his victory speech he said that Canadian values are Conservative values. That didn't really seem quite right, since 39.6% of the popular vote is actually 24.2% of the eligible vote. It's therefore not exactly the support of the majority by any means.

In the last five years I've become an electoral reform advocate and I've had the real honour and opportunity to speak with thousands of Canadians in my area, in high schools, university classrooms, community information tables, meetings and events of all sorts about

our electoral system. In that time I learned that you can teach a 10-year-old how to use an MMP ballot in less than two minutes. I learned that many people see an MMP two-vote ballot as solving their problems. They say, "Great. I can vote for the candidate I like and the party I like. Super. That solves my problem."

I learned that if you asked, "Do you think that 39% of the popular vote should result in 54% of the seats and 100% of the power?", almost uniformly Canadians will say "No, that's not fair."

There has been a lot of talk in the last couple of weeks about Canadian values. What are they? Do they even exist? I believe that the principle of fairness and equality is a fundamental Canadian value and a keystone in our democracy, and should be enshrined in our democratic system, which can only mean proportional representation. I would simply like to say one more thing—that's actually my thing about PR.

Only one more thing. Speaking to Ms. Romanado's point about whether the electoral system—you know, women, chicken, eggs, electoral system—not electoral system, but many people have encouraged me to run for office over the years. Would I like to serve the public good? Yes, absolutely. Would I like to participate in policy-making? Yes, very much so. Would I want to engage in a culture of adversarial politics? No way, José. Regardless of gender, an adversarial culture repels many good people. A renewed parliamentary culture based on collaborative and consensus policy-making—which is encouraged by PR—might draw different kinds of people to seek public office, and I think that would be a really good thing.

Thank you, everyone. Safe travel.

• (1935)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'd like Gregg Hill to come up and speak after Mr. Meslin.

Go ahead, Mr. Meslin.

Mr. David Meslin (As an Individual): What she said—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Meslin, go ahead.

Mr. David Meslin: Thank you so much.

We heard a few moments ago a new proposal for first two past the post. I'd like to propose the first 10 past the post. Pretty much everyone wins. There would be about 3,000 MPs and they could fit easily in the TD Stadium or the Canadian Tire Centre.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Meslin: I just want you to explore that as an option.

On a more serious note, though, thanks so much for doing this. I've never seen an open mike like this for a federal committee. I think it's really innovative, and it's amazing for someone like me to be able to show up and speak to you. Thank you. It's really fantastic.

I've been working on voting reform for 15 years. I was involved with the 2007 referendum in Ontario, and I was the director of field organization for the 2009 referendum in B.C., on the yes side, so it's great to see this happening federally and to see a commitment from the federal party and from other parties to change the system.

I want to point out that not only is first past the post obscure within the OECD, we're actually the only country in the OECD that is using first past the post exclusively for all of our elections. No one else does it, just Canada. That's because it doesn't work very well, and that's acknowledged by other countries throughout the world.

I wanted to mention that in Ontario we just received legislation that allows for ranked ballots to be used in single-member districts, with a 50% threshold, or in multi-member districts using proportional STV. So this isn't something that's now obscure in Ireland or Australia; it's happening right here in Ontario. I hope you'll consider that proportional option.

I'm a huge fan of PR, either MMP or STV. You've heard from millions of people, though, who have said that, so I'm not going to emphasize that. I hope you do come to a consensus on some "Made in Canada" PR model. If you can't, though, which seems quite possible considering who's around the table, I want to urge you not to walk away and do nothing. I want to also urge you not to have a quick referendum with an uninformed population.

I want to throw two quick ideas out there. Two alternatives are having what I call a reform referendum, similar to the referendum we're having in P.E.I., except without first past the post as an option.

So the Conservatives and others are saying Trudeau might have a mandate to move beyond first past the post, but the Liberals can't pick their own system. Fine, let us pick the system. Have a referendum with MMP, STV, and AV. Don't have first past the post. Trudeau keeps his commitment, and the Conservatives' concern that parties shouldn't be rigging the system in their favour is all met. I think that would work. Do it in 2019, though; don't rush it. Spend millions of dollars on education, perform—

• (1940)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. David Meslin: The second one is a citizen's reference panel similar to Ontario—

The Chair: Like a citizens' assembly?

Mr. David Meslin: A citizens' assembly. It's an amazing process. It was invented in Canada. People travel from all over world to Canada to see it. Again, it takes it out of your hands, it takes it out of the activists' hands.

The Chair: Got it.

Mr. David Meslin: Lastly, I brought some materials for you. If I could pass them to the Green caucus, with your permission, they could pass it around.

The Chair: Everything that is passed around to the committee has to go through the clerk. You can speak to the clerk about this.

The Chair: Mr. Hill.

Mr. Gregg Hill (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the second chance to speak to the committee.

I'm a member of Leadnow. I'm also a member of Fair Vote Canada. I used to have a button, but I had to surrender it at the door.

Regarding the process of reform taking place in Canada, I see some ominous parallels with what was going on in 1997 in the United Kingdom when the Labour Party, under the leadership of Tony Blair, undertook in its election manifesto to replace first past the post with an alternative system. For those of you who know a little bit about recent British history, the Labour Party went on to a landslide in seats, not in votes. It was less than a majority, of course.

They did go to the extent of setting up a committee, well known as the Jenkins Commission. It recommended a specific system, as this committee will hopefully be doing in December, but then the enthusiasm for reform cooled among the leadership of the Labour Party. Even though the report was filed and there was some education and publicity done, they abandoned the project and walked away from it.

So my question is—and I don't expect it to be answered here today—can the committee give us their assurances, if not here today then elsewhere, that the same will not happen in Canada?

Thank you.

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

Ms. Lerner. Then Philip Pothen, and after that it's going to be Linda Fraser.

Ms. Lerner, go ahead, please.

Ms. Anna Lerner (As an Individual): Thank you.

The witness, city councillor Justin Di Ciano, asked what issues we're trying to address here. I don't think he sees any issues.

Since I turned 18 I've had the opportunity to vote three times, but instead of making me feel like I'm participating in the democratic process, it's made me feel quite disempowered, because I haven't been able to vote for my first choice, because I knew that my vote would be wasted in the riding I was voting in. So I do see an issue there.

I also don't see my voice or my identity reflected well in our parliamentary system. Is Canada the envy of the world, as Nathan Cullen said before? We rank 64th in the world in the representation of women. That's not very good, from where I stand.

Finally, pro status quo groups and individuals speak to the instability of proportional representation, but over the past five years, we've had a government that passed sweeping legislation, removing environmental protection, making our elections less fair, and making two tiers of Canadian citizens. All of this happened without the support of the majority of Canadians and without consultation, because the Harper government had a false majority and could do whatever it wanted with it. It's the same as the false majority the Liberals currently hold. I'm still waiting to see what they do with it.

This isn't what I would call stable. It's quite the opposite. We need a system that more closely aligns with the popular vote, because it would mean a slower and more representative shift in the makeup of our government.

We need a system that encourages collaboration between politicians. This is what we elect them to do. I don't think we elect politicians to make sweeping decisions without the rest of their colleagues on board.

We have a rare moment right now, as the governing party has made a clear promise to change our electoral system. That's never happened before. This promise was made by three parties leading up to the election, and the special committee consulting us is proportional for the first time. It's obvious from the stance of each of the committee members that although strengthening our democracy should not be part of an issue, it has highly partisan implications. Moving to a proportional voting system may not benefit your parties, but it will give more power to the voters—more power to me—and it will make the tone and culture of Parliament better.

Thank you.

• (1945)

The Chair: Thank you.

I should mention that it's not permitted to take pictures during a committee meeting, only before the gavel comes down or at the end of the meeting. These are just the rules of House of Commons committees on Parliament Hill, and we're following the same rules.

We'll go to Mr. Pothén.

Mr. Philip Pothén (As an Individual): My name is Phil Pothén. I'm here to speak in favour of mixed member proportional representation. I oppose first past the post for all the reasons that have been expressed here so eloquently by the vast majority of presenters. Also, I want to emphasize that I believe that the ranked ballot would exacerbate the biggest problems of first past the post.

The problem with both of these systems is that they engender majority Parliaments that entitle the largest interests to effectively discount the others throughout the term of their governments. They can produce policies that pander to their own bases and to the marginal voter while essentially discounting the smaller interests.

Like a lot of your colleagues, and a lot of you, I'm a lawyer. In particular, I'm a land use planning lawyer. In almost every case, I end up advising my clients that it's better to strike a deal early on than even to win outright.

The best, most thoroughly thought-out solutions are those that are arrived at when all the parties are represented and have real bargaining power around the parliamentary bargaining table. That forces them to earnestly consider and accommodate each other's interests.

In the end, it doesn't help much if you win outright at committee of adjustment, because the opposing party is just going to appeal to the OMB, and your policy is only going to be overturned in the next election. Likewise, it doesn't help much if you come to some kind of consensus while some of the key, most effective parties have been excluded or under-represented at the table. If your solution isn't stable, you're going to have interests that haven't bought into it.

We need a system that gives all the parties a seat at the parliamentary table and real bargaining power. I think you will find that you can often find a solution that doesn't sacrifice your own interests and that can still accommodate the others'.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll have Ms. Fraser, and after that Ms. Pelham, please.

Ms. Fraser.

Ms. Linda Fraser (As an Individual): Hello. I'd like to thank you all for having this. This is wonderful.

I wanted to talk about Dave Meslin because I'm working with him right now. I didn't know he was coming.

I live in Whitby. I'm a retired teacher. In Whitby we're working on ranked balloting. It was Dave Meslin's bill that went through Queen's Park, through three readings. I went to all the readings, and because I live in Whitby we've started ranked balloting in Whitby.

One of the problems that we're having, that I'm having, with ranked balloting in Whitby is that it's very difficult to get in touch with the citizens of Whitby to talk to them about ranked balloting because city council runs most of what goes on in Whitby. City council is not really in favour of ranked balloting because they're stakeholders. Town council has stakeholders in this, because if Dave's bill is adopted by Whitby, then there'll be three spaces on my vote to vote for mayor. I can vote for this person for mayor, for this person for mayor, and for this person for mayor. Our mayor doesn't like that. He likes being the person on the ballot; he doesn't like having all that opposition.

It's really difficult because you're fighting with the people who are now on council, and they've been on council for a while, and the mayor, to get something that's going to take some of the vote away from them.

•(1950)

The Chair: Are you saying you're in favour of ranked ballot yourself?

Ms. Linda Fraser: I'm in favour of ranked balloting for municipal elections because there are no parties involved, but I like proportional representation, and that's what you're talking about, provincial politics or federal politics. I like proportional representation.

There are a couple of final things I'd like to say.

The Chair: Very briefly, if you can.

Ms. Linda Fraser: I agreed with everything Mike Schreiner said. If the United States had—sorry, it has gone out of my brain. I won't say it.

The Chair: That's all right. You made some good points.

Thank you very much.

We'll have Judy Pelham.

Ms. Judy Pelham (As an Individual): Hi there.

I support proportional representation. I think that a mixed member system sounds like a good idea. I don't tend to think referendums are a good idea. I think online voting and mandatory voting need more reflection than I know anything about.

I want to try to offer some thoughts towards the value of proportional representation that maybe haven't been offered. I'm certainly not a political scientist.

The notion of a representative democracy, which is what we have, is bad. There are too many people in the country for everybody to directly run the country. All the representatives go to the House and they debate amongst themselves. In some sense, at the moment that the election is finished, it should be a time for all of the members to act in the interest of all Canadians. No decision should be made on the basis of the fact that a certain party has the majority; it should be made on the basis of the fact that it's a good decision for all Canadians. But that view is not a broad...that is, many people are much more cynical about what's going on in the House than that.

I'm sure that all of you who spend your lives working to do the best for Canadians understand that that's a difficulty. That cynicism that's out there is a difficulty.

I am in support of proportional representation because I know many young people need to see a new system. I see 20-something-year-olds come in front of me as a teacher every year. They need some impetus for change.

I agree with many of the points as to why proportional representation might be more fair, but the opportunity that we have here is to say that this is the way that not all geographic regions will be represented, but all ideas, conceptual spaces, will be represented. They'll go into the mixture, the compromise, that the House is supposed to be.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

Could I have Joseph Edward Schuchert? No.

Then we'll go on to Jeffrey Tighe and Martin Smith.

Mr. Jeffrey Tighe (As an Individual): Good evening. My name's Jeffrey Tighe. I'm a Toronto area lawyer. I want to speak tonight on why Parliament needs to seek a mandate for electoral change through a referendum. My paper on the subject is on the committee website, published on September 6.

Last week, Minister Monsef admitted that in her consultations she does not see a consensus among Canadians as to what electoral system they would prefer. Even if the majority of Canadians want change, it must be determined if they will accept the change that this committee puts forward over the old system. A new system should not be imposed on Canadians.

Some people have argued that there's no need for a referendum as the government and other parties campaigned on a platform of electoral reform. This position is tenuous given that it assumes voters only voted on this issue when, in reality, there were many issues and electoral reform was a very minor one during the election. Not every issue requires a referendum, but this issue goes to the very basis of our democracy and requires a direct mandate from the people.

The government did not campaign on any particular change, just change generally. It is anti-democratic to then translate that into a mandate to change the electoral system to whatever politicians decide. To have democratic reform while ignoring democracy cannot convince people that their vote really matters while you deny them a vote and you change the electoral system.

A recent Ipsos poll shows that 73% of Canadians want a referendum. Twitter and town hall meetings will not give groups that vote in lower numbers, like young people and new citizens, a greater voice than millions of them voting in a referendum. Some people have argued that a referendum is too complicated, and yet we have general elections where a dozen issues are discussed. Some people have argued that a referendum is too expensive or that there isn't any time before the next election.

A simple solution would be to have the next election under first past the post and hold a simultaneous referendum during the election on changing the system. Our democracy should not be held hostage by an artificial timeline based on a vague election promise.

•(1955)

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Smith and then Mr. Orchard.

Go ahead, Mr. Smith.

Mr. Martin Smith (As an Individual): Obviously, you are juggling a lot of different issues at the same time. I think there's one in particular that has an inescapable conclusion, and that's the subject of the referendum.

When we talk about a referendum, it's not just any old referendum. It has to be a fair and representative referendum. Otherwise, what's the point? The first conclusion that's inescapable on that subject is that it's impossible to have a fair and representative referendum before the reform.

You can see from previous reforms here in Canada and around the world that there can be reform. In the Brexit vote, for example, they managed to overcome the preference for the status quo, the strong power that the status quo holds, but the reasoning behind that was really xenophobia. It takes the wrong reasons to overcome the status quo power that systems have at the moment. You can say the same about the election in New Zealand. They were very resentful of the government at the time, and they voted for reform. Even in those two examples, the threshold was just met—51% or so.

There's no point in having any referendum at all before the reform. However, afterwards, it can make sense if there's a certain lapse of time that allows that status quo advantage to be nullified. One of the committee members mentioned that perhaps one or two election cycles should pass. I don't think that's enough. I would say at least one full economic cycle and perhaps, even after that, one more election cycle. That would give enough time so that the status quo becomes kind of a hazy question. The status quo after the reform: is it the 12 years or whatever number of years that we've been under the proportional representation system or is it the 150 years before that when we were under the first past the post system? At that point, it's possible to have a healthy and rational discussion about the benefits of each system.

This committee was constituted in order to foster engagement, national unity, and voter representation, and to eliminate cynicism, apathy, complacency... This is what a reform referendum does. That's another inescapable point: that we need to have a referendum if we want to validate anything that you do here, and that needs to be done after a certain time when the reform has been completed.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We have Mr. Orchard and then Mr. Michael James Paskewitz.

Mr. Grant Orchard (As an Individual): Thank you.

There's an interesting proposal before you from the Citizens' Democracy Forum, in Ontario, called single-member party proportional. In the U.K. it's DPR. It's similar to the voting system in Scotland. It's simple, easy to understand and implement, and it meets the principles set out by this committee. It continues with single-member constituencies and requires no change in existing ridings. There's no party list to pick from, and voting and counting is simple and quick. There is no change in the overall number of MPs and no need for gerrymandering of ridings. It works by two separate votes on a single ballot. One vote for the constituency candidate is now on a separate vote for the party. The party votes determine the number of seats each party gets in the House and which party gets elected. Like pieces of a pie, each party gets a portion of the total House seats and the members are accorded equal strength within their party's portion of seats.

For example, in the 2015 federal election, Liberals received 39.5% of the popular vote, which under PR-SMPP would be 133.5 House of Commons seats with 184 Liberal members. That would give each

Liberal MP .72% of a vote. The NDP got 6.5 House of Commons seats with 44 members elected, which would give a weight of 1.1 votes for each of their MPs. Voting thresholds of 3% to 5% and/or the election of at least one MP to give a party standing in the House could be in effect. If a party reaches the threshold but does not elect an MP, its percentage could be negotiated to another party, or, as in the U.K. model, its leader could be given an automatic vote in the House. The leader would have a vote but no constituency seat. On non-party matters or free votes, each MP would be accorded one vote—one member, one vote.

Your committee is also dealing with electronic and mandatory voting. I'd recommend a big no to both of these. Electronic voting has no guarantee of the security of the vote. As has been amply documented in the U.S., it is susceptible to tampering and hacking. Paper voting is traceable and manual counting is more accurate and reliable. Mandatory voting is a shabby way to make our democracy appear better than it is, removing responsibility from our political leadership to make the elections and issues meaningful and interesting to voters.

One way of increasing voter turnout is to improve our electoral voting system, making elections fair and giving people more of a sense that their vote counts.

Thank you.

● (2000)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Paskewitz.

Mr. Michael Paskewitz (As an Individual): Thanks for having me here today. I'm here as an individual, not with a particular group.

I'm a big advocate of some form of proportional representation—MMP or STV. I don't have a particular preference for either. I'll leave that for the committee to decide.

Why do I support PR? First, I've voted in six federal and provincial elections and in none of them has my candidate won. I've voted for numerous parties represented here at the table. When will I be represented by a party of my choice?

Second, I want to see less toxicity in the House of Commons. There have been numerous studies showing that proportional representation encourages collaboration and less toxic discourse between parties. One unique example of this can be seen in the result of mixed member proportional. The centre-right Christian Democratic Union party in Germany is currently in a coalition with the German Green Party in the Baden-Württemberg state. It might be hard to imagine Canadian Conservatives and the Greens forming government. In fact, the Germans thought the same of their own parties only a few years ago. Yet, here they are finding common ground and working together.

Finally, I strongly believe referendums are not an effective way of engaging public opinion. Yes or no answers are not suitable for complex issues. However, if a referendum is chosen then it should be held after citizens have knowledge and experience with the new system so that we have the ability to meaningfully compare the two. Therefore, it should happen only after an election with the new system.

Thanks for your time.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll hear Darcy McLenaghan and then John Rae.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Darcy McLenaghan (As an Individual): I support MMP—one vote, one equal share in power. We need a voting system that doesn't distort the popular vote, which is not what we have right now. I've frequently voted for a party that I don't want because the vote for my first choice, the third or fourth most popular party, would earn me no representation in government. Strategic voting skews the exit polling numbers on party popularity in favour of the established parties and it gives them a false inflated endorsement and herds voters toward those parties, because no one wants their vote to be wasted. This creates inertia that favours established parties, stifling growth of less established parties. The system winnows out diversity of voices and cuts change off at the knees.

The elector must be given the tools to register their first preference for party representation untainted by compromises inherent in runoff balloting or strategic voting among local candidates. This means a separate vote solely on who your first-choice party is. The party must then be represented in the Commons and proportioned to its chair of that nationwide party preference vote by allocating extra seats after the local candidates have been elected.

The voting for local representatives must be a separate vote from the national popularity vote and it must not be first past the post either. Local candidates must be elected through some form of transferable vote, I suppose, so that each elected representative has at least 50% of the local riding's voter support.

I'm passionate about public policy, about building a better society, but even I have found myself so disgusted by the roulette wheel that is our voting system that I have been tempted a few times not to vote.

When we create a system that promises every vote will earn a share of the power, people will use it. This government got in on the promise to end first past the post before the next election. This contract is the foundation of this government's legitimacy.

• (2005)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rae, and after Mr. Rae it will be Mr. Benjamin Dichter.

Mr. John Rae (As an Individual): Good evening, honourable members. Thanks for the opportunity.

My name is John Rae, I've been 41 years in the disability rights movement in Canada. I currently serve as first vice-chair of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. I understand you had a good session with some of my colleagues in Winnipeg last night. Tonight I appear as an individual to raise a number of topics.

I'll make three points. Number one, it is desirable that more Canadians participate by voting. I support that. However, I do believe the idea of mandatory voting would be disproportionately a problem for the disabled community, so I oppose it. What we do need, though, is to be more engaged in the electoral process. That requires additional amendments to the Elections Act to cover topics that are not currently included, things like mandatory requirement for accessible offices, accessible campaigning, all-candidates' meetings where sign language and interpretation will be the rule and not the rare exception, and so forth.

Point number two is a challenge. I have attended numerous meetings on the question of electoral reform and rarely, if ever, is the word "disability" even breathed let alone given any kind of serious consideration by those who are proponents of electoral reform. It is argued that a new system will bring more women into Parliament. It's hard for anyone to oppose that idea. I certainly support it. But if we're really talking about making our Parliament more representative of what our country looks like, then I challenge you, your colleagues, your research staff, to develop a system that will bring our percentage, which is 15% to 20% of the population, more in line in Parliament than we currently occupy.

Point number three. You who are currently temporarily sited can verify how you voted before you leave the poll. I can't. That directly discriminates against me. That's why people like me are so passionately supporting additional ways of voting, whether that be an electronic machine, online, or telephone voting.

Elections Canada has often asked me to prescribe which one I prefer. My issue is outcome, not so much approach. Any of those will do the job. Anything less than fixing that part of the discriminatory electoral system we currently have will simply continue barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities to this country. I submit in 2016, that is unacceptable.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mr. Dichter and then Dustin Su.

Mr. Benjamin Dichter (As an Individual):

Hello, my name is Benjamin Dichter. I am the Conservative candidate of record for Toronto—Danforth, and I am the founder of a little group called LGBTory. I am the big bad Conservative in the room.

For the past 10 years I've owned a business on the university campus. It's amazing how challenging it is to get young people interested in politics. We have a danger in changing our system, in which currently between 50% and 60% of the population are engaged. This room is great. You people are engaged. That's not the majority. Complicating the system is going to further disenfranchise younger people who are somewhat engaged and somewhat not.

As a final thing, I was invited here by a number of Liberal members who wanted to reach out to me to come and speak on their behalf. When we met, they were telling me about a bunch of videos they saw online on YouTube made by a friend of mine by the name of CGP Grey. There's a whole bunch of videos on electoral systems. What I can tell you about Grey, knowing him, is that he hates politics. He likes math. He likes systems. But he's not a political person. We need to get people more engaged, and complicating the system is not going to accomplish that goal.

Thank you.

• (2010)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Dustin Su and then Christopher Tolley.

Mr. Dustin Su (As an Individual): Hi, my name is Dustin Su. I live and work as a professional engineer in Willowdale. I'd just like to share some highlights with you of a coffee dialogue that my wife and I hosted 10 days ago with seven of our friends. We really feel the core issue we're trying to address here is the distortion of the federal election outcomes due to the first past the post voting.

We believe it's unacceptable for a party that wins less than 50% of the popular vote to form a majority government and implement long-term agendas that don't represent the values of the majority of the electorate. In a new system, we want election results where the proportion of seats a political party earns is in close proportion to the percentage of votes cast for that party; where the ballot and method of counting seats are easy to understand; and where local representation is maintained, where MPs are accountable to voters who elect them.

I guess the other major concern from our dialogue is with regard to public engagement, as the previous gentleman said.

I'll just bring up an Ipsos poll that was released on August 31. Only 3% of all polled—and I think about 1,000 people were polled—were actually closely following this public engagement, 3%. Only one in five were actually aware that the public consultation was happening. So 20% actually are aware of it.

We believe that the government could be doing more to promote awareness of the national engagement process, as education is critical for the new system to be truly legitimate in the eyes of the electorate. We recommend that, once the committee decides upon a new system, the government should invest heavily in public awareness and education and promote further discourse so the electorate fully understands the system.

I will say I disagree with the last gentleman. I believe Canadians are smart enough to actually be able to use a system that you propose. I also suggest utilizing the CBC as a centrepiece for political discourse—assign a media personality to be a champion of public engagement, and create a dedicated time and space on television and radio and online for public engagement, discourse, and education.

Thank you for your time, for allowing me to speak, and for studying this very important issue.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Thank you for holding a discussion with your friends on this issue.

We have Christopher Tolley, then David Hwang.

Go ahead, Mr. Tolley.

Mr. Christopher Tolley (As an Individual): Thank you very much for taking the time to hear from me. We've heard some very strong arguments tonight. I'd like to put a very personal face on this.

My name is Chris Tolley and I was the candidate in Toronto-Danforth for the Green Party. One of the most exciting things about the campaign was, by the nature of our riding, our team was made up of mostly young people. In many cases, they were people for whom it was their first time ever being involved in a political process. In some cases, it was even the first time that they had voted. Due to their energy and their enthusiasm, they were able to raise a tremendous amount of support and outreach and information about our beliefs and our ideas.

However, in the last two weeks, there was a massive shift. There was a desire for change. A lot of our supporters said, "We believe in what you believe in, and we believe in your values, but we're going to vote for change."

In a system that works, normally the desire for change and the desire to vote for your beliefs and your values would work hand in hand. However, since our system is broken, they actually butt against each other. It's done this so many times throughout history and it's hit everybody across the political spectrum. We need a system in which the desire for change, and the desire to vote for your values, and who you believe in, go hand in hand. At the end of the political process, I saw a group of young, enthusiastic people come out of the process disillusioned and disenfranchised, and that was heartbreaking.

I believe that mixed member proportional representation is a system that would allow the desire to vote for someone who you believe in, and who believes in your values, to work hand in hand with the desire for change,

Thank you very much.

• (2015)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll hear from David Hwang, then Ben Ross.

Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. David Hwang (As an Individual): Good evening. My name is David Hwang.

I'm not with anybody. I'm just here as a constituent in Toronto, who wants a couple of things. First, I don't advocate for any system, because, right now, there obviously has to be more time. The system that is crucial to our democracy shouldn't be done with haste. It shouldn't be a campaign promise.

It should be done with the consultation of everyone. For anyone to say a referendum is basically consultation with an uninformed public, I take that as very insulting. At the end of the day, are we going to address people who don't speak English, for whom English is a second language? There are a lot of people who are new Canadians, and who don't vote because they don't know the system. And you want to complicate matters for my family?

I don't advocate for anybody. I don't advocate for any system. I advocate that everyone has a voice. Maybe it's not the voice that fits into my narrative. But let's be honest with ourselves, are we only advocating free speech and free votes because it falls into your narrative? And you're going to muzzle the people who don't fall into your narrative? That's a fallacy. That is wrong.

All I ask is that we have a referendum. Sure, you can have a referendum with every system, so let's have it with a really robust discussion, a great discussion. For people to say, it's going to take a lot of time, a lot of money. The last time I checked, a level of government was able to squander \$300 billion. You're going to tell me that you prefer a wasteful \$300-billion system over spending \$30 million for a process that's going to change our system.

Tell that to the people of North Korea. Tell that to the people of China. Our democracy is very important. A referendum might not go my way, but I don't insult the electorate and say, you're stupid because my viewpoints are better. I don't think that way. I hope that people have the courtesy to think with free speech.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll hear from Ben Ross, then Tom Cullen.

Please go ahead, Mr. Ross.

Mr. Ben Ross (As an Individual): Thanks.

First of all, thank you all for your time and your service here today and for your professional service to Canada. We really appreciate the fact that you spend your lives being our voice.

I grew up—in a vague sense of the word—in a generation that grew up with a very concrete sense of distrust and futility, and real separation from the voting system of Canada. People in my circles who do vote, vote out of a sense of duty in a really fatalistic sense. We don't feel as if our vote means anything. I'm 32 and I've voted in every provincial and federal election that I was able to, and I have also never voted for a winning party. And I thought that would change when I moved to Toronto and I voted NDP, but that didn't work out.

To shorten it, I'm in favour of MMP. It makes the most sense to me. It speaks to the question of liking my local representative, but not liking their party, or wanting this person to be elected at the top, but I know this person here down at my level. From the beginning today I've heard single-issue parties being discussed as a dirty word—sorry if I'm going over—

● (2020)

The Chair: It's okay, you have another 10 seconds.

Mr. Ben Ross: Why don't we elect our issues instead of complaining that politicians don't talk about them? Because you do,

but that isn't always the perception, and seeing is sometimes being in the public eye.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Tom Cullen and Jeff Braunstein.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Tom Cullen (As an Individual): Thank you.

I want to congratulate this committee on being one of the only committees—my understanding—in which the representation of the committee is proportional, so yay for you guys.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: We're getting a lot of positive reinforcement here. I like this place.

Mr. Tom Cullen: Maybe it'll give you a taste of what collaborative government is all about, that all Canadians want to see, not like some of the things we see in the House sometimes.

As many people have already stated, so many of us have voted one way only to get an MP of another party and literally not be represented, and not feel represented. Both the perception and the reality are vital. I think if anyone wants to ask Canadians about values, fairness would be one of the top values that every Canadian of any political stripe, gender, religion, whatever, would say they're for it.

Only a proportional system is fair. Fair is one syllable, proportional is four, stick with fair.

The other point is you want something simple and intuitive in the balloting experience, and not to confuse AV with ranked ballot; ranked ballot is a mechanism that can be used in all sorts of systems. I was in the shower thinking about how an MMP system would work on the candidates' side of the ballot, how I would be able to make sure I could express my preferences and not have to vote strategically even with MMP. The answer is a ranked ballot. You can do MMP with a ranked ballot on both sides of the ballot. I can make sure who I like least and who is my favourite. And I can even count to four and rank all four of them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Braunstein, and then Mr. Christopher Durrant.

Mr. Jeff Braunstein (As an Individual): Hello. My name is Jeff, and in the interests of full disclosure, I want to say that I do work for the Green Party. I'm coming here today to speak as a citizen and as a voter, and say that I understand the difficulty in implementing a proportional representation system. That difficulty doesn't come from the lack of merit in proportionality. It comes because the governing party would at least on paper have to give up some of its power in order to implement that proportional system, and that's a difficult thing to do.

I wanted to come and remind everybody how quickly that pendulum swings the other way. You can go from being the party with all of the power to being the party with none of the power very quickly. This system isn't balanced, it isn't steady progress, and it puts party over country. We all get legislative whiplash whenever an administration changes and the new administration spends its first couple of years undoing everything that the last administration had done. As a consequence, Canada isn't where we should be. We're doing okay, but we should be doing better than we are right now, and it's largely because of that back-and-forth whiplash system.

The debate about the merits of proportional representation versus first past the post is over. It's PR, and it's PR by a landslide. I think we all know that. It's just a matter of whether you and the House of Commons will have the courage to make the obvious and necessary changes for Canada and put that interest over party interests.

Thank you.

• (2025)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Durrant, and Mr. Deutsch, please.

Mr. Christopher Durrant (As an Individual): Hello. My name is Christopher Durrant, and I want to thank you all for the hard work you're doing.

I know you have a lot of work balancing values and what Canadians' values are, and I'm not going to talk to you about the legitimacy, diversity, and benefit to public policy that a proportional representation system would bring you. I know you have to think of other values Canadians have, and I was thinking, what are the other values Canadians have? One of them is that they like a representative who has a link to a geographic riding. They like someone they know, someone they grew up with, or at least someone friends of friends know, and they like having their MPs to be accessible. They like coming to your constituency office. They like hemming you in at the church picnic.

Matt DeCoursey, they're coming for you at the Fredericton farmers market. They have an issue, and they want to talk about it now.

What system could accommodate that value as well as the value of proportional representation? I think that would be the system that's known as best runner-up, mixed member proportional, and that's when...it doesn't change our ballots. In most cases we're still electing one member for one riding, but just to top up the proportionality of the House of Commons, the best runners-up from the parties that are under-represented in the House of Commons are elected as well, and they act as second representatives to the regions.

I think this can also be done in a way that represents Canada's special nature. It could be done on a regional level. The province of Quebec, and the prairies, and the maritimes could all be guaranteed that they would be getting a share of the top-up representation. I think it's a great compromise choice. I'm sure you've heard from some people who want to keep voting simple, and I think there is an advantage to that in terms of accessibility. This system would make voting fair and simple, so I urge you to consider it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Deutsch, followed by Mr. Frydman.

Go ahead, Mr. Deutsch.

Mr. Adam Deutsch (As an Individual): Hi. I was forced at the door to be either a participant or an observer. I decided to be a participant.

Actually, I'm a member of the Green Party, but I don't like politics. I'm only interested in public policy, and if any other party picks up the Green Party platform, I'd be happy to vote for it.

The reason I came here tonight is that my soul is being destroyed by the current system. I have voted many times against what I believe in just to avoid a worse alternative. I don't think I'm alone on that. I'm not in favour of any specific system, but I'm in favour of a proportional system. I think the system mentioned by the previous speaker was very attractive, and there were others that seemed good as well.

An earlier witness spoke about climate change. Which system is best for reducing climate change? I used to work for a company that had offices in Sweden. I've been there six or seven times. Every time I went there I noticed that Sweden was decades ahead of Canada in its action on climate change. Countries like Sweden and Germany have proportional representation systems. They have Green Party members in their Parliament. I think the nudging effect of the Green party is in everybody's interest. I think the Liberals would benefit from it right now. They can just blame everything on the Green Party.

I canvassed in the 2007 referendum in Ontario. I'd never done any political work before. The most common reaction was that people would ask whether a referendum was being held. Those people who did know about it were a little wary, and they preferred the devil they knew to the devil they didn't know.

That referendum was held at the same time as an election. I think that's a very bad idea. When we finally got 37% on that referendum, I was astounded. I was expecting 5% or 6% from what I'd seen. I actually thought it was a rather positive reaction, given the poor publicity around it. If a referendum is to be held, I would suggest that it be held after people have already experienced the new voting system. It's very hard to make a judgment without that.

• (2030)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Frydman.

Mr. Sam Frydman (As an Individual): Thank you.

You're here to discuss change and change is never easy. Change is always difficult and there are always many opponents to change.

The important thing is that all these wonderful ideas you've heard are assimilated and included in your decision-making.

I have concerns about some of the issues that were brought up with regard to simplicity on the ballot, complexity on the ballot. I have worked elections and I have seen even the most simple ballot be a struggle. Why is it a struggle? It's a struggle because of lack of education. You cannot simply put a picture of a ballot on the front page of a newspaper one day and expect people to understand it. There has to be an investment in education. Whatever decisions are made, I look forward to a better democracy coming from this committee.

My biggest concern is one voiced by Thomas Lindsay. He noted that we citizens come to meetings like this and we speak into a mike, but unfortunately, the mike isn't connected to anything.

Thank you.

The Chair: In response to that last comment, I can assure you, after listening to people expressing themselves, sometimes with great emotion and conviction, that this testimony will have an impact on our thinking. It really will.

I've witnessed my own thinking evolve over time as I speak to more and more people. It does have an impact, I assure you.

Ms. Yormika is not here.

We will hear from Mr. Fiorani and then Miriam Anderson.

Mr. Ettore Fiorani (As an Individual): Hello. Thank you for the time today.

This is a fundamental decision. A lot of people don't realize that. Before making such a fundamental decision, we need a referendum.

The precedent in Canada and in similar countries suggests that a referendum has to be held before the fundamental decision. I'm glad people have mentioned New Zealand, Ontario, and P.E.I. What do those places have in common? They held a referendum where all voters got to vote if they wanted to, before making a decision.

Town halls are not enough. You have 40 or 50 people—or maybe 100 people here. You'd have to hold thousands of them, and maybe even more, and you wouldn't get the input you would get in a referendum.

Furthermore, the minister always likes to fall back on inclusivity and wanting to consult with as many people as possible—immigrants, women, you name it. Yet she wants to deny immigrants, women, and millions of Canadian voters the chance to vote in a referendum. I'm an immigrant. My family are immigrants, and we'd all like to vote in a referendum.

Finally, I think it's a bad precedent to leave the decision in the hands of a few hundred politicians. They may be good people, but at the end of the day, they have some self-interest.

Along with this, former prime minister David Cameron, after the Brexit referendum, said that despite his side losing, he was proud that in his country they left fundamental decisions in the hands of the people. I hope that Canadians will be able to be proud of that, too, and that they leave this decision where it belongs, and that's in the hands of the Canadian people.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have Ms. Anderson and then Mr. Dimitre Popov.

Ms. Anderson, please.

Ms. Miriam Anderson (As an Individual): Hello. I'm an assistant professor in the department of politics and public administration at Ryerson University. I support any form of proportional representation that the committee recommends.

There are three problems I see in the current electoral system that I would like to see addressed by any new system proposed.

The first is eliminating the need for strategic voting. Personally, I absolutely hate not being able to vote for my first choice and always having to try to decide who the two top running candidates are in my local riding, and then to choose one of them.

Secondly, a number of people have spoken to this, I think a false majority that our current system creates is fundamentally anti-democratic, problematic, and something that would be addressed by some form of proportional representation.

Thirdly, I'm concerned about the low representation of women in the House of Commons. Currently they rank 64th in the world, with only 26% of women in the House of Commons. Many of the systems that rank near the top have some form of proportional representation. It's also easier to ensure that there are more women running with some kind of list. When parties have to put forward a full list, then they can guarantee that a certain percentage are of each gender, which is easier than dealing with just single-member electoral districts.

In closing, I think this is a huge, once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a new electoral system. Thank you so much for being part of this committee, and I look forward to seeing what you propose.

• (2035)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Popov, and then Mr. Aly Khan Pabani.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Dimitre Popov (As an Individual): Good evening.

My name is Dimitre Popov. I am a founder of a non-profit, non-partisan organization, Canadians for Integrity. I am also an activist with the independent campaigning community, Leadnow.

Today's times are not yesterday's. Today, Canadian voters are better informed and better organized. As a result of the actions of the Leadnow community, the current government was able to form a majority government. We will support this government only if it governs in good faith and solely in the interests of the common good. We will eject from the public office in the next election any member of Parliament who puts special interests before the interests of Canadians and Canada.

In the first past the post system, governments win power only with a portion of the vote, and a substantial number of votes go in the trash. That is not consistent with democratic principles. Any group that has more than 4% of all votes should be entitled to representation in Parliament. Canadians want their votes to count.

For that reason, as you are no doubt aware, approximately 85% of informed average Canadians want proportional representation. The government should consider this fact and implement proportional representation, something Mr. Trudeau promised to do during the election if his Liberal Party was elected. We voted the Liberals in because we believed Mr. Trudeau was sincere when making promises during the campaign. The time to implement the proportional representation system has come.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Pabani and then Ms. Tamara Bassilios.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Aly Pabani (As an Individual): Hi there. I'm Aly Khan Pabani. I'm a constituent of Parkdale—High Park. I just want to first talk about the issue of having a referendum. The issue is being addressed a lot here or thrown around a lot. I want to say I don't think a referendum is appropriate when the issue is dealing with actual fairness towards minorities and the disenfranchised.

We wouldn't have a referendum on whether or not women or people with disabilities should vote. We wouldn't have referendums on rights for visible minorities. Those are simple, self-evident issues of fairness, and fair elections to me is a self-evident issue of fairness, so I don't think a referendum is appropriate at all.

Let's put that to bed already, okay? A referendum is being pushed by the Conservatives only because they want to keep the status quo, and they know a referendum is a quick way of doing that because people have a tendency to head towards the status quo.

Also, I want to say I advocate for fully publicly funded elections as the way to encourage more of a participatory democracy, regardless of personal welfare or income. I feel like the current system inherently enables or favours large donors and deeper pockets by giving them more influence inherently on our politicians. ...and enhance our political system. You see this in issues like the setting of the corporate tax law and even the enforcement of the corporate tax law. You see this in issues such as dubious pipelines, shady arms deals, and mercury mutations. You see this profit-driven influence affecting our politicians, and this needs to stop immediately, the TPP especially. That's heading off topic, but, yes, I'm definitely opposed to the TPP.

● (2040)

The Chair: There's another committee travelling on that. Punt that one to them, okay?

Mr. Aly Pabani: Regardless, I think big-money influence is definitely eroding democracy worldwide, and it also deepens existing wounds like those that have been inflicted on first nations people and indigenous peoples around the world.

My last point on the actual form of voting system is, I oppose a ranked ballot system because it essentially incentivizes another form of strategic voting, which is ranking the candidates on the ballot.

If I vote for a party on the margins or a candidate on the margins, my first vote is essentially discarded, and I'm left with the choice of either voting for someone who's a more likely winner who I disagree with, and, hence, getting no representation in the House, or sticking with my only vote, my first choice, and still getting no representation in the House. I want representation in the House. I don't think that's too much to ask for. Mixed member proportional representation is a no-brainer. It's the only way to go.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Bassilios followed by Ms. Kristen Dahl.

Ms. Tamara Bassilios (As an Individual): Thank you for this opportunity to weigh in on this historic decision. Every day I wake up thankful for living in this beautiful country. I'm going to try not to cry. We are luckier than most on this planet, and I think we need to ensure that we do everything within our power to continue to make decisions that are in the best interest of this country, and I think we set an example for the rest of the world.

There are a few major factors that weigh against us and our headwinds in our continued success. The political system is one system we can influence. The financial system I think may be a little bit beyond our control. The political system is really the easiest way for us to influence the decisions that are made on our behalf that influence what happens in this country. Though I'm happy to be a Canadian, proud to be a Canadian, and thankful for the safety we're offered here, for the education system we have, and for the medical system we have, it is not perfect, and there's still some work to be done.

I'm not going to stand here and quote you all of the studies I know are out there. There are experts who have already done that work who say the system could benefit from some change. I'm just here to recommend we hear them out, and we hear out the Canadians who have expressed their views that they would like to see change.

I also believe that solving these problems we have will require some really hard work from some really intelligent people, and at this point in time there may not be an incentive for those who really care to continue doing the good work they do. I'm very honoured to stand in front of some of the people who are doing that good work here today, so thank you for that.

Thank you for this opportunity, and I look forward to hearing the recommendations to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Dahl, please, then after Ms. Dahl, Mr. Robertson.

● (2045)

Ms. Kristen Dahl (As an Individual): Hello. My name is Kristen Dahl, and I live in Toronto Centre. I didn't know this was happening tonight, so I'm glad that my friend told me at the last minute. I consider myself to be fairly politically engaged, so I worry about what would happen in a referendum for those of us who aren't as involved and how they would learn about a complex issue.

I'm here in support of some sort of proportional representation. I don't think our Parliament is reflective of the people and the diversity of Canada. I think voters feel alienated, and the results are apathy and anger. I am an environmentalist, and I've never voted for who I'd like to vote for. I'm sorry, Ms. May. I have the sentiments of so many other people here who feel disenfranchised and frustrated by a system that not only doesn't represent them, but also is a system where many feel like me that they can't vote for who they'd like to.

This is such a unique opportunity for change. I know you hear this again and again. We trust that our representatives in committee will make a decision based on evidence in support of a system that's more fair.

I worry that a referendum will look something like the Brexit vote, with misinformation, lack of deep understanding, and a media spreading wild stories. I certainly echo the sentiments of the gentleman from Parkdale—High Park with his thoughts about a referendum and minorities who are losing out.

I support proportional representation. I hope it results in a more collaborative representative and goes into Parliament.

Thank you so much for being here.

The Chair: Thank you, and thank you for making it out tonight.

Mr. Robertson, followed by Mr. Germann.

Go ahead, Mr. Robertson.

Mr. Kenneth Robertson (As an Individual): I'm Ken Robertson from Barrie, Ontario. I feel honoured being here tonight. I didn't expect this. I was in Oakville this afternoon at a retiree's meeting. I was going to come here tonight because I knew about it, but I didn't think I'd get an opportunity to speak. I thank you for doing this and spending all day at it. A lot of people don't realize the work that MPs do put in, as well as MPPs, and I think they should know that.

The reason I got involved 15 years ago...my son had come home from doing an apprenticeship. It was the first time he was eligible to vote, and I asked him to get in the truck and we'd go vote. He said he wasn't going to go. He wasn't interested in voting because his vote

wasn't going to count. He was curious as to why I was voting. He said, "I know how you vote, and your vote never counts". I went out and voted. He didn't go. I got thinking about that. I did a bit of research and I found out about Fair Vote Canada, which had started up. I started looking at some of the stats. I saw that in most of our elections we were getting majority governments of 30%, 38%, and 40%. Bob Rae, I think, in Ontario, got 37%.

Whether it's in Alberta with Notley, or whether it's in Ontario with Wynne, or in Ottawa with Harper or Trudeau, it's the same result. It's a little insane when you think about it.

I joined the Fair Vote chapter. I lived in Oakville at the time. I'm in Simcoe now. I joined the Simcoe chapter, and we've been fairly active. We've gone into schools, we've gone to service clubs, and we've gone to union halls. The one thing that everybody gets...and I heard a comment here that electoral reform is complicated. You know when you go to service clubs, and you go to union halls, and you go to schools, and you tell them 38% represents 100%, they think that's complicated.

The one thing about our referendum—and I've heard this a lot tonight—you've got to remember a hundred years ago women got the right to vote. If there had been a referendum, then I can guarantee you men wouldn't have given them that right to vote. They wouldn't have done that.

Asian Canadians didn't get the right to vote until 1947-48. First nations Canadians didn't get the right to vote until 1960. There were no referendums. That was done without that.

I went to three town halls that our Conservative MP Alex Nuttall put on. He talked about a number of issues, including electoral reform. At those meetings he made the comment—and I heard it tonight from a gentleman who was up here to speak—that the MPs don't have the ability to make those decisions. I think you do. I have a lot of faith in him, and I have a lot of faith in you guys.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kenneth Robertson: I have just one comment about my grandson

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Kenneth Robertson: My grandson just joined the military. He got his paratrooper wings. There's a lot of nonsense going on in the world. You guys right here may decide to send him into a hot spot. There'll be no referendum that could cause my grandson to lose his life. If you guys can send him into a hot zone that could take his life, then you can change the electoral system without a referendum.

Thank you.

Voices: Hear, hear!

• (2050)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Germann, followed by Mr. Li.

Mr. Ryan Germann (As an Individual): Hello, and thank you all for being here.

I learned about this very late, just today, and I don't have much prepared, like some of the previous speakers, but I think you can see the commitment to this issue that all of the people who have attended have expressed. I live down the block. People have come from a long distance. This is an important issue. To anyone who says it's a minor issue and no one cares, I challenge that. I care.

I voted for this, against my usual party, because I thought the candidate in my riding who had the strongest, clearest electoral reform message...it was a close call, but this candidate was the one who said more strongly, "We are going to change this system". So I voted. I've never ever voted on a single issue before. That was my issue this time.

I will address a few comments, just my opinion, I guess.

I believe that the two major parties in Canada both benefit from first past the post. It's not just the Conservatives; it's also the Liberals. When the Liberal Party reluctantly kind of committed to it—and I don't think there were clear, strong statements from the Liberals until nearer to the election itself—that was when I thought, well, at least it wouldn't be terrible if the Liberals got in. I voted NDP. I usually vote Liberal, but I really wanted to see this issue addressed.

I'm wary of a referendum because of all the issues with the money in the referendums, the kind of messages, the confusion. People are apathetic and they don't always want to study and learn the rules. They just say, "Meh, whatever". I have to admit that in my kind of demographic I benefit from the Liberals and Conservatives. Personally I benefit, but I see a lot of those policies that aren't beneficial to others, and that hurts me. It makes me feel un-Canadian when I see that.

If there is going to be a referendum, let it be a two-part referendum: Do you want to see change in electoral reform, yes or no? That's it. One question. If people say yes, well then, obviously first past the post isn't an option. Then you can present the other options perhaps as a ranked ballot.

I don't like the idea of a referendum. It scares me. But if there has to be one... Again I'm a bit wary because the Liberals do benefit from first past the post. So will this go through? I'm counting on you guys to make this really happen.

I've been listening for a while and it sounds as if the majority of those here, in this room, do want proportional representation. The people who are against it had their chance to be here and say so. If 51% of those people are here and were the majority and wanted to keep it, they'd be here, and they're not. So that has to say something about—

A voice: They didn't get the invite; that's why.

Mr. Ryan Germann: I got it the same way you got it.

The Chair: Okay, thank you. We're over time now, unfortunately.

Mr. Ryan Germann: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead, Mr. Li, followed by Mr. Klimuntowski.

Mr. Raymond Li (As an Individual): Good evening, committee. My name is Raymond Li.

Time is short and ideas are complex, so I must gloss over some details. Most of these ideas I have posted on Mr. Dave Meslin's website, 100 Remedies for Broken Democracies, so you can find out more details about it.

The first idea is that ranked ballots and proportional representation are not mutually exclusive. You can do both. You can have a ranked ballot, then you count everybody's first choice for the purpose of deciding which parties get how many additional proportional members for the purpose of proportional representation.

A gentlemen earlier said that he didn't want ranked ballots, because then his first vote doesn't count because he's voting for a minority party. This takes care of that, because the first vote still counts for the proportional representation part.

The second idea is a close runner-up to proportional representation. A couple of other speakers have already alluded to this. Instead of having a party put a list together of people who are not elected or running a campaign, the people who lose by the closest margin should get those proportional seats from the party that gets the additional seats. In this way, in the riding where the contests are the closest, you get that additional member. The second member, the proportional member as opposed to the elected member, is going to, in most cases in a divided riding, vote against the first one, and they will cancel each other's vote out, so you don't get that double vote. On issues that are of mutual consent in a riding, where everybody agrees, those two members from that riding will agree.

You can also end up with a person who wins by a squeaker. Should somebody who wins by one vote get the whole voice from that riding? No, if you win by only one vote, your opponent also gets in, and then the next election, both of you can campaign as incumbents.

I have more reasons for that, but I won't go into them now.

The final point, just a quick side point is, right now we announce vote counts in the east coast way before the polls close in the west coast. The electoral officer has said this is a problem in an electronic age, but you can't close that down. The simple solution to that—

• (2055)

The Chair: Can we have just another 10 seconds? What's the solution?

Mr. Raymond Li: Don't announce the vote. You can count them in the east coast, but don't announce until the polls close in the west coast.

The Chair: We will hear from Mr. Klimuntowski, and then Mr. Neacsu.

Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. Michael Klimuntowski (As an Individual): Good evening, members of the committee, members of the public.

I'm not happy to be here. I don't want to be here. I'd rather be at home watching TV with my family, but I'm here. I'm here because I don't think hijacking our electoral system is a good idea. This isn't something the Trudeau Liberals campaigned on. It was relegated to a couple of bullet points in a campaign platform that numbered a couple of hundred pages.

If we're going to go about embarking on these kinds of reforms that will change the rules of the game, we should go directly to the people through a referendum, where all Canadians of the age of majority are able to voice their opinions. My parents left a country, where one party did rig the political process, and I don't want the Trudeau Liberals to rig our political process.

Go directly to the people. This is what I'm asking of you here tonight. I don't think this wonderful teacher, who said she speaks for her classroom of children, speaks on my behalf. I want a referendum. I think Canadians are smart enough to voice their opinion. I think you owe it to us, if you're going to change the rules of the game so fundamentally and with such grave implications, you should go directly to the people.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Please go ahead, Mr. Neacsu, and then after that Mr. Kenneth McCracken.

Mr. Andrei Neacsu (As an Individual): I just want to thank everybody for being here. I very much appreciate this opportunity for people to talk and members of Parliament to listen to us.

This is just a little background about me. I was born and raised in Romania in the late 1970s, and that involved being born in a dictatorship. So I know what being raised and living in a dictatorship means; I know what living in an undemocratic country means. So when I see that political parties can gain full control of the country with 40% of the vote, that to me is undemocratic.

It's very simple for me. Just pick up the dictionary and look at the definition of "democracy". It involves the will of the majority, right?

You get the will of the majority and then you implement the issues that the majority agrees upon. That's one point.

On the point of a referendum, with so little information, with so little education—I spent the summer just talking to friends, talking to people on the street, acquaintances, about the electoral system, and I've had many people literally ask me what first past the post is. If you don't understand the system that we have now, how can you possibly vote on whether you want change or not? I don't want to blame anybody; it just seems there's some sort of failure in the educational system maybe or, I don't know, engagement with people, and so on.

A referendum doesn't work when people don't fully know what's going on in the country and what it might change to. Perhaps, like many other people have said, a referendum afterwards might actually be useful when everybody knows what's going on.

Other than that, I don't know how mandatory voting would be enforced. It could lead to spoiled ballots. That's, I guess, something the committee could look into. Engagement in general, I think, should be promoted a little bit more, because people are just not aware of what's going on, altogether, on the street and so on.

• (2100)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Mr. McCracken and then Mr. Trevor Ball.

Mr. Kenneth McCracken (As an Individual): My name's Ken. I support proportional representation in any form, including the one that was mentioned using each column. That sounds okay to me.

A list of points came from Fair Vote Canada in research that's over 30 years. You probably have heard all these points, right, but a couple sort of stand out. One is prudent fiscal management. That is something Canadians seem to care about a lot. Anyway, that was the one that kind of stuck with me, but it's really an important thing for people, especially Conservatives apparently, not to waste money in this policy lurch thing that's going on.

The thing that happened is—this was my number one issue in the election—a few of us who are associated with Fair Vote Canada went to our politician, our representative, Julie Dabrusin, and she seemed to know nothing about the issue when we first went there. The second time she threw back some kind of talking points, kind of throwing out flack, I would say. The third time, I attended a town hall meeting a week ago in her riding, and she was very well informed. The audience was very well informed. It was overwhelmingly for proportional representation, although there was a status quo movement there—planted, I believe.

The thing is that, after the meeting, I asked her if she could send out the notice of this meeting, today, this most important meeting in Toronto, I'd say, to the people who attended that meeting and maybe even the constituency list. She said that was a good idea. A couple of days later, I reminded her about doing that.

The Chair: Is there a particular system you are in favour of?

Mr. Kenneth McCracken: MMP seems to be the consensus; the other ones seem complicated.

All I can say is that it seems as if the Liberals, perhaps, are dragging their feet on this one. I've heard some comments from the House recently, saying that perhaps they're trying to make this process sort of just go through the process and they can afford to break this particular promise because there won't be a lot of people pushing back on it. And I think that's probably true.

Also, the liability—

The Chair: Sir, we've got to get to the point here.

Mr. Kenneth McCracken: The point is that I believe the committee may come up with the recommendation for proportional representation, but will it actually create the kind of change that's been promised? I wonder.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Trevor Ball. Then the last speaker tonight is Mr. Kinsey Schurm.

Go ahead, Mr. Ball.

Mr. Trevor Ball (As an Individual): I'd like to start by saying that I think change is absolutely necessary. I think it's a travesty that the majority of votes cast in the last election were essentially ignored, and the majority of voters then did not have representation of their choosing. I think that's despicable.

Personally, I would support any form of proportional representation. It would be a massive improvement. But my preferred form of proportional representation would be single transferable vote. The reason is voter choice; it gives voters more power because they have more representatives to choose from.

Also, I don't think single-member districts are practical. I don't think it's reasonable to think that one person can satisfactorily represent every constituent of a riding. There will always be people on one side of an issue and on the other side of an issue within the same district. Single-member districts just don't make sense to me.

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, Mr. Kinsey Schurm.

Mr. Kinsey Schurm (As an Individual): Evening, everyone. I hope everyone is having a wonderful time here. It's pretty nice. It's a good crowd. It's well-organized.

My issue is the fact that I see lots of empty chairs here. I did come in late, so I'm sure they were kind of filled up, and it's the end of the day. That's an issue to me.

I think when you're changing how people are going to be voting for their federal MPs, the people who represent them and Canada on the international stage, you can't get the opinion of the 3% of the people you're going to be talking to over the course of these town halls and then come to a decision through a committee.

I think, at the end of the day, we need a referendum. My family comes from the eastern bloc, and stuff like this.... When you have a committee more or less telling you how we're going to end up voting, we don't know what you're going to do. You know what you're writing down. If you want to walk away with it and say that this benefits us, so we're going to this, the Canadian people said this, this town hall said that, we would get blind-sided.

At the end of day, we need to talk to every single Canadian and have them vote, or anyone who is interested in this. I come from a family of five, and four of my family can't be here. My father is working, and my mother is taking care of my brothers. That's unfair, right? How many other people are in similar straits who can't make this town hall, whether because it was only announced today or they only got the invitation today because of whatever, poor coordination or whatever, or they're working, they're busy, they're trying to keep food in people's mouths, trying to keep the power on. Ontario is terrible for hydro rates. It's pretty miserable.

That's why I think we need to have a referendum. Thank you very much.

● (2105)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That brings us to the end of our day in Toronto. We had a similar segment late this afternoon, a public input session. In total today, we heard from 88 people here in Toronto. So, thank you. All the comments were great, very informative and influential in terms of the committee's thinking. Thank you again for coming.

Tomorrow we're off to Quebec City.

This meeting is adjourned.

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