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Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (1340)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Good afternoon. We're opening our first panel here in Vancouver for meeting number 32 of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, which is on the eighth day of its cross-country tour to gather feedback from stakeholders and Canadians on how we can improve our current first-past-the-post electoral system.

We have with us this afternoon David Moscrop, Ph.D. candidate, department of political science, University of British Columbia; Mr. Nick Loenen; and Megan Dias, graduate student, department of political science, University of British Columbia.

My understanding is that each witness will have five minutes to present. This will be followed by a round of questions from the members of the committee. Each member will have the opportunity to engage the witnesses for five minutes. That includes the questions and answers.

If for some reason you can't respond because time has run out, the next time you have the mike you can respond to a question that was previously asked.

Without further ado, we'll ask Mr. David Moscrop to take the floor, please.

Mr. David Moscrop (Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia, As an Individual): Good afternoon and thank you for the invitation. I look forward to having a chance to speak with you.

Electoral systems do not change often or easily, nor should they. The electoral system is a part of the fundamental rules of the game in a democracy. These rules are institutions that enable citizens to understand and predict how their democracy will function. In essence, they help make democracy user-friendly.

However, some institutions can and should change over time. They should adapt to evolving norms and expectations, to shifting demographics, and to new priorities, technologies, practices, and approaches to democratic governance. While Canada's first-past-the-post system has served the country well since Confederation, I believe that a change to a proportional system would better serve us in the 21st century and beyond. However, whichever system we choose, the way we choose it also very important.

In the next few minutes I'm going to discuss two things: which system we should adopt and how we should adopt it. I study democratic deliberation and the psychology of political decision-making, so I'm approaching my remarks as a democratic theorist and as a student of Canadian politics. However, I'm also a citizen who believes that while we've done quite well as a country, we can do better.

Let me start with how we should adopt a new system. Electoral reform is not merely a technical exercise, it's a political exercise and a normative exercise. Choosing a system is about power, inclusion, and how we want to live together.

Because no electoral system is neutral, because political parties are affected by it, and because we disagree about which is the best one for us, only a thorough, open, and sustained democratic process will provide the necessary legitimacy for whichever system is chosen. Accordingly, the process of choosing a system must be separated from the process of ratifying that choice. More specifically, politicians who will be directly affected by the system should not be in charge of choosing it since they face a direct conflict of interest. The electoral system belongs to the people to whom the polity belongs, that is, all of us.

I strongly recommend that we initiate a national citizens' assembly on electoral reform, similar to that which was held in British Columbia in 2004 and in Ontario in 2006. The assembly should be tasked with learning about electoral systems, deliberating over which is best for Canada, and then making a specific recommendation.

Now, for ratifying the proposal, the controversial bit, either a free vote in Parliament or a referendum is necessary. I prefer a citizens' assembly followed by a vote in Parliament. A parliamentary vote would be quicker and less costly than a referendum. More importantly, provided Parliament merely ratifies the recommended system without amendment, I believe this would meet the threshold of democratic legitimacy that requires that the system chosen is a product of disinterested individuals acting in the public good and not of partisan political bias or engineering.

That said, a referendum, provided it follows a citizens' assembly, that is extremely well resourced and includes a robust and sustained public education campaign might also meet the threshold. However, when run poorly, and referendums often are, referendums risk undermining their democratic intent through low and unrepresentative turnout, public misinformation campaigns by partisan interests, and structural biases that creep into decision-making.

To summarize, a citizens' assembly, if properly resourced and run and followed by a free vote in Parliament, would be a wise and democratically legitimate approach to choosing an electoral system. It would help us pick an appropriate system for Canada and would take the choice out of the hands of politicians who might benefit from that choice, perhaps at the expense of their opponents. Not only would this approach be democratically legitimate and effective, it would be politically expedient for a government or for a committee that finds itself in a tricky position.

Now, which system do I think we should choose? I believe a mixed member proportional system is best for Canada. MMP allows for direct local representation and lives up to the commitment many Canadians have to fairness understood as a proportional translation of votes into seats. Now, this is a value choice. It rests on a conception of fairness related to the idea that each vote should have a high likelihood of contributing to electing a member of Parliament while also allowing smaller parties to win seats in the House of Commons.

MMP would address what many see as a serious problem. Under first past the post, governments win majorities with around 40% of the vote and often with the support of a mere 25% to 27% of the eligible voters. Such outcomes offer weak electoral mandates that raise questions in the long run about democratic legitimacy.

Properly designed, MMP would allow Canada to have the best of two worlds, the local representation and an effective House of Commons that we have in our first past the post and fairer electoral outcomes and representation offered by proportional systems.

● (1345)

In conclusion, we have a once in a generation opportunity to choose an electoral system that represents the values that many Canadians cherish. I believe that choice ought to be MMP. However, the way we choose a system is at least as important, indeed, perhaps more important. A citizens' assembly is necessary for this choice, followed either by a free parliamentary vote or an extremely well-run referendum.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Loenen, for five minutes.

Mr. Nick Loenen (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, we all know Sir Sandford Fleming for giving us the 24-hour clock, but he was also a student of Parliament. He gave an address 125 years ago in Ottawa on the rectification of Parliament.

Fleming saw two problems: one, the makeup of the House was not representative at all of how Canadians vote; and two, excessive party discipline allowed the executive to control the legislative. He thought that was wrong. He had a remedy for both of these ills. The remedy he took from John Stuart Mill was multi-seat districts and a ranked ballot.

Those two problems that Fleming saw are still with us today. The remedy he proposed is as relevant as it was in his day. Would we be able to turn all of the 338 ridings into a multi-seat district? I don't think so. I don't think it's possible because it would mean chronic coalition government, and Canadians are uncomfortable with that. In addition, it would mean that in rural Canada, the ridings would be so large as to be deemed unmanageable.

For those two reasons, we can't go that way, but we can go a long ways that way. In other words, we need a compromise.

Hence, my suggestion to you would be that we have a single seat preferential ballot for rural Canada and multi-seat in the urban centres. That is a perfect fit. It's a perfect fit for our geography. It's a perfect fit because of the uneven distribution of population, and it fits the need of the hour.

At this point in our history, I do not believe Canadians want full proportional representation, but they certainly want to go more proportional than what we have. I believe that this is exactly what we need at this moment, and what is perhaps the only alternative that is possible politically, which is another very important consideration: What is possible?

I do think that this kind of hybrid common-sense adaptation of all of our Canadian needs makes a whole lot of sense, and we had it in history. Both the provinces of Alberta and Manitoba for 30 years had exactly that kind of hybrid system between rural and urban ridings. It was discontinued in the 1950s by the politicians. The people had no voice in it.

I looked at your guiding principle, and it's a wonderful statement. It's a beautiful statement. It's inspirational. It yearns for greater democracy, and particularly more effective local representation, for inclusion, for MPs who will speak for their constituents. It talks about civic engagement, and for the voters to be empowered, not necessarily the parties, and in particular for MPs to have some more clout. Those two, electoral reform and parliamentary reform, are both needed, and are tied very closely together.

If I look at the guiding principles, it narrows the field considerably because it rules out the entire family of proportional representation systems. Why? Because those are party-based systems. They empower parties. You'll end up with more party discipline than you have today. Those systems are appropriate for countries where you have a separation between the executive and the legislative. We don't have that. That's not Canada.

In our system, for it to survive, for it to be truly accountable, to be a check on the powers of government, you need independence, a measure of independence for the MPs; otherwise the House becomes merely a rubberstamp, so I do not see how the guiding principles would allow you to buy into any form of proportional representation.

● (1350)

I believe that proportional representation systems, all of them, are party-based systems. They fit the European mindset, which sees politics as a clash of ideas that are embodied by the parties.

We look at politics more as offering people good government. It is more practical. It is more geared to personalities than to parties and platforms. Therefore, I do not think you will be able to get buy-in from the Canadian public for any system, including the mixed member proportional system, that has an element of party-based voting. It simply is not on—

The Chair: Mr. Loenen, are you able to wrap up?

There will be time in the Q and A.

Mr. Nick Loenen: I'll leave it at that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Dias.

Ms. Megan Dias (Graduate student, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia, As an Individual): Thank you to the chair and the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak here.

I'm going to spend my time in front of the committee arguing that the process of how we adopt a new electoral system is critically important, and that, as it stands, the process needs to be made more inclusive and representative.

I believe that the best way for electoral reform to be decided in Canada is through a diverse and inclusive citizens' assembly that is representative of Canadians at large. I've come to this conclusion both as someone who spends a lot of time thinking about and studying politics, and also as someone who has attended and spoken at several town halls now and has seen their limitations in representation and decision-making.

With electoral reform, we get to make a decision about what type of politics and government we want. We get to make a decision that has the potential to make our politics more effective, engaging, and inclusive. We should also ensure that the process of reform reflects these principles and reflects the type of politics and society we want.

To me, this means using a process that is inclusive of a wide variety of Canadian voices and perspectives and empowers diverse individuals to have a meaningful say in choosing their electoral system, a system that will impact their lives as citizens. The current method of public engagement is simply not doing this.

As Darrell Bricker's poll illuminated a few weeks ago, only 19% of Canadians are even aware that this is happening, and only 3% are paying close attention, and this 3% tends to be older, affluent white males.

Town halls simply haven't reached a diverse or representative group of Canadians. I've attended and spoken at several town halls now, run by MPs as well as local organizations and citizens, and I am usually the youngest person in attendance by far.

Everyone at town halls seems to be well educated, well connected to politics, and knowledgeable about the issue. The inability to attract younger and less-informed individuals, as well as a whole host of minority groups to these town halls is not the fault of the organizers. It is the nature of town halls themselves. Someone who attends a town hall is likely already interested in the subject, has an opinion she wants to register, and has the time and means to do this. All of this favours limited groups of people and excludes others.

Town halls simply are not a good way of educating people on this topic either. Electoral reform is not as intuitive as other political topics. Academics spend years studying it, and the committee has spent months getting a crash course on it. It's unfair to expect that in a two-hour town hall, Canadians can learn about the different systems, think about how the different ones will impact their lives differently, come to an opinion about which one they prefer, and then discuss and register their opinions with their local MP and fellow constituents.

I worry that an online consultation will be inadequate as well for similar reasons. Online consultation will, again, favour individuals who already have an interest in the topic. It will also require citizens to have the time and interest to essentially teach themselves the subject. Those who don't have the time, or frankly, haven't been given the incentives to know why they should care, won't be motivated to engage.

I submit to the committee that the best way to engage Canadians on this issue, especially Canadians who have been historically marginalized and disconnected from our political system, is a citizens' assembly, like the ones held by B.C. or Ontario. Citizens' assemblies can be designed to include individuals who aren't usually included in this discussion.

The B.C. Citizens' Assembly ensured gender parity and representation from all ridings in B.C. It also ensured that there was representation from aboriginal groups. Participants were offered a stipend for their time in the assembly, which means that those from less affluent backgrounds weren't precluded from attending. Finally, the assembly devoted the time and resources necessary to educate each member on the issue, so that it's not just the already educated and informed dominating the debate, and everyone could bring their perspectives to bear on it.

In order to hold a a citizens' assembly, it might be necessary for this process to be slowed down and the timeline on reform to be extended. I don't see this as an issue. Reforming our electoral system will have major implications for our politics, and will therefore affect the lives of citizens at large. I would rather have an electoral system that is decided on by a group that is representative of Canadians at large, even if this means delaying the final decision a little bit.

Electoral reform is a major opportunity for us as it allows us to make a decision about what type of politics we want. The process of reform should also reflect what type of politics we want: engaging, diverse, inclusive, and representative. A citizens' assembly would fit these criteria, and it would inform and empower individuals who are not currently part of the discussion and allow them to bring their perspectives to bear on the issues.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to include a proposal for a citizens' assembly in their final report to Parliament.

● (1355)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We've heard a lot about citizens' assemblies on this panel, but this is a bit of a new emphasis, so it should be very interesting.

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

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'd like to first recognize that we are on the traditional territory of the Coast Salish, including the Musqueam, the Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh first nations.

I'd like to thank all our witnesses here today. Those were excellent and very different presentations. We really appreciate having different perspectives on our panel.

I'd like to start with a question for Ms. Dias. What graduate studies program are you currently in?

Ms. Megan Dias: I'm in political science. I'm an M.A. candidate at UBC.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What is your work geared towards? Is it in electoral reform or—

Ms. Megan Dias: It's on political behaviour, and that does interact with electoral systems, party systems, that kind of thing.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You said that you're finding that people at the town hall meetings you've been attending are already very aware of the issue and that it's a certain type of demographic that's coming out to these meetings.

Other than a citizens' assembly—and a citizens' assembly is a great suggestion—what else do you think we can do to have better outreach and to get to those people who aren't well informed? We heard from some of the witnesses in Victoria yesterday that there was already a citizens' assembly here in B.C., so the decision has been made and we don't need to ask B.C. again because they know what they want, that type of an attitude. What would you say about that?

● (1400)

Ms. Megan Dias: I think the citizens' assembly process in B.C. was very successful. The people who participated in it seemed to really have an understanding of the issue, and there was a part of the citizens' assembly that required them to go back and interact with other citizens.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What was the demographic of the citizens' assembly?

Ms. Megan Dias: A citizens' assembly allows you to choose members in a way that ensures that the demographic is representative. The demographic was equal parts men and women. They included representatives from all ridings in B.C., and they also included aboriginal representation. There was a much more diverse representation than there is at town hall meetings or things like that.

For a citizens' assembly held on a national level, you could decide what kind of demographic representation you want. There's no one set way to do that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What is your position on what type of system this committee should propose?

Ms. Megan Dias: I think, on balance, MMP is the best system. It gives the local representation that is important for a country like Canada and important to Canadians. This is balanced with a better sense of fairness and proportionality. MMP allows for things like lists that would allow for greater gender representation in Parliament, which I think is really important.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you believe that increase in gender equality and perhaps minorities in Parliament would be a direct result of MMP? Do you think that would have a big impact?

Ms. Megan Dias: It would not be a direct result of MMP itself. It would be the details that we put into MMP. MMP allows for party lists, and party lists have been used in other countries to increase gender representation and to increase representation of other groups. That's not inherent in MMP, but it's definitely a possibility and something that I think would be beneficial with MMP.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What would you imagine the process would be to get onto one of these party lists? How easy would it be? Sometimes it's made to seem that it would be very simple. Of course, at the end of the day, it would be party will as to who goes on these lists. However, sometimes my fear is that there still may be the front-runners or that typical candidate, perhaps the highest fundraiser, and those types of situations. How do we avoid the elite of the elite, the cream of the crop, or whatever, getting onto those lists rather than a cross-section of our society?

Ms. Megan Dias: Yes, I think that is a concern. I know it's a concern for a lot of people about things like lists. I think it would come down to the details. This is a system that we're creating. We can set this up in a way that might mandate that you're not allowed to do this, or that on the list you have to include an equal number of men and women, alternating. Things like that could be set up.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Deltell now.

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

[*Translation*]

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this parliamentary committee meeting.

[*English*]

I will continue in English as best I can.

Mr. Moscrop, thank you so much for your comments. You made some very interesting points. As you know, we in the Conservative Party are open to discussion on this issue. We all recognize that our present system is not absolutely perfect. There are some things that we are very concerned about with respect to our actual system, but we also recognize that there is no perfect system.

You've talked a lot about how to reach a new way, how to have a new electoral system. You've said that as politicians—and I strongly agree with what you're saying—we are in a conflict of interest. For sure, we are the ones who could decide how to get elected. This is quite difficult for us.

You also talked a lot about how, if we move on and have a new electoral system, we should have a huge amount of public information. People should be very well informed about what is going on.

There are some questions in my mind. First of all, do you think we have enough time in front of us before the next election to have a new system and to get the public well informed if the government decides to go with a new electoral system?

Mr. David Moscrop: This is the great divide between the academic community, I think, and the activist community. The activists say that you go through the door that's open when it's open. I understand that perspective. Academics say that you want to get it right, that it's important that you get it done, but you need to get it done right.

I think getting it done right includes not just achieving a proper system for Canada but achieving it in a proper way. That requires, when it's something so fundamental as electoral reform, sustained and robust public consultation and education, because you need to get the buy-in from the public for it to be legitimate and you also want the public to know what's going on.

In New Zealand, they started the process in the 1980s with a royal commission, which I think was in 1986. They didn't get MMP until, I think, nearly eight years later, and they had two referendums. That's perhaps a little excessive, but I think the timeline you mentioned might be slightly ambitious if we want to make sure that the public not only has a chance to give their input, but also actually knows what's going on.

I think the poll from Mr. Bricker is indicative of a problem. People don't know that we're doing this, and it's very important that they do, because it's fundamental. This is potentially a long-term problem, because we want to build trust and legitimacy not just for electoral reform but for phasing Canadian democracy going forward. That requires that people become educated and aware.

Personally, I think that if the process has to be slowed down to include more public education and either a citizens' assembly or a referendum, it should be. I don't think we need to rush it. I know that the activist community is not going to love that line, but I'll remind folks: the outcome is important but the process is just as important, if not more important.

● (1405)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: You've talked about the referendum, the New Zealand experience, and also the experience here in British Columbia with two referendums.

I could say that there is a new trend in our discussion now, in that people are open to a referendum, but after the new electoral system. As you know, I'm a Québécois. I'm sure you have already recognized my accent. We have good experience in Quebec with referendums. We had two referendums on separation.

I'm sure that I will please my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, because this would be like saying that we will get independence right now and then within five years we'll ask the the Québécois if they think it's a good thing to be independent. What do you think? Do you think it's good to have a referendum after electoral reform or before?

Mr. David Moscrop: A cooling-off period is not such a bad idea sometimes, especially with something controversial. In New Zealand, they did have a cooling-off period. They decided they wanted to keep MMP, and I think that's reasonable.

Part of the problem with a referendum is that it's a snapshot in time. It reflects the way that people are feeling in the moment. Imagine you'd run the Quebec referendum in 1995. If you'd run it again in 1996, I bet you would have had a different outcome, and then which one counts, today's or tomorrow's? This is part of the problem with a referendum. It gives you a moment in time. You have to decide which one counts.

Look at Brexit. Folks woke up the next day and said, “I voted yes, but I didn't really mean to vote yes. I just wanted to send a message. I don't like David Cameron, and I don't like EU bureaucrats, but I didn't think my vote would count.” They got trapped by their own vote actually mattering.

I do think that if we're going to have a referendum, we need a citizens' assembly no matter what, but if we have perhaps two, a referendum asking “Do you want this?” and then another asking “Are you sure?”, that wouldn't be such a bad idea. It gives people a little bit of time, a cooling-off time. They can decide what they want. I believe that proposal's been floated. I think it's not such a bad thing, but again, only if the votes are held extremely responsibly, and the money is spent and the time is taken, because if you do a referendum poorly, I would argue, it's worse than not doing one at all.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you to our panellists for being here and particularly to the crowd on this sunny Wednesday in Vancouver. I also recognize that we're on the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations' traditional territory, and we thank them for allowing us to do our business here today.

Let me pick up on something you just said, David. Here's my worry. I don't actually take this from an activist's point of view; I just take it from the experience of a parliamentarian who has spent a bit of time. Delay often means death in our Parliament. We started talking about this issue in the House of Commons in 1921. Some people say we should slow down, and I ask if they would perhaps like us to take another century.

We've had 14 major studies across the country from the Law Commission. Citizens' assemblies have been conducted here. All come to a conclusion of proportional of some variance or another. In terms of the political science on it, in terms of the expert advice that we've been getting, the vast majority of both the public and the experts who have come to us have recommended some proportionality.

Talking about the legitimacy, I think, is quite important, and that is at the heart of how we legitimize what we're doing. The NDP recommended to this government that we have the citizens' assembly process work in tandem with us. That hasn't happened, and I'm worried about the tension that the delay is causing. This government promised that the last election would be the last election under first past the post, and, in good faith, they are keeping that promise, unlike some of the other ones, but there is tension about our being able to finally get to a conclusion here, rather than saying, "Remember that great study we did in 2016? Wasn't that wonderful? We went around the country."

I'm looking at a quote from Mr. Mayrand. Our Chief Electoral Officer said, "Not a single government, whatever the majority is, should be able to unilaterally change the rules of election. Changing the rules of that competition among them should require a broad consensus—the broadest possible."

Could you reflect on that comment from our head of elections and what that might mean to this committee and with regard to the recommendations we put forward to Parliament?

● (1410)

Mr. David Moscrop: Absolutely. Let's be honest: I think Canadians would agree that the consensus needs to be broad. It needs to be multi-party. You certainly don't want any party gaming the system. I think the government understood that when they agreed to make the committee proportional, and I think that sends a good message. It was a respectful decision.

I think the consensus, though, doesn't need to be just a parliamentary consensus. It needs to be as close as we can get to a national consensus, or at least a national bargain. I don't think you'll ever have a full consensus, because people are going to disagree. That's fine.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We aim high.

Mr. David Moscrop: Absolutely, right, and you'll land somewhere in the middle. At the same time, I agree with you, and I'm super sympathetic, that you want to get it done. You don't want to just look back and say, "We were close." So why don't you pass legislation that you can grandfather into the next Parliament and then let people work it out in an election, and then you can have your redistricting in the next election?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let me step to the referendum question for a moment, because there's an inherent legitimacy in putting a direct question to voters, but I'll characterize referendums in this way: they're easier to do badly than to do well.

Mr. David Moscrop: Sure.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I watched this at this panel, questions coming from various committee members repeated as myths and outright lies about proportional systems.

It's similar to.... You mentioned Brexit. It was much easier to spread fear and to be on the side saying that it was going to cause terror and chaos than it was to explain. I've noticed that in politics—Nick will probably have some comment on this—explaining is harder than just spreading fear.

You said your condition was that they had to be run well. I guess that's my concern. We have posited this idea of bringing in a new system, with as broad a consensus as possible, allowing Canadians to see it actually function—so you can't spread those lies as much—allowing the comfort of change to be permitted, and then, at the next election, on the ballot, saying, "Do you want to keep it or return to first past the post?"

Do you have any comments on that? Maybe Nick and Megan can answer as well.

Mr. David Moscrop: I think that's reasonable. There are a bunch of different ways to do it.

It's worth remembering that referendums are good legitimacy-building tools, to some extent. They are awful policy-making tools. When you run a referendum, you are not looking to build a policy, you are looking to generate legitimacy for a policy that has already been submitted. That's worth keeping in mind.

I would say this. In British Columbia, the referendum actually worked fairly well. The government set an arbitrary 60% threshold to pass it. I think that was ridiculous and unnecessary, but 57.7% of people voted in favour of electoral reform. We forget how remarkable and how unusual that was. The referendum was actually run fairly well. Part of the reason was that the folks at the B.C. Citizens' Assembly, which was well funded, became educators. They went out into the public and essentially became points of contact for the public and taught folks what the option was and why it was good. They became heuristics. They became shortcuts for people.

There is a way to do that, but it takes a lot of time, a lot of money, and a lot of legwork.

What is one of the best predictors of whether someone is going to vote in an election? It's whether they have been contacted directly by a political party on their doorstep. We need to be doing this for electoral reform too.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Ste-Marie, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, members of the public, colleagues and members of the support team.

Thank you for your presentations and your remarks.

I would start by asking Ms. Dias and Mr. Moscrop a few questions.

You say there is a new system to adopt, but the most important thing is how it is done, the process. The question has been raised by several colleagues here.

On the one hand, there is the government's commitment to changing the electoral system by the next election. On the other hand, you say that we have to take the time to do things right. Is it preferable to push the deadline back, if necessary, to make sure the process is carried out properly? Is that what you said?

● (1415)

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Dias: Yes.

Mr. David Moscrop: Absolutely. It's better to do the process right than to rush it and risk getting it wrong.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I think the idea of a citizens' assembly like the one you had in British Columbia is great. However, it takes time. As you said, that is one of the ways to do things right. It also costs a lot of money. I was talking about that with our chair during the break. I think the process of consulting the citizens' assembly in British Columbia cost about $10 million. If we did the same thing in Canada, where there are several nations and several regions, the bill could easily be double that amount.

Do you think it would be worth it?

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Loenen: It was $3 million, not $10 million.

Ms. Megan Dias: I think it would be worth it, yes. We are devoting significant time and resources to electoral reform as it is, and it would be worth doing it well.

It would also signify to Canadians that we care about this process and about hearing their voices and perspectives. We would get a more inclusive and representative discussion on this. Yes, I do think it would be worth it.

Mr. David Moscrop: When you are building a house, you don't want to skimp on the foundation. It is something that's worth putting some money into. It is the thing upon which the house is going to rest. Electoral reform is part of the foundation of our democracy. I think it would be worth the $300 million it would cost to run a referendum. If it becomes $325 million or $330 million, it's worth it.

The problem is that it sounds like a lot of money, and in some sense it is a lot of money, but it is something we are going to live with for an awfully long time. I think of it as an investment, not as a cost, and we ought to be making that investment because it matters a great deal.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Loenen, my questions are for you.

You said it will be difficult to adopt a new proportional system on which there was unanimous agreement. You suggest that we favour a compromise that would both ensure that electors are close to their MPs in rural areas, on the one hand, and incorporate an element of proportionality in the cities, on the other.

I have two questions for you about the model you present.

According to the witnesses who have come to talk to us during previous consultations, the public would not like there to be two kinds of elections across the country, one for rural areas and one for cities.

I would like to hear your thoughts on that point.

I will ask my second question right away.

Why should people in rural areas favour a preferential ballot? Preferential voting reduces the diversity of representation, because, as a general rule, everyone's second choice is the middle. So that would unreasonably benefit one party. Why, in your model, would we not simply leave the first past the post system for rural areas? Why move to preferential voting?

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Loenen: Thank you very much for the question.

Different types of elections? No. Both use a ranked preference system, whether you're rural or urban. I don't see any difference. You don't end up with two different types of MPs. You don't have a different voting system. The quota by which you determine whether the winning candidate is elected or not is exactly the same. It's a Droop quota under both systems.

I don't understand why people would feel that rural Canadians vote differently than urban Canadians. Urban Canadians have more choice, but the legitimacy of the MP in both cases is identical.

The second question was, why not leave the rural areas first past the post. Well, then indeed you would have two different voting systems.

The Chair: Thank you. I see the distinction. Unfortunately, we're out of the time. You made the point, and it's a good point.

We'll go to Ms. May. Maybe she'll ask you to finish that point. I think you were very succinct in making that distinction.

Ms. May.

● (1420)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): I'm afraid that I really want to focus on the fact that David Moscrop and Megan Dias have a particular view about delay. I'd like to pick up on where Nathan Cullen was on that and see how you feel about the awareness of this meeting. I think it will have changed. Darrell Bricker's poll was in mid-summer.

If you turn around, you'll see, and I want to get this on the record, there are two tables here that are empty. Perhaps you'll see the nameplates for the expected visitors. It says they're for media. We've been in five provincial capitals, one territorial capital, and several smaller communities, and so far, the only place where media showed up to cover the hearing was in Whitehorse. Full points to the *Whitehorse Star* and the local reporters.

We are trying. Goodness knows this committee is doing more than I think most parliamentary committees have done in our history. We have open-mike sessions. We have tremendous turnout from the public. I'd like to suggest to you, and ask each of you, whether your answers would change, that preference for delay is better. I think I got this right from you, Mr. Moscrop, that it is better to get the process right than to risk getting it wrong.

What if this is it? Nathan Cullen and I are thinking along the same lines here as people who see a window opened, politically, that is going to close soon. I don't have anything on the record from the current government that there is a commitment to have electoral reform come hell or high water no matter how long it takes.

I've heard a promise that 2015 will be the last election held under the first-past-the-post system. If this process doesn't do it, if we don't deliver on that, would your answer change in terms of electoral reform? Bear in mind, if we can deliver a system that works by the fall of 2017, we have between 2017 and 2019 for further public engagement and further public education. Who knows what manner of things we could try in that time?

It's my belief that it's now or never. Well, not never; we can get back to it in perhaps 2060. We have lots of time. But I think this is it for electoral reform. If you thought that, would you provide what you think would work to enhance public participation in the timelines that I believe we have in real life?

First David, and then Megan.

Mr. David Moscrop: Part of the problem is that electoral systems are sticky. As you say, they don't change easily or often. If you get it wrong, then you might end up stuck with it. If it ends up benefiting one particular party or a couple of parties at the expense of another, then you might have the public and partisans saying, “Look at what this process has delivered to us. It's delivered this system that is benefiting some parties and not another.”

It's not like first past the post doesn't do that already, but when you're going to change something so fundamental as this, it's not going to be ordinary legislation in its impact. There's a risk of getting it wrong.

If we're going to stick to the timeline, to answer that question, I think we need people going door to door. That's the way to do it. We want to go high tech. I have to say, I admire the committee and how it has been working. The travel schedule must be brutal, but the way to do it is door to door. That's what works. We want to go to the Internet. We want to go to town halls. We want to tweet it. We want to have Facebook. We want to beam it into people's brains.

The only thing that works effectively in the long run is door to door with a grassroots engagement, and it can't just be the activist communities. It needs to be political parties and it needs to be MPs and their staff talking to folks one on one. That's the only way to do it. The ground game matters. This is what we go to.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

Megan.

Ms. Megan Dias: My concern with the committee making a proposal on the electoral system, setting this up by fall 2017, and then trying to engage the public is that the public won't have been involved in the decision on the electoral system. It will only be the committee members and whoever has been able to come to town halls or has gone through the online consultation process.

It is important to have broad public engagement on the decision.

Ms. Elizabeth May: On the idea of a national citizens' assembly, we had before us yesterday, in Victoria, Diana Byford and Craig Henschel. Both of them were in the B.C. Ctizens' Assembly. Extrapolating from the number of people they had in B.C., they figured 676 people would be a national citizens' assembly, but that's fewer people than have already appeared and come to the public meetings of this committee.

Engaging the population of Canada, in a sense, is called representative democracy and responsible government, and that has to do with something called Parliament, which we've been elected to. What number of people would be enough to say that we've talked to the people of Canada?

● (1425)

Ms. Megan Dias: The problem with the representation right now is that you're engaging a specific subset of Canadians. You're engaging a specific demographic group.

People who go to town halls are probably feeling passionate about this issue. They're probably largely PR people, because they feel passionate about it. They haven't been able to engage a broader representative group of Canadians. Maybe it's not so much about numbers as it is about engaging a more representative cover, and that's what a citizens' assembly would give us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Thanks to everyone, our witnesses for today and members of the audience. As the member of Parliament who is probably closest to where we're located—my riding is Cloverdale—Langley City—I wanted to thank all the audience members for coming out. I look forward to hearing from you as we get into the open-mike session today.

We've heard in some of the testimony about the great work that was done in B.C. with the citizens' assembly, and the two of you have talked specifically to that. Yesterday, we had two of the participants from the B.C. Citizens' Assembly speak to us. I would like to get your thoughts on the practicalities of taking that model to a national scale.

The B.C. model, as was mentioned, had gender parity, because there was a man and a woman randomly selected from each riding. To do that in Canada, with 338 ridings, we'd be looking at 676 participants. There are cost implications, time implications, and travel implications. I like the idea of trying to get some sort of consensus, whatever that looks like and whatever the threshold for agreement is. It's a large number.

Ms. Dias and Mr. Moscrop, maybe the two of you could comment on that. Have you looked at the success of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly, and if that could be applied on a national scale? One of the women who was before us said that if she was asked to do what she was asked to do for the province on a national level, then she would say no, simply because of the travel commitment.

Ms. Dias, have you looked at the benefits and how that could apply to the national stage?

Ms. Megan Dias: I've talked to people who have suggested we could. We're not wedded to the B.C. Citizens' Assembly model, right? I think it worked well in B.C. The general principle of the citizens' assembly is appropriate for this issue and it would work well.

There are different ways to try to deal with this. It doesn't necessarily need to be every single riding represented. Maybe we could talk about regions. We could do something like that.

There have also been suggestions about holding citizens' assemblies in each province. Instead of having a national one, what if we had 10 provincial ones and one for the territories? There are different ways to get at this that wouldn't require over 600 people converging on Ottawa.

Mr. John Aldag: You think that would give us the kind of legitimacy of representation to be able to say at the end of it that yes, this is a legitimate process.

Ms. Megan Dias: Yes, I think so. I think it would represent a much more diverse group of Canadians. It would give them a much more robust education on this issue than they're getting currently.

Mr. John Aldag: Mr. Moscrop, do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr. David Moscrop: I think if you extrapolate from British Columbia, you end up at over 600, but if you say that you don't really need 600 people to get a representative group of Canadians, you could probably do it with half of that, right? I do think breaking it down by region makes sense, even breaking it down by province. The riding level might be too specific for something like this. It would require too many people. We could probably do it with 300 people, depending on how you did the math. At the end of the day, you want to represent this group of Canadians, and that's actually as much a math equation as anything else. Maybe Mario can talk about this later. I have no idea.

What it does allow you to do as you get slightly bigger numbers, say for instance 300, is you can start to select by gender, you can start to select by ethnicity, you can even start to select by partisanship if you want. You can have a representative body, because you're not going to get it with a town hall. There's a huge selection bias because people are opting into it based on their pre-existing passion for the issue.

I'm a PR advocate and one of the first people to say they're not even close to representative. These are PR folks who are turning out to push PR. I happen to think most of them are right, but they're not representative.

Mr. John Aldag: As British Columbians, we know that the Rockies do a great job of protecting us from crazy ideas coming from Ottawa.

We had the citizens' assembly and it gave us a solution that was made for B.C., but when I look at it, the citizens' assembly essentially failed. We had the best minds. We had this sample of British Columbians. It went to a referendum. Is this really the best solution? If we go through the same process, if we go to a referendum with the solution that may come out through a citizens' assembly, are we destined to fail, or were there other factors at play in B.C. that resulted in no change?

Mr. Moscrop, I'll ask you.

● (1430)

Mr. David Moscrop: I'm from Ontario, but I've been here for six years and I'm starting to understand western alienation a bit. Each year I come out a little more western alienated. The referendum was a success. The B.C. Citizens' Assembly was a success. The Government of British Columbia failed the people of British Columbia by setting an unnecessarily high and arbitrary threshold for passing electoral reform at 60%. The result was that 57.7% of people said yes. You would need one fan, which I appreciate. Thanks, Mom.

If 50% was enough for Britain to leave the EU, it's enough to choose an electoral system.

The Chair: Thank you. You're out of time.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I want to start with a brief comment and then turn to the citizens' assembly and the self-selection issue. That's all I can fit into five minutes.

The problem with the issue of rushing versus delaying.... The key point of view for us, as a committee, is that we actually have a mandate that tells us to design a system for 2019. That's what we have to work with, unless we say in our report that we are rejecting part of our mandate, that our mandate isn't practical. But as it stands, our mandate says we are to try to design a system for 2019. This involves all kinds of problems, one of which is by this time it would be literally impossible to have a citizens' assembly that is set up and makes recommendations, simply because it may very well make a recommendation that involves a redistribution and a redistribution takes 24 months. We don't have the time any more. We might have had time if we had started it a year ago, right after the election, but that's just a practical matter we're dealing with. I simply throw that out.

Having said that, I want to turn to the issue of a citizens' assembly and the very large numbers we are talking about. If we apply a very mechanistic version of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly nationally—two members from each riding, one male, one female—you get 600-and-whatever members. The obvious way of cutting this in half—and I don't think this creates a problem that anybody would regard as unreasonable—is to say gender equity but every second riding has a male and every second riding has a female. Problem resolved.

I actually think you'd want to have some other equity considerations in there. I think it would be important to have a certain number of people who speak non-official languages as their first language, to deal with our very large and diverse immigrant population. Anyway, I'm simply throwing that out.

I do want to say something regarding self-selection. I think this is really important. We've had open-mike testimony which in no way reflects what poll results tell us about what Canadians think. At the open-mike session last night, I think it was about 5:1 people standing up and saying they were opposed to a referendum, please no referendum. Every poll I've seen indicates that no matter how the question is asked, somewhere from 55% to 73% of Canadians want a referendum, and those who were opposed, either strongly or mildly opposed to a referendum, amount to less than 20%; yet we find 5:1. This suggests a severe self-selection bias in who's coming here.

Having said that, I'll mention that I got up and walked around and counted the people in the room here, to make the point that in Canada's most diverse city, a city which I believe has just under or just over a 50% non-white population, out of 60 people in the audience—and I counted—five are not white, and the age demographic is also not typical of the age profile of the city. That's not to be disrespectful—with my board of directors in my riding association, there is a similar problem—but it is to say that we have a self-selection problem here that leads to witness testimony that doesn't work. Open-mike testimony simply does not reflect where non-activists on this issue stand. This will be a massive problem when we come to compile this stuff later on. We'll have a non-representative sample, a wildly non-representative sample.

Having said all of that, I actually want to go back to the citizens' assembly argument I raised earlier. What do you think of the idea of having a citizens' assembly that lowers the number by doing some kind of measure such as I suggested? Would that seem like a reasonable way of approaching things?

That is for you, Mr. Moscrop.

Mr. David Moscrop: Yes, absolutely. It's a great compromise and it would do it. What is it; 338 works pretty well for the House of Commons, and I think it would work pretty well for a national citizens' assembly as well. You want the number to be high enough to be representative, but to sort of echo what Ms. May was suggesting, you don't want it so high that it's unworkable, because with 676 people, I don't know how you would do it. So that is a nice compromise. You might even be able to do it with less than that. Again, that's a question to work on with statisticians as well, especially if you want to build in the representativeness that you were talking about earlier.

● (1435)

Mr. Scott Reid: Very briefly, on public education you give a little bit of an indication about the kinds of things that need to happen. In British Columbia, from the outside it looked to me like it was a very good attempt to publicize. Also, the citizens of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly went out and did some work on their own, but in addition to what they did, were there any measures they missed out that would be necessary to ensure the maximum level of information to an informed electorate? Does that come to your mind?

Mr. David Moscrop: Well, the times have changed a little bit. I think of this: Twitter, Facebook, social media writ large, Instagram and Snapchat are really useful tools for enhancing a substantive process. They shouldn't be your primary tool. This shouldn't be the thing you are doing. They should be complementary to something more substantive. British Columbia wouldn't have had the benefit of those things 11 years ago, certainly not to the extent we do now. You certainly could now, but also have more door-to-door canvassing. There's a lot you can do.

The problem isn't technique. The problem is money, usually, and time. It's classic. It's a resource problem. You're going to have to spend a lot of money and you'll need a lot of people going door to door. You'll need a lot of people tweeting, a lot of people reaching out. If you're willing to spend the money, lots of folks will tell you how to spend it properly in order to reach the public, but you have to be willing to spend it and you have to be willing to take the time to do so.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): I have to admit it's true. The acoustics in here are not too great.

Thank you so much to our panellists and to the citizens of Vancouver for coming out in big numbers.

I want to touch on something that you've alluded to, Ms. Dias and Mr. Moscrop. You've talked a little bit about engagement, but specifically education. We've seen through the various stops on this tour, and I've seen in various town halls that there is a one-sided group that is showing up at these town halls. It's great. I love the fact that people are engaged and they want to come here, but my concern is about the education component. What is our current system? What does it look like? What are the pros? What are the cons? What are the possibilities that we could consider to improve our system? We have a couple of little boo-boos in our system that can be addressed by a new alternative voting system, that can be addressed by the specific tactics that we decide to deploy. Given the fact that we have a large educational component that we need to look at, what are your thoughts?

Professor Moscrop, you mentioned doing door to door. Quite honestly, as my colleague Mr. Reid mentioned, we have a finite time to get this done and I don't think going door to door to try to educate people is going to be feasible. I read your article in 2014 about our lizard brains, so I'm not quite sure if our lizard brains will be able to understand whatever we propose door to door.

Anyway, I just wanted to get your thoughts on how we can convey the options that we've put forward and let Canadians decide. Could you give me some feedback on your thoughts on educating Canadians in such a way that they understand the good, the bad, and the ugly?

Ms. Dias and then the other two.

Ms. Megan Dias: Again, I think that a citizens' assembly is uniquely posed to do that. I think town halls are not really capable to do that . You have two hours to get through the topic very quickly. I think more accessible materials need to be available to Canadians. Right now we have the Library of Parliament graphs and information, which is great, but if you don't know that exists, if you're not the kind of person to do that, you're not going to have that material available. There have been different civic organizations that have come out with reports. Those are also great but again, if you're not the type of person who's connected to this issue, those won't reach you.

I think the committee has to come up with a more aggressive or robust campaign that also tells Canadians why they should spend their time reading about electoral systems, why they should care about how votes are counted or things like that, and makes the implications that these are the outcomes we are trying to get and these are the values we care about. This is why we're doing this process at all.

I also think it means going to places like schools and universities and high schools and talking to youth. I think Dave said it, online materials are great as a supplement but I don't think they should take away from going to places where people are to engage them.

● (1440)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: On that note, before the two other witnesses answer, do you think it is the role of Elections Canada to do this?

Ms. Megan Dias: I'm not sure. I think Elections Canada could be uniquely posed as a non-partisan group to be able to do this, but I'm not sure it's within its specific mandate.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm going to flip that on its head. Every time I go to a town hall or I go to something, we always seem to have a presenter, just one, who's from one side of the debate, and that person will educate the crowd on how fabulous that specific system is but not always give them the good, the bad, and the ugly. My concern is by having people with specific stakes in the decision educating, they're not going to provide well-rounded information. That's why I was suggesting perhaps maybe Elections Canada would be best positioned to be non-partisan in it and actually give Canadians all the information, and what the ramifications of the costs will be in any reform that we do. That way they can make an educated decision.

Ms. Megan Dias: Yes, I think if Elections Canada was given the money and the resources to do that.... I think Elections Canada should be involved in things like get-out-the-vote campaigns, things like that, so that seems reasonable, yes.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses.

I would also like to thank the interpreters, who help me a lot.

The present consultation process is not perfect, but no process is perfect, as there is no perfect electoral system. Nonetheless, some are sometimes better than others.

We have to remember that this committee's mandate is not to improve the first past the post system, but to find a new voting system, a new electoral system. We should not forget that the present system, the status quo, does not have merely small flaws around the edges. It has inherent flaws that lamentably and systematically fail to represent the will of the people and reflect the choices and votes of the public, which is what democracy and an election should do.

Once in British Columbia and three times in Quebec, the party that got the most votes lost the election and did not form the government. That is a reversal of the will of the people!

In addition, we are used to a party that gets 39% of the vote having 55% of the seats and 100% of the power. Yes, we have to do some educating and get people to understand this; once it has been explained, they generally do not consider it reasonable. That is why most people who have an interest in this subject end up reaching the conclusion that some form of proportional representation is the best way of fashioning a parliament and representing the will of the people.

But how do we do that? There are several options and that is where the discussion heats up.

Mr. Moscrop, you are proposing a mixed member proportional representation system, which is generally what our party favours, but our minds are not closed to other options. How do you see this within the framework of the Canadian federation? Do you favour provincial lists or regional lists in the bigger provinces? Would you want there to be open or closed lists?

[*English*]

Mr. David Moscrop: I think you would need at least provincial regions for top-up, or perhaps smaller regions within the provinces. You wouldn't need to adjust that with P.E.I., for instance, but you might in Ontario. Part of what I like about MMP is that it does give you the flexibility. Folks are fond of saying we need a made-in-Canada solution. I think there's enough room in MMP that you can design it to fit the federation well and to respect geography and local representation, which Canadians are quite rightly wed to. I also prefer open lists, which helps address some of the problem of Canadians not wanting too much political party influence.

I'll quickly comment on nominations to those lists as well. Right now we say, "Well, we don't like party lists because how do folks get nominated?" Ask people how they get nominated now. There are a lot MPs who say after they get elected, "Well, I got nominated somehow. I can't exactly tell you how it happened." If you read the Samara book, *Tragedy in the Commons*, it's a great story about how these processes are opaque, bizarre, and inconsistent. So I do think we need to discuss also how nomination processes happen, but you can do that within an open list PR.

● (1445)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

Mr. Loenen, I imagine you are well aware that in the last federal election, the Liberal Party swept the Maritimes. It got 40% to 45% of the vote and 100% of the members, and that seems to pose a problem at this point, in fact.

On Vancouver Island, the Liberal Party got 20% of the votes and the Conservatives got 21% of the votes, totalling about 40% of the electorate, but they did not get a single member. So there is a representativeness problem. There actually are Conservatives in the Maritimes and Liberals on Vancouver Island.

Could your system, which seems to me to be more similar to the single transferable vote in the Irish system, solve these distortions in the existing system?

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Loenen: Thank you very much for the question.

The point is that under that proposal the distortions would have halved at least. You wouldn't have these huge distortions.

Getting back to what has dominated the discussion, namely process, I think it was Mr. Cullen who started that by asking whether a legislature, by a simple act of the legislature, can change the voting system. Provincially we have done that, and in B.C. as recently as 1953. The sky didn't fall. If you look at New Zealand, when the people were asked whether they were in favour of changing the voting system and were presented with some options, surveys indicated that as many as 50% of the people didn't have a clue what they were voting on and for. So I very much favour a confirmation referendum. That makes sense, because now people have understood what they're actually voting on.

That's just my contribution on that question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Loenen.

Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Thank you to our panellists and all of the audience members who have joined us this afternoon. Thank you for coming.

I'm going to start with Ms. Dias.

I listened carefully to all of the presentations, but I was struck by your testimony because you addressed something that hadn't really come out so far this week, and that is the shortcomings that seem inherent in the approach of consultation by town hall and by public hearing. It's wonderful that we have a full room here today, so obviously, there are many Canadians who are interested in this process. However, it must be said and noted that the people who are interested in this are perhaps a unique group of people. The Minister of Democratic Institutions, I believe, referred to them as democracy geeks. Is that it? I'm not sure if I like that phrase, but I think we get the point.

You said that public meetings, whether they be town halls held by members of Parliament or the travelling committee, or the minister's hearings, have failed to attract younger people, for the most part, and less wealthy, less educated individuals. You talked about marginalized or disaffected groups. I might even add to that, perhaps—I'll let you comment on it as well—that even a person interested in democratic reform might not be so interested as to book a day off work on a Wednesday or to get a babysitter to look after their children.

There are surely millions of Canadians who care deeply about their voting system but are not going to find their way into the testimony of this committee. You mentioned the Bricker poll that showed 16% of 20% are the people following this, roughly a little over 3% of the actual electorate. The part where I maybe go off a little bit is—and I'll ask you to comment on this—once the recommendations are in, once this committee makes its report, and once the government makes a decision on a proposal, why not then throw it out to the electorate at large and let everybody have a vote and a say on what the change might be?

● (1450)

Ms. Megan Dias: I think there are two issues there. The first is, I would love for the actual system to be decided on by a group that is more representative than it is right now. If it goes the way you're proposing, the committee is going to make a decision based on the town halls they've heard, the testimony they've heard from witnesses, and the submissions. That's going to be based largely on a very specific group of people and not a broader audience. That's why I recommend a citizens' assembly to actually decide the system.

Mr. Pat Kelly: But not a referendum to follow?

Ms. Megan Dias: I'm with Dave on this. I'm not opposed to a referendum as long as it's very well run. I think referendums can be terribly run, and I think turnout in referendums would be an issue.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Fair enough, and thank you.

I have a question for Mr. Moscrop.

If I recall your preamble correctly, you characterized the current voting system as having largely served Canada well up until now, it would seem, because you are still proposing change, but you did characterize it as having served us fairly well. Then you highlighted that the inherent conflict of having elected people decide what the system should be is like letting the players make up their own rules in a contest. Yet you said that ultimately it should just be decided on a free vote in the House by those same members.

Again, I put it to you, would it not be better to put it to a referendum to again take out the inherent conflict of the politicians making up the contest?

Mr. David Moscrop: I have to say that I care a great deal about electoral reform, but I also don't want to pretend that the country is falling apart. We are one of the strongest democracies in the world, and that isn't blind nationalism and that isn't jingoism.

Look at any ranking from any body. Canada is always at or very close to the top because our democratic institutions are remarkably strong. Our political culture is remarkably strong, but we can improve it. I think, to use a cliché, the time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining, so let's do it.

Now, in terms of a referendum, if you do a referendum poorly, then you might get a deeply unrepresentative turnout, so there's a real risk that a referendum might actually be less representative than a lot of these town halls, depending on who turns out. You have to be very, very careful.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. David Moscrop: To quickly finish on one more, a free vote that ratifies the citizens' assembly.

The Chair: Mr. DeCourcey, please.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): To all our presenters, Ms. Dias, Mr. Moscrop, and Mr. Loenen, thank you for your substantive, balanced, and fair testimony and the way you've interacted with all of us on this committee.

A lot of the line of questioning that I had has come out in the way you've answered questions. I think we all understand the challenges posed with this process. At the same time, we're tasked with doing our very best to come up with a recommendation or set of recommendations by December 1.

Starting with Mr. Moscrop, give us your closing advice or the things to remember as we deliberate and hopefully try to come to a consensus on what that recommendation or series of recommendations should be.

Mr. David Moscrop: I don't envy the committee its task. You have to balance politics and partisan commitments with the fact that you're doing something that could very well end up being a foundational part of Canadian democracy, certainly for decades and perhaps for centuries to come. That ought to weigh heavily on your minds as you go forward. I'm sure it already does.

I would say this. Politics is political, and it should be. That's fantastic. I like the fact that we have a partisan system. I like the fact that we have a pluralist democracy. It should be agonistic. We should be wrestling with this stuff. We should be disagreeing.

The electoral system isn't ordinary legislation. It is a fundamental part in a democratic institution, a part of what keeps this democracy together and a part of what makes the country so great. I think we can improve, but we ought to be very careful not to get it wrong. Also, we ought to be very careful to not play pure politics with it, because the effect of that going forward is potentially catastrophic. I think we can do better, but the stakes are high, and that's why I'm so passionate about the process.

Let's say we don't have a different process. Let's say it's the committee and ordinary legislation. I would just say this. Keep in mind that you're not choosing this for your party and just for this Parliament. You're choosing this for all Canadians today and for all Canadians for years, decades, and even centuries to come, and it all has to be taken very, very seriously.

● (1455)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you.

Mr. Loenen.

Mr. Nick Loenen: I guess this is my closing statement. I believe that it's really, really important that you seek to empower voters, not political parties. That is fundamental.

From all of my experience—and I've been at this for a long time, as both a practitioner and an academic, and as an activist—I do not believe that Canadians will buy into any party-based system, including the mixed member proportional system. As confirmation of that, look at the survey done by the Broadbent Institute last fall, about a year ago. That survey was shamelessly biased in favour of the mixed member proportional system, yet they came up with what, 43% or something...?

It is my advice to you that if you're going to change the system, and I think you should, it must be candidate based, not party based. I know that it is going to require some compromise, but you know, that is what politics is all about.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much.

Ms. Dias, as we try to form a consensus on the committee, what are your closing pieces of advice?

Ms. Megan Dias: It's just echoing things that have already been said. This is a big decision. It's not something that should be rushed. Time should be taken to do this properly.

As someone who's been part of the process a little bit, I will say that this is the first time in my lifetime that there are town halls happening and there's a committee travelling across the country, and I am so excited by the idea that my voice gets heard. The more we can extend that, the more that Canadians can feel that they are part of this process and get to make a decision about what kind of politics we have and what type of government we have, I think that's a great thing for political citizens. I think that's something we need more of, so I would urge the committee to think about that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. DeCourcey.

Thank you to the panel. We have a fresh perspective on the issue, that's for sure. It was a good discussion. It's going to contribute to the report. We thank you for your time. Of course, you're welcome to stay and listen to the next panel.

To the audience and to the members of the committee, we'll take about a seven-minute break. That translates into a 10-minute break.

● (1455)

(Pause)

● (1510)

The Chair: I'm going to open the meeting now.

On panel number two, we have Christopher Kam, associate professor, department of political science, University of British Columbia; Mario Canseco, vice-president, public affairs, Insights West; and Patrick Jeffery Jewell. They will have five minutes each.

I don't know if you were here, panellists, when I explained how we function. Does everyone know that there's a round of questioning after? Each member gets to ask a question, or interacts with the witnesses for five minutes.

For the benefit of the audience, there are earpieces, either for the simultaneous interpretation or simply to amplify the sound if you're having trouble hearing because of the acoustics.

I would remind the witnesses that it's important, for the benefit of the interpreters, to not speak too quickly. Sometimes when witnesses really move along very quickly, it's hard for the interpreters to interpret.

We'll start with Mr. Kam, for five minutes, please.

● (1515)

Mr. Christopher Kam (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia, As an Individual): Thank you very much for inviting me to speak to the committee.

Given the limited time I have to speak, I'll confine my remarks to two of the principles that define the committee's mandate, those related to effectiveness and legitimacy, and those related to local representation and accountability.

The first of these principles, effectiveness and legitimacy, mandates that the committee identify measures that increase Canadians' confidence that their “democratic will” as expressed by their votes is fairly reflected in electoral outcomes. An implicit assumption underpinning this principle is that the electorate considered collectively has some coherent democratic will.

A good deal of work in a branch of academia called social choice theory tells us that this assumption is overly simplistic. In any moderately complex electoral environment—think of one in which voters must choose over more than two options in more than two policy dimensions, say, three parties competing on social policy and economic policy—we know that it's unlikely, indeed it's verging on impossible, that there exists some singular monolithic majority. As a consequence, it's very difficult to say what is the democratic will of an electorate, and whether such a will accords or does not accord with a particular election result held under a given system or not.

The second of these principles, local representation, mandates that the committee identify measures that ensure or support accountability. I guess in the context of modern parliamentary government, accountability can operate on two levels, and it does so simultaneously: the individual MP's accountability to his or her constituents on the one hand, and the governing party or coalition's accountability to the electorate at large via Parliament on the other. My sense is that the motion implicitly prioritizes the first of these types of accountability because the wording is terrible.

Regardless, scholars are agreed that accountability requires that the electorate be able to identify the act responsible for political decisions and outcomes, and that it can effectively sanction that act, should it wish to.

In this regard, the issue of dual candidacy under a mixed system is worth some attention. It's clear that dual candidacy, whereby a candidate can run in a district and on a list simultaneously, dilutes the candidate's accountability to the local constituency. There may be offsetting merits in dual candidacy; however, my point is just that the issue deserves discussion with respect to this principle of accountability.

The second type of electoral accountability, government accountability, has been misconceived. It's often put in terms of the stability of the government. We'll hear the old saw that under first past the post, elections are more stable than in governments elected under proportional representation. The problem here is not cherry-picking the experiences of this country or that country; rather, it's that there's no optimal level of stability.

You can have too little stability, and you can have too much stability. A much better metric is to consider what we would technically call the monotonicity of the electoral system. That is to say, is there a positive relationship between shifts in votes and shifts in legislative power? Certainly, the converse of this, that if a government, for example, lost votes and gained power, we would find perverse.

I've looked at the relationship between shifts in electoral votes and shifts in power, and there's good news and bad news. The good news is that regardless of the electoral system we looked at, there is among advanced industrial democracies a positive relationship between shifts in votes and shifts in power. It's very clear that majoritarian systems outperform proportional systems on this metric in the sense that responsiveness or monotonicity of the electoral system declines by about 50% under any form of proportional representation.

Again, that's one of many values that one may wish to consider and trade off against, but that's what the data says.

Thanks.

● (1520)

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

Mr. Canseco, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Mario Canseco (Vice President, Public Affairs, Insights West, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me to this session.

I have worked as a public opinion researcher for the past 13 years, first as an observer and collator of publicly available surveys at the University of British Columbia, and starting in 2007, as a pollster who has conducted research in more than 20 different countries. I've been with Insights West for the past three years, finding new approaches and ways to review how people think and how they vote.

I stand before you as an individual who is keenly interested in the topic of electoral reform. In many ways, my interest in public policy began in my childhood home. My father Morelos Canseco González served in the senate of Mexico as an elected representative from the state of Tamaulipas from 1976 to 1982. My father travelled to many places, including Canada, to take part in interparliamentary meetings.

From a very young age, conversations at the dinner table revolved around politics, participation, and elections. It is that curiosity about the way problems can be solved that ultimately led me to become an electoral researcher and forecaster.

This committee was appointed to identify and conduct a study of viable alternative voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system, and examine mandatory voting and online voting.

My company, Insights West, has been looking at some of these issues over the past year, and asked Canadians about them again this month so I could share the findings with you this afternoon.

The results I will quote are based on an online study conducted from September 14 to September 16, 2016, among a representative sample of 1,021 Canadian adults. The data has been statistically weighted according to Canadian census figures for age, gender, and region. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.1%.

Let us begin. In spite of the many discussions that have taken place on electoral reform, it must be acknowledged that the majority of Canadians, 64% in our latest survey, claim to be satisfied with the system that we currently have in place to elect the members of the House of Commons.

The highest level of animosity towards the first-past-the-post system is observed here in British Columbia, where 30% of residents claim to be dissatisfied with the status quo, a higher proportion than the Canadian average of 22%.

In our research, we have tested three different systems that could be implemented in the future for federal elections. By far the most popular of the three is party list proportional representation, which is supported by 49% of Canadians. The level of agreement is lower for single transferable votes at 40%, and the mixed member PR system at 31%.

Proportional representation does better than the other systems because it is particularly simple to explain, with a level of support that reaches 60% among Canadians, ages 18 to 34, and 56% in the province of Quebec.

It is fair to say that younger Canadians are far more likely to endorse a change, any change in our electoral system than their counterparts age 35 and over. Younger Canadians tend to be more open to voting outside of the two dominant parties that, under one name or another, have formed every federal government in our country's history.

A new system that may reward supporters of the so-called minor parties is definitely appealing to voters who currently feel that their vote is wasted unless they cast it in favour of either of the two candidates who are more likely to emerge victorious in a specific constituency.

Still, while some Canadians find PR attractive, others simply do not like it. One of the reasons cited by the three in 10 Canadians who disagree with adopting—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Canseco, could you just slow down a little bit for the interpreters?

Mr. Mario Canseco: Gladly.

One of the reasons cited by the three in 10 Canadians who disagree with adopting PR for federal elections is the perception that the sense of connection they currently have with their elected MP will be lost. It is complex, at least at this early stage, for some Canadians to forgo the idea of having a local MP they can vote for in a direct manner in favour of supporting a list.

Regardless of which system is ultimately adopted, 68% of Canadians believe a referendum is required to settle the issue of electoral reform. This majority of Canadians encompasses both genders, all age groups, every region, and supporters of the three main political parties currently represented in the House of Commons.

The call for a referendum is not unique to a particular party. Recent changes to electoral systems have been put to a vote in other countries, and most recently in the United Kingdom in May 2011 when 68% of voters rejected a move to the alternative vote system in a referendum that was plagued by an abysmal turnout of 42% of eligible voters. Canadians are asking to be part of this decision, and meetings like this one help. While many want to have a say in the discussion that will affect the way we elect our federal government, we still see a high level of undecided citizens when it comes to some of the systems that could be adopted.

On the issue of mandatory voting, other countries contemplate either fines or community service for registered voters who decide not to cast their ballots. We asked Canadians to ponder two different scenarios to compel all registered voters to participate in federal elections. Canadians, to put it mildly, were not amused, with 67% disagreeing with the notion of compelling eligible voters who do not cast a ballot to pay a $200 fine and 64% disagreeing with forcing non-voters to perform 25 hours of community service if they failed to exercise the voting franchise.

When the tables were turned and Canadians were asked if voters who do cast their ballots should each be eligible for a $200 tax rebate, 69% agreed with this notion.

● (1525)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: What a surprise. That's shocking.

Mr. Mario Canseco: It would seem that Canadians would prefer to reward those who cast a ballot rather than punish those who do not.

The third component of our research is online voting. Other countries allow citizens to cast ballots through the Internet. In the Baltic state of Estonia more than one in five votes cast in the 2011 parliamentary election was cast online. Voter turnout in Estonia has been higher than 60% in the three elections that have allowed Internet voting. Canada and Estonia are strikingly different in both area and population, but the Estonian experiment shows that there are ways to make online voting work—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Canseco, can we jump to Mr. Jewell, and then we'll have questions for you. Based on your text, I think that's a good jumping-off point because you covered a lot of issues that are important to the committee. There'll be time for questions to flesh out those issues.

Mr. Jewell, please.

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, and other members of the ERRE committee, thank you for this opportunity.

My presentation is entitled “PPR 123: Perfect Proportional Representation”, the ideal electoral system for the digital age.

Briefly, PPR one, two, three is as easy as one, two, three. Voters run the same riding system on the ballot. The voters choose their top three candidates, one, two, three. The votes are processed according to alternative vote, the same system Australia has used for almost a century. It does not need computers to do that. The difference comes in Parliament, because no first-place vote is ever thrown away. Every first-place vote is held in trust by an elected representative of the party of the voter's first-place vote and cast with every vote in Parliament, thereby giving you perfect proportional representation.

I note that Professor Russell, in his address to you, said that in his opinion the first principle should be enhancing the capacity of elections to produce a House of Commons that represents the political preferences of the people. With PPR one, two, three, we carry the votes of the citizens—the honest, uncoerced, first-place vote—into Parliament with every vote in Parliament.

Now, many experts have told you that there's no perfect voting system, and I'm calling this perfect proportional representation rather conspicuously to draw attention to it and ask you to judge whether this achieves that or not. What I can say is that all existing voting systems have many well-known and serious defects, and by now, this committee must be very well aware of them. The only logical conclusion should be to look for a better alternative.

I got to that point myself in 2004, following very closely the work of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. With my strong background in mathematics and systems analysis, I thought I should be able to make a contribution to the whole process. I first tried to invent a better system on my own and ended up reinventing the Borda count.

Then I went into serious research to see what other people had, and I found a real gem, which was my eureka moment. It was a proposal to the Citizens' Assembly called “The Seven Cent Solution: Vote Proportional Representation”, by Mr. John Kennedy of Burnaby. The key idea is the one that I've just outlined, that the body of elected representatives holds in trust all of the citizens' votes, the first-choice votes only, which are cast by proxy on their behalf with every vote in Parliament.

Each elected representative is entrusted with first-place votes. First-place votes for the losing candidates are retained by the party and reassigned to an elected representative. Some accommodation is required to avoid wasting votes on independent candidates in unrepresented parties.

Proxy voting is something we all know as the standard in corporate shareholder democracy, but in a political democracy, the way to think of it is that every adult citizen is an owner entitled to exactly one equal voting share to be entrusted in the representative. What we have now, by contrast, is that we count the votes; the winners are elected, and they go to Parliament. How many votes do they have? They have one: their own. All the citizens' votes are thrown away.

The conclusion that I want to make to you is that truly democratic representative government cannot be achieved simply by changing how the citizens vote. Truly democratic representative government can only be achieved by changing both how the citizens vote and how the Parliament votes.

PPR one, two, three, which eliminates strategic voting and wasted votes, is based on the alternative vote, thereby ensuring that every elected representative has true democratic legitimacy by being the candidate supported by a majority of the electors.

● (1530)

Then, in Parliament, we have true democratic legitimacy and absolute equitability through the voting power of each party being exactly equal to and derived from all of the first-place votes of citizens. Using the alternative vote ensures that the first-place vote is uncoerced and therefore an honest vote.

So, please, don't do anymore looking backward to previous centuries to look for the best way to do voting in the digital age.

Thank you.

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

We'll go to the first questioner, Ms. Sahota, for five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you to all our panellists who are here today. I think today has been a great day of panels. We've heard very diverse opinions from person to person, and we enjoy that.

I will start with you, Mr. Jewell.

First of all, I'd like to thank you and your lovely wife, Diana, for visiting me in Brampton and presenting me with your PPR system, perfect proportional representation, as I think you're calling it.

I think we could benefit, though, from further explanation of the system. I think we've heard it also called weighted voting. Is that true? Is that a reference you've heard? Under your system would the weight of each individual MP's vote change in the House of Commons? Is that a correct representation?

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: I wouldn't like to refer to it as a weighted vote, although mathematically you could consider it as such. As I've tried to explain, the rationale for it is that you are not voting your own single vote. You're voting all of the votes that have been entrusted to you, and that is true for all of the members, and everyone's vote is entrusted to somebody.

So, yes, you could say that's a weighted vote, and indeed, there's even a stronger reason for thinking that it might be considered in that way, because one of the issues with respect to the matter is that it could be that there are constitutional issues where some provinces may be guaranteed a certain number of seats. My solution to that one is to derive the equivalent seat total that each member would hold in trust by using the total vote and doing a simple calculation, to say so many votes is equal to so many seats. We're talking, of course, about fractional seats. And so, within Parliament itself, you would need computers to keep score of either the citizens' votes or the equivalent seat total votes instead.

● (1535)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Have you looked at a specific example that you could give us, a simulation maybe from your riding or your region?

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: The first thing to know is that this proposal is strictly neutral and scrupulously fair to all voters, all parties, and all candidates, because it goes right back to the citizens' votes and because it's using only their uncoerced vote, which doesn't exist today. I think the Broadbent report said something like 40% of the votes are strategic votes. Who knows what those people really would have preferred to do?

I did do one number, as an example. With the Green Party having only one elected member, it became fairly easy to figure out. According to the last election, the number of votes that the Green Party got would be the equivalent of about 12 seats, so when Ms. May would vote in Parliament, she would have about 12 seats.

The people who are never representatives would probably have about three-quarters of a seat. They have less than one since they would be overrepresented in Parliament because of the distortions of first past the post, which of course would not exist in the system I'm proposing.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Mr. Jewell. That cleared up some of my questions. I admire your dedication to electoral reform. You and your wife have been watching every single one of our committee meetings. I have to say that's more dedication than we expect from the average person, but you're not an average couple, I guess. So, thank you for that.

Do I have a little bit more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 25 seconds.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Canseco, how did you do your polling? What kind of a space do you have to poll? What kind of a technique do you use?

Mr. Mario Canseco: We conduct most of the surveys at Insights West through an online panel, which we operate. The idea is to recreate the representation of the country based on census targets. In the same way that the telephone pollsters of the 1980s and 1990s would rely on the phonebook, which we can't do anymore because there are many Canadians who have decided not to have a landline, what we have is essentially a large pool of Canadians who we can contact, based on the census targets, to conduct our surveys.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Reid, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you to all the panellists. You've all been very interesting. Unfortunately, I have to focus on only one of you because you have widely different subject matter.

Mr. Canseco, I wonder if I could focus on you. You conducted, to the best of my knowledge, two polls, one in February and one that was released at the end of June, in which I think you asked the same question and got more or less the same results. There didn't seem to be much movement. I'm looking at the June 28 results. In response to the question about a referendum at that time, looking at the nationwide number, 41% said there definitely should be a nationwide referendum before we change the system; 27% said probably it should be put to a nationwide referendum for a total of 68; 13% said probably a vote in the House of Commons is enough, and then only 5% said definitely a vote in the House of Commons is enough.

Have you seen any indication since that time that those numbers have shifted? Actually, the same thing applies to the question about preferences regarding proportional STV and so on.

Mr. Mario Canseco: Thank you for the question.

The number hasn't changed. The survey we conducted this month continues to show two-thirds of Canadians suggesting that this should be put to a referendum. The numbers are fairly similar for the three systems that we tested, particularly around half of Canadians saying that they would favour proportional representation, and a little bit of a clearer divide on the other two systems. The things that we added for this particular survey were the questions on mandatory voting and also questions on online voting. But it's not something that has shifted dramatically.

One of the most beautiful things about our industry is that you are able to track things over time, and this is an issue where it has consistently been at roughly the same level, given the margin of error that we operate under.

● (1540)

Mr. Scott Reid: Then you have some numbers that have not been made public that are more recent.

Mr. Mario Canseco: Yes, they will be on our website tonight. They are the numbers that I quoted earlier today.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mario Canseco: And thank you for visiting our website.

Mr. Scott Reid: Actually, I guess I'm visiting an old part of your website because I got the June 28 one. I'm on your website, but the wrong part of your website.

Seeing as I'm here, it's www.insightswest.com for what that's worth.

My party has been pushing for a referendum, as I think everybody knows. That's news to Nathan, but Nathan will know that I've regarded it as very important that a referendum has to be on something, obviously, so that is the status quo versus some alternative. To make it a realistic test of the Canadian will, I think you have it against the best alternative versions that are out there, the ones that have the best chance of succeeding. There's no point in trying to get out some kind of caricatured version that is unlikely to achieve support. So there is a best version, I believe, of multi-member proportional and a best version of STV.

I want to ask this question. This may be outside your expertise, but is it your view that if we attempted to have a referendum in which there were more than one alternative option on the ballot, as they're doing in Prince Edward Island right now, instead of just status quo versus MMP or status quo versus STV, that would increase the likelihood that Canadians would feel comfortable looking at another option?

Mr. Mario Canseco: If we were to have a referendum that included several options plus the alternative, plus another thing, plus what we have right now, it would be essentially a first-past-the-post election.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm sorry, it would be a first past the post?

Mr. Mario Canseco: Nobody would have a majority. We would be having the same complicated discussions if we don't have a clear decision between yes and no.

Mr. Scott Reid: I should have been clear. The way I understand it's being done in P.E.I. is you actually rank the ballot. It's a preferential selection among.... It's not choose one or the other. You're right, because then you could get nothing with the majority. Maybe it's not a fair question to ask you. It's simply an alternative that's been tried and I wanted your feedback on what you thought of that.

Mr. Mario Canseco: I think it really depends on the size of the exercise. In a place like P.E.I. it would probably work in a fairly simple manner. It would be easier to explain depending on how the situation goes as far as the actual promotion of what is at stake here goes, which is something that, quite frankly, we didn't have in B.C. for the last two STV referendums.

Doing it in a Canada-wide manner would definitely require a lot of information and a lot of discussions about what is at stake. I think that stands for anything that we try to do in the future as far as changing the system is concerned. If anything, the way Canadians feel about this really stands out as they may not have been following the issue too closely at this stage, but also they are definitely as informed about the options that are in front of them as most of us who are sitting in this room.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right.

I think I'm out of time, so thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you to our witnesses and the audience members who have joined us here this afternoon.

I'll start with you, Mr. Canseco. *Bienvenido, es muy interesante todas sus cosas, y yo sé que*. Our interpreters can handle that.

I wonder if you've noticed a similarity between support for proportional systems among younger voters and people from the west. Let me ask this first, and then I'll draw an inference. Why do you think that is?

Mr. Mario Canseco: I think there are two reasons behind it. One of them is definitely the fact that younger voters tend to gravitate towards parties that have not formed a government in the past. I think we've seen it in some of the federal elections, provincial elections, that I've covered. The 18-to-34 vote tends to gravitate towards parties that are not necessarily the Liberal Party at the federal stage, the Conservative Party at the federal stage, and there seems to be this tendency, especially for people who are new to democracy and are voting for the first or second time—

● (1545)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: They're idealists, yes.

Mr. Mario Canseco: —that they've lost the election, that they voted for a candidate who finished in third, fourth, or fifth place. It tends to happen more here. We've had a lot of discussions about electoral reform. We had a couple of referenda provincially that didn't reach the threshold that was established. We have been talking about this for longer, I would say, than many other Canadian provinces or regions.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That longer conversation just for the west coast....

I've been looking at the results of a Manitoba election—I'm sure you've looked at it as well—asking voters why they don't vote. It was in the non-voting category, and it was expressed by many that they felt their vote didn't count, that they lived in a riding that had a known outcome. “I live in such-and-such riding. It doesn't matter if I vote.” We hear that expressed when surveying young people on why they don't participate: “because it doesn't matter”. It's a natural human thing. Why participate in something if you have no effect on the thing?

I guess I'm inferring some alignment, also, not just with the familiarity of the conversation on the west coast, but that feeling of the alienation Mr. Moscrop talked about a little earlier. We saw this in our last election, with voters still going to the polls in B.C. hearing results from Atlantic Canada, and almost a decisive result. A lot of people say, “Why bother if my vote doesn't matter?” Votes should always matter.

The support for proportionality seems to move that way in that if I can find a system where my vote is guaranteed to matter regardless of my age or where I happen to live in the country, then I'm going to support it. Am I stretching too far here?

Mr. Mario Canseco: No, it's a fair way to analyze it. It happens mostly with voters who are age 18 to 34, more than anything because they're new to the system and they're trying to figure out what is going on and they're motivated. Maybe they're actually participating in a campaign, volunteering, donating their time or their money, and they find out that the representation they would probably like to have is not going to take place after the election.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Kam, just looking through your notes, I don't know if you land on a preferred type of voting system, if you go between the proportional or the current system at all. Do you express a preference?

Mr. Christopher Kam: No.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You don't have one?

Mr. Christopher Kam: No, I'm choosing among flawed alternatives. I think the trade-offs between them is almost perfect. So what I get from one I lose from another and....

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

So the mandate of this committee is to come up with something among these imperfections.

Here's my intuitive challenge. Mr. Jewell, I know you don't want to call it weighted, but it's the only way I can think of it. MPs who are casting their vote in the House based on your system would have a different impact, would have different significance on the outcome of any vote in Parliament. Is that correct?

Mr. Patrick Jewell: That is correct, but I would like to explain that. The party vote is exactly what it should be.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right. The final result is that if the Conservatives get 20% of the vote, they contribute to 20% of the vote.

Mr. Patrick Jewell: Let me retranslate my answer to your question.

If your party is under-represented, your weighted vote will be greater than one, as it were. If your party is overrepresented, it will be less than one, but it will rectify the distortion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'll just give you my impressions of that. I imagine that voters represented by people who have a greater weight to their MP's casting ballot will feel empowered, yet voters who have an MP representing them who's at 0.7 of a vote will not feel as great.

I know the goal you're aiming at. At an intuitive level, I could imagine people standing in the House of Commons and I could imagine voters saying, “You're my MP. I want you to vote this way.” Elizabeth has 12 votes, I have 0.75 votes, and yet we're still members of Parliament. It feels odd, I guess.

Mr. Patrick Jewell: I'm glad you've challenged this aspect of it, but I'm pleased to respond to it, as well.

The first point you made, two minutes ago, was that people living in a riding where the outcome is a known conclusion have no reason to vote. In this system, every vote counts equally, period, all the time. It solves that problem.

As to what happens in Parliament, you vote one vote. The computer says that you have 1.5 votes, 0.8 votes, or whatever, but you don't see it. You don't need to think about it. The citizen doesn't need to see it or think about it. All they know is that their wishes, as they expressed them in the election through their honest first-place vote, will be honoured with every vote in Parliament.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Good afternoon, gentlemen.

I will take this opportunity to display my knowledge of Spanish too.*Encantado, señor*

Mr. Jewell, one thing I liked in your brief was the possibility of members of Parliament voting remotely. Given that we are in Vancouver right now, we have missed four votes in the last hour. These are the sacrifices we have to make to meet with you, but the pleasure is greater than the cost, you can rest assured.

Mr. Jewell, I will have questions for you in a few minutes, but for the moment, I am going to address you, Mr. Canseco.

You said that the results of your survey will be available this evening, on your website. Can you remind us how many people were consulted? What is your sample?

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Canseco: The sample size for the survey was 1,029 Canadian adults. The standard for a nationwide survey in Canada is usually 1,000 Canadians, so this survey was consistent with any other survey we would have conducted on some other topic.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I have a question about the methodology, the way the people were selected. Do you think there was a bias that meant that people who are familiar with the issue of electoral reform were able to respond more in greater numbers, or was it a random sample, in which the man and woman on the street who were not familiar with it also responded?

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Canseco: The respondents to our surveys are not aware of the topic until the moment they click. Usually the best way to do it, to maintain their engagement and to have them answer on several things, is to mix it with other things. It's not necessarily a stand-alone survey where we invite people to take a survey on electoral reform that will be presented on Tuesday. It's more about the reality of just having the randomness that is required for this type of exercise.

There may have been other questions related to other topics on the same survey. It's the best way to ensure that it is truly random and not only the people who want to take the survey on a specific policy issue or something else.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Very good. Thank you. I am eager to check the data.

You said that 56% of the population supported what, exactly?

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Canseco: It's the proportional representation system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: All right, in general.

What were the figures for Ontario and for British Columbia?

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Canseco: They are lower. I can check them right now, if you will allow me.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: While you are looking for that information, I will ask Mr. Jewell a question.

In the system you recommend, you keep the same ridings and the person who gets the most votes wins the election. However, you use a preferential system to weight everyone's vote. Is that right?

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Jewell: No, that's not correct. The alternative vote is such that, as I think you understand the Australian example, all votes are counted, first-place votes. If the leader has 50% plus one, that person is elected. If not, the bottom candidate is eliminated, and those votes for that eliminated candidate revert to their second-place vote.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: All right.

In other words, to elect someone, we are talking about a preferential system. You know that this system tends to reduce third parties and shift votes toward the more centrist parties. So it would widen the gap between the votes cast for each party and the number of members that represent them.

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Jewell: That's a possibility, but another possibility is that, because the first-place vote is an honest vote, the third party candidate, as you refer to it, might get many more first-place votes than they do under the existing system. In any case, the first-place vote counts for that party regardless of how many members are elected.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Canseco, do you have the data you were looking for earlier?

This is a very dynamic exercise.

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Canseco: The level of support for adopting proportional representation for future federal elections is 56% in Quebec, as I already said, 53% in Ontario, and 42% in British Columbia.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: What would it be for Canada as a whole?

● (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Canseco: The number for Canada as a whole is 49%.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: What do you think the reason is for it being lower in British Columbia, when you had the process about this?

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Canseco: What's interesting about British Columbia is that the level of support is actually higher for single transferable votes, which is the system that we voted on twice in previous elections. The threshold that was set to actually change the system for our own provincial elections was 60%, which was extremely high and very difficult to reach. In the first one, there were more than 50% of B.C. voters who actually suggested that the system should be changed, and it was lower than the threshold that was set.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie. I would like to thank the witnesses.

Ms. May, you now have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you to all the witnesses who are here today.

I will just pick up on that last point about the B.C. referendum following the Citizens' Assembly. I didn't get a chance to put this to the last panel when we were discussing the threshold.

It wasn't just the 60% of the vote. As you'll recall—you're nodding, Mr. Canseco—it was also a double threshold of the number of ridings. I think it's extraordinary that 92% of the ridings carried for STV as well as 57% of the votes. Even with that double threshold, as you say, the British Columbia government failed its citizens on this.

I am just wondering, in looking at the polling that you've done, how is it that when you move to the question of, “What kind of system do you like?”, you get a high degree of, “I don't have an opinion”. Is this among those people who have an opinion and understand the systems? How many of the people would say, “I don't know what you're talking about between MMP, STV, or some other system”?

Mr. Mario Canseco: We actually provide a very lengthy explanation of the three systems, which is definitely required.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Would you like to come on the road with us?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mario Canseco: I would love to. Thank you for the invitation.

It needs to be completely clear to them that they're choosing a specific system.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Actually, I'm not kidding on this. Could we get the script that you used in a telephone call to explain the three different systems before asking people the question? I think it would be fascinating to see how you boiled it down.

How long does it take your polling interviewers to explain the systems to the people they are talking to?

Mr. Mario Canseco: Because we do it online, the time is essentially in the hands of the respondents. They can choose to take a little bit longer to read it. This is one of the topics that is very hard to do in a telephone survey. There have been a lot of discussions in the industry about whether telephone is better than online, certain discussions of that nature.

In my mind, for something like this, it's necessary for the respondents to take their time. It's not that easy to answer the phone and then listen to a lengthy explanation. It's easier to read it, and I think this is one of the reasons the survey worked so well. Even with that, around one in five respondents across Canada cannot choose a system.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm going to turn to Mr. Jewell, just because I really do need to understand your system better. It seems to me, it is perfect in proportionality, but there are other values we've been asked to look at, including inclusiveness.

I'm picturing myself here in the election. I'd certainly have the voting power to potentially work in a minority government to some greater effect, but I'm still just one person and I think I'm going to die. There are committees. There are amendments. There are debates. Of course, we'd also like to see greater proportionality in the House to be closer to the gender parity in real life in our society. Is there some way that I'm missing in which your system would increase the number of women in Parliament? I think I know the answer. It couldn't increase the number of people who are actually Green Party members working in Parliament, but would it do anything around inclusivity and increasing the proportion of women or other unrepresented groups?

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: Thank you, Ms. May.

First, I'd say again that the intent of this system is to be scrupulously fair to everyone. When we have a system that is fair, the thing that none of us can foresee is what the difference will be in the voter behaviour if they have a fair system. Therefore, I can't say that you will have more colleagues, but what I can say is that you are supremely disadvantaged in the existing system, and nobody really knows what the natural level of support for your party would be if there was an honest voting system. That's the first thing.

As to the matter of gender parity, I do have ideas on that, which I have elaborated on. I have about 30 documents on the website. Just to make it simple, I believe that the election after 2019 should be one where Elections Canada goes through a serious redistricting. One area to focus on would be to reduce the number of ridings in urban areas, because we will now have a system in which it is geography neutral or population neutral. It doesn't matter how many people are in any riding. Every citizen's vote counts the right amount, wherever they happen to be. In the case of Mr. Cullen, you have a heck of a tough riding to handle. It's tough for you. It's tough for your constituents. I don't think that's a good use of the seats in the legislature. We have so many surplus seats in the urban areas, so I'm saying Elections Canada should be tasked to squeeze out some of those surpluses and reallocate them geographically, where it would provide better service and make your efforts easier.

As for females, there is no reason that we couldn't have, within an urban area, a district where there would be six seats, three of which could be reserved for male and three for female. Then you get gender parity by the design of the system and the candidates that the parties propose for it.

You can do the same for other diversity goals that you would have. Within the urban areas, there's plenty of potential to do much smarter things with the seats that we've got.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

It's your turn, Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Professor Kam, I'm going to start with you. It seemed that you got cut off when you were responding to some of Mr. Cullen's comments about the trade-offs in different systems. This is the stuff you know, that you study. Do you have any insights? As was mentioned, we're ultimately tasked with finding an alternative to first past the post. We've heard over and over again that there are these trade-offs. What direction would you give us in our search for balance in those trade-offs or recognizing the trade-offs?

Mr. Christopher Kam: The cost of trade-off is phrased in terms of representation and accountability. Various scholars have various perspectives on that trade-off. You had Arend Lijphart before you at some point. In Professor Lijphart's view, there's no trade-off whatsoever if you put zero weight on accountability. Another view, by G. Bingham Powell, is that there tends to be a fairly tight trade-off between these two qualities. A third view, advanced by John Carey, is that the relationship between representation and accountability could potentially be subject to optimization. That is, there's some sort of sweet spot that would allow us to choose an electoral system that gives us maybe not as much representation as you could hope for, or as much accountability as you could hope for, but a good blend of both.

My sense is that the literature is relatively inconclusive. I think there are fairly good metrics for representation. I think André Blais talked to the committee about measures of ideological congruence between the population and the legislature under various electoral systems. I think the balance of evidence is that you tend to get a bit better congruence under PR, but not by much, though the variance on congruence is smaller under PR.

There's very little good work on the performance of different electoral systems in terms of accountability, because, as I was saying previously, the metric that tends to be used, cabinet stability, is not something we can say is...we can't create a cardinal metric that says there's an optimal point of cabinet stability. Zero is bad, and complete cabinet stability, where you had no turnover, would be bad, too. It's not clear where the optimal point is, so our measures for accountability tend not to be very sophisticated, whereas the measures that scholars use to measure representation tend to be better.

This debate about trade-off remains ongoing. My sense is that there's no real evidence one way or another to suggest that some electoral systems provide a sweet spot. I think you're facing really hard and fast choices in this respect. I've already stated at the outset that I think the first guiding principle you've been given, to find a system that better reflects the democratic will, is tantamount to hunting for a unicorn. There's a lot of good theoretical work to suggest that's the case.

I think you will notice, as members of Parliament, that if you scrupulously followed the majority will in your constituency issue by issue, taking one issue at a time, you would soon find yourself supported by a tiny minority in your constituency, because the intersection of all those majorities could end up to be a very small set of people. I think that's the fundamental nature of the problem.

● (1605)

Mr. John Aldag: Well, thank you for sharing those thoughts. I really was hoping there was a sweet spot we could be pointed to and we could all go home and it would be good.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deltell, please, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Gentlemen, it's a real pleasure for me to meet you.

First, Mr. Kam, I want to make a short comment on what you said, because it's quite interesting. You talked about every issue evaluated, and you will see that many people support you.

I think I'm speaking on behalf of all my colleagues here. We cannot find anyone who supports 100% of the propositions in our own parties. It's impossible. Humanly, it's impossible.

I used to say that if you hear someone say that there is 100% agreement with his program, and in every party 100% of his colleagues are agreed on 100% of that, you would have in front of you, 100%, a liar, because it is humanly impossible.

This is democracy. This is why we have to respect the fact that, usually, it's not a clear majority. People have been elected with under 50%. In my case, I've been lucky, and three times out of four I've been elected with more than 50%, as has Mr. Boulerice in his riding, twice.

It's very touchy, but at least we have a consensus on most issues. This is why we can move on the real issues of the people, even if we do not agree on all aspects.

As I said earlier, gentlemen, I welcome that kind of discussion. In our party, we always have the door open. We want a referendum, for sure, but we are open to discussion about the future of the electoral system.

This is why, Mr. Jewell, I welcome your proposition, even if I am not quite sure I understand it very well. This is why I raise this question: How do you think we can educate people about so many propositions that we have on the table? How do you think we could achieve that? Because it's not an easy task. We have run on this electoral system for the last century and more. If we want something else, it is quite a challenge.

What do you think we should do to educate people before moving on with a new electoral system?

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: Is it on the consultation that is the question?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: On the consultation, or how to educate people. It's how you tell the people that this is the new way we want to deal with the electoral system. It's simply to be sure that people understand what the issue is.

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: I think it's quite simple to explain the system. It's different, to be sure, but if you explain to people that you vote your first three choices and.... Everyone knows how leaders were elected. That's the process that is used, so that's how your individual member is elected.

People will understand that their vote will be taken forward into Parliament and trust in their elected representative, if they voted for the candidate who was elected, or someone else from that party if their candidate was defeated. I think they'll understand that pretty quickly. They'll understand that they're getting better with that system than they are under this system.

Did you ask about the question of validation for a system of this nature?

● (1610)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay, I will express myself in French so the translator will make it easier for you to understand what I tried to ask.

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: You mentioned a referendum.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I invite you to talk on that.

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: I have actually recommended a referendum on the PPR side of it. I think the government has all the power to implement the alternative vote. It's an upgrade on the first-past-the-post system. Parliament has the door to that. It's a proven system. It has been used in Australia for a century. It is the mother ship for the PPR side, so I say push forward with alternative vote, put out the PPR side to the public in a referendum, so that they have the understanding of what is being proposed and changed, and let them decide. If they wish to not have PPR, so be it.

I think that would be a pretty easy sell, because it's clearly putting more power in the hands of the people and, as was previously said, what the public wants is more power in their hands.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Is a referendum also a tool or a weapon, to give power to the people in a referendum?

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: It's your call whether you go with a referendum or not, and I'm not a huge advocate of referenda. I've seen how easily they can be perverted by political forces.

I also have an enormous respect for the role of representative government. I had a small experience as a municipally elected member. I know how hard elected members work, and it's that research and deliberation that the people really need.

If you guys are comfortable, and if you have a consensus that is cross-party, you have all the authority to go forward with this thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'd like to thank our three panellists for being here today, and of course, the members of the audience for coming out in such large numbers. Thank you so much.

This has been a really interesting panel, because you have each brought something very different to the table.

My first question is actually for Mr. Canseco. You mentioned that the poll numbers you had just recently done in September, or the press release, will be on your website. Would it be possible for you to send that data to this committee, as well as, as Ms. May mentioned, the link to the questions, exactly how it was worded? It would be very helpful. Thank you so much.

Dr. Kam, I really enjoy your blog. I've been reading it, and it's actually really interesting how you explain some of the misconceptions that are out there in terms of electoral reform, and quite frankly, some of the issues that we've been hearing.

There is one that we hear often. I'm not diluting it and I'm not saying that the perception is not out there, but we have heard multiple times that people feel that their vote didn't count. When they say that, it's usually because whoever they voted for didn't win.

Could you elaborate a little? You mentioned in your blog some of the realities of what we would actually need to do in order to satisfy that condition. I think it is quite interesting, quite honest, and frank. I appreciate that.

Mr. Christopher Kam: I don't find the argument that “my vote didn't count” under a given electoral system to be particularly compelling, because, one, I have been a scrutineer at an election before and I remember that we counted all the votes. So it's not as if people are dumping some ballot boxes. That's in a legalistic sense. We've counted all the votes.

The other sense is that “my vote wasn't pivotal in electing somebody”. Guess what? There's one median voter. They're pivotal in electing a member, and the rest of them are either surplus or not.

If you want a system that maximizes votes counting, as in votes going to elect people, then here's the system: Any candidate who gets a vote gets elected. That's the logic, right?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Right.

Mr. Christopher Kam: Then every vote will count. That's pushing the argument to the edge of absurdity. It's clearly an impossibility.

We have a system here, and some candidates are going to win and some are going to lose. That's going to happen. Some quotas under PR systems will go unused. We can have higher tiers and higher tiers, and I suppose we could exhaust them, but then we'd get a very complicated system.

There are always going to be trade-offs. As far as I know, that's just a general condition in life.

● (1615)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I know my colleague mentioned a little about trade-offs. We don't have a measure at this moment. When we look at those guiding principles, or we look at what some of the values are that Canadians put towards their electoral system, we don't know what people would be willing to trade off.

For instance, if you're talking about accountability or local representation, if that's something that is absolutely non-negotiable, not an issue, that we cannot even contemplate, we don't have concrete data to support that information that it in fact is the be-all and end-all.

How can we as a committee determine which electoral system will most satisfy those criteria without knowing which ones are more important to Canadians? What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Christopher Kam: I think the motion that sets out the committee's mandate sets it out in terms of values that an electoral system must reflect. There's no resolution, or unambiguous resolution, to satisfy all those conditions. In some cases, it's because we can't define, for example, what democratic will is, or it's hard to agree on what accountability is, and so on.

It's hard, then, to measure the trade-off we confront. What would be a better way to phrase this? If the mandate said to choose a more proportional electoral system, that's unambiguous. Right? I can measure the proportionality of an electoral system, and I can choose a proportional one.

If you want one that is decisive at the electoral stage rather than at the parliamentary stage, you ought to choose a disproportional system, a winner-take-all kind of system.

Proportionality is a value-free metric in some ways. It merely says that the slope between votes and seats is equal to one. Under an electoral system, it is or is not equal to one. That can be assessed unambiguously. As to the rest of this, I don't know how you assess these values unambiguously.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Monsieur Boulerice.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here with us this afternoon.

And thanks to the many people from Vancouver who are in the room for being passionate and interested in a fundamental subject that affects the quality of our democracy.

Our committee was given the mandate of studying the various options available to us. In the normal course of things, the 2015 election will be the last one conducted under the present electoral system, the first past the post system. I am using the English term even though I am speaking French, because it is quicker.

I have a question for you, Professor Kam. You say there are always compromises to make, because all electoral systems have advantages and disadvantages. You talked about one compromise in particular relating to accountability. There is also a compromise to be made between the proportionality of a system and the value of local representation. We have heard a lot about that in recent weeks and this summer, when people came to see us. You can have a system where local representation is very strong, but the distortions are also very strong.

The existing system creates distortions that are so large that the will of the people is sometimes overturned. We saw that situation at the federal level in 1979, as well as in British Columbia and three times in Quebec, in 1944, 1966 and 1998. The party that got the most votes lost the election.

Professor Kam, do you think that the fact that this kind of system can overturn the will of the electorate is a fundamental democratic problem?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Kam: The question, then, is about when you have a party that wins second place in the popular vote but forms government, that's a problem. Yes, that can be a problem. Ideally, we wouldn't like that. It's rare, but it happens. But I can point to other problems in other systems. When you have a centrist party that gets to make a coalition or be in a minority position regardless of what happens to its vote share, that also would be a problem. That's why I put forward a metric of the responsiveness between shifts in power with respect to shifts in votes.

I'm a little uneasy talking about what the voters' will is. Remember that these results of wrong-winner governments come about mostly because of the accumulation of votes, not just within ridings, but mostly the aggregation across ridings, so it could be that one party won very big in some ridings and very small in others. These distortions can happen either at the electoral stage—where that's what happens in the first past the post—or they can happen at the parliamentary stage, when you have a proportional system that generates the need to form coalitions.

There is a recent paper by G. Bingham Powell, of the University of Rochester, that basically says the propensity for these sorts of—what shall we call them—distortions to emerge is about equal under the two systems, it's just that they occur in different places in the electoral process. In the proportional system, they're almost always going to have to occur in the parliamentary formation of coalition governments, where parties could conceivably lose votes, yet because their ideological location gives them a bargaining advantage, they get into cabinet. Would we call that a distortion?

That's why I'm saying I'm a little.... We're making choices in a less-than-perfect world, so there is no first best electoral system. This is akin to buying the used car that you can. No matter which electoral system you get, it's like a used car. It's going to have some dings in it, and you're going to discover some of those problems once you drive it for a little while.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Professor Kam. I think our committee is going to try to use Mr. Churchill's precept, when he said that democracy was the worst of the existing systems, except all the others. We are going to try to improve the best of the imperfect systems.

Mr. Jewell, I would like to ask you a question. I heard the explanation of your system just now. We have not done this for a long time, but I would like to read you a question from Keith Spoors on Twitter. He asks you what would happen, under your system, if a party did not elect any members, but got 3% or 4% or 5% of the votes. You assign different weight to the votes for each member. There might still be the possibility of a party getting 6% everywhere in the country but not electing any members. In that case, there is no way to assign any weight, or not, to that popular vote.

[*English*]

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: Yes, thank you for the question.

That's what I was alluding to with the simple statement that some accommodation is necessary to avoid wasting votes for independent candidates or parties that don't elect anyone. The possibilities I see would be to set a threshold, and that's a common thing in proportional systems. Set a threshold of 3%, 4%, or 5%, whatever it is, and if the party reaches that, then they are assured representation extraterritorially from a seat. It could be picked from the strongest defeated candidate or the leader of a small party, whatever.

You would have to do that. For the independent candidates, my thought was to have an ombudsperson type of idea where any of the otherwise unrepresented votes or independents would have some representation in a non-partisan form.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thanks to all of you for attending our session today. I've heard some excellent testimony and some new ideas that haven't come out so far this week.

I'll start with Dr. Kam. Thank you for your contributions so far in discussing the inherent trade-offs that have to be made or that are made when comparing the different systems. Your characterization of hunting for unicorns is particularly appropriate when I think of some of the presentations we've heard or remarks from the floor that simultaneously placed value on having an individual representative from their riding who can represent them because they know the local people and they are accessible to local people, but at the same time they desire a proportional system. These are trades. You can't have a perfect balance of these. We've heard this literally in the same breath of the people demanding proportional representation, and are also saying “but I still want to keep my local member of Parliament”.

In your opening remarks you said a number of things, and I was struck by the talk of majoritarian systems and their responsiveness to change. I'd like to give you a minute to explain that a little more fully if you care to.

● (1625)

Mr. Christopher Kam: Okay, the idea I was trying to set out is that one of the things I think we would like, and that anybody would like in an electoral system, is that there ought to be what we call a monotonic relationship between changes in the votes and changes in the legislative power. If a party gains votes, then it ought to gain legislative power. If it loses votes, and particularly if an incumbent government loses votes, then it ought to lose some power to continue to effect its policy agenda.

If we take that as a metric—and I'm open to hearing counter-arguments as to why that might not be a good metric—it's clear that majoritarian systems outperform proportional ones in the sense that if you take the votes from an incumbent government under a majoritarian system, then their power falls at a much faster rate than under a proportional system.

That can be tempered with a couple of remarks. It's still a positive relationship under PR systems. The worst performing system wasn't a proportional one, it was the Japanese electoral system, the old electoral system and the single non-transferable vote, which had the remarkable property that changes in votes were entirely uncorrelated to shifts in power. That's quite an accomplishment. It's good for incumbents, perhaps, but less so for voters.

We can take the New Zealand case as one, and there the responsiveness fell by half. These numbers are not for any given metric, but we can say that responsiveness declined in New Zealand. What did they get in return for that? They got more proportional representation.

It's up to how people made that choice. I don't know, I'm not a political philosopher, so I don't have guidelines for them on that.

Mr. Pat Kelly: In a majoritarian system such as the present one, it's much easier to get rid of an unpopular government. People don't vote for the incumbent party and they get a new government.

Mr. Christopher Kam: Yes, majoritarian systems would be a family of systems that includes first past the post, the Australian alternative vote system, and the French two-round system. The shared quality of these things is they have a district magnitude of one. That really tends to be what determines how majoritarian a system is.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you.

Do I have time for another question?

The Chair: A 20-second statement would be all.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I wanted to ask Mr. Canseco if he had any more up-to-date data than what we heard earlier about the number of Canadians who are intently engaged in this process.

Mr. Mario Canseco: The number of Canadians who are intently engaged in this process is fairly low. Looking at the numbers, it's probably around 25% to 30% who are following this either very closely or somewhat closely.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Actually, Mr. Canseco, following on the last statement you made that your polling would indicate that possibly 25% to 30% of Canadians are following the process closely or very closely, I wonder if you can elaborate further on what that means in your polling and how that would differentiate from the evidence we received from Darrell Bricker, which broke us down to possibly 3% of Canadians following this process closely.

Mr. Mario Canseco: I think different companies would have different methodologies and ways in which to ask a question. We've been asking questions about specific policy issues for the past three years using the same metric. There are certain times when you can get 50% or 60% of Canadians to be completely involved in certain discussions. We see it at the municipal level with specifications related to elections. We see it provincially, depending on certain decisions that are happening such as the pipeline issue in B.C.

So 30% might seem low, but it's still considerable. Three out of 10 Canadians are discussing this at the dinner table and talking to their friends. It seems low in comparison with other things that are generating more attention, but, ultimately, this is also the fault of the media that we follow. The fact that the two tables behind me are empty should serve as a careful analysis of the interest that the media in this province is putting into this issue.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Do you have any particular idea why your percentage would bias higher than Darrell Bricker's?

Mr. Mario Canseco: It's too difficult for me to comment on somebody else's surveys, and I don't think I should go there.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thanks very much.

Mr. Jewell, in your follow-up testimony to questioning, you believe that we should go ahead and move to an AV system and run a referendum on the perfect proportional representation. Is that what you concluded?

Mr. P. Jeffery Jewell: I did feel that a referendum on the PPR side, since it is unprecedented, is something that would need to have public acceptance, and I do believe that's quite achievable because of the merit and the nature of it. I think it's also something that's easy to explain to people, and especially, I think it's easy because it won't have the political opposition of opportunism, which we certainly witnessed here in British Columbia. The political parties had reasons to defeat that recommendation. I don't think they'll have the same motivation to defeat PPR because it is scrupulously fair to everyone.

Since I may not have another chance to talk on this, I'd like to also say that the relationships within the political world should also benefit enormously because, on the alternative vote side, you don't win by undercutting your opponent; you win by getting secondary support. In Parliament, you are not likely going to have a majority, and you need to work with other people, whether it's a coalition or a minority government, whatever.

I think the nature of having a truly honest voting system, where the political parties cannot gain by slagging one another, should help politics in elections. The public's fed up with this kind of nonsense, as you well know, but it wins. Unfortunately, under the system we have, that kind of bad behaviour is rewarded and, under an honest system, it will be punished.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much.

Professor Kam, you spoke about the relative trade-offs and merits of proportional systems versus first past the post. Could you speak to the possible trade-offs, merits, or pitfalls we and Canadians should be aware of when talking about alternative vote versus first past the post?

Mr. Christopher Kam: In some respects, the alternative vote—

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: —and/or alternative vote versus proportional representation.

Mr. Christopher Kam: First of all, let's take alternative vote versus first past the post. In many respects, these are going to be very similar systems in terms of their aggregate results because they have a district magnitude of one. If you look at the history of the Australian state and federal elections, you're going to find that the alternative vote generates a fair amount of disproportionality simply because of that district magnitude of one. However, you're also going to have a little more room for independents and smaller parties to get in on the basis of preferences. There are some arguments that centrist parties, parties that are positioned to capitalize on second preferences, do better under that sort of system. If you look at the Australian experience, the Labor Party sees itself as a right against two centre-right parties, and it gets power sometimes and gets to effect its agenda.

With respect to first-past-the-post and mixed systems, I think what we need to understand about the mixed member proportional system is that it is a proportional representation system. The district level representation is peripheral or subordinate to the proportional representation element.

Mixed systems are motivated by the idea that we can get the best of both worlds—we get a proportional result and we get local representation. I think they've been tried with, as I would expect, various results around the world. The German experience has been largely positive. The New Zealand experience has been, on the whole, satisfactory, although with different people complaining about different aspects of the system. The one aspect that gets on people's nerves a bit is the issue of dual candidacy. Here, if you lose an election, you lose an election. When you have dual candidacy, the members are allowed to contest the district and the list, and this can almost always ensure their election or at least insulate them from defeat. My reading of this is that it has gotten on people's nerves in New Zealand, but it's not a huge problem.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes our very interesting panel. There was a lot to get into in terms of mathematics and theoretical foundations. That was a slightly different flavour than we've had for a little while. It gives us a lot of substance for our report, and for that we're very grateful to the witnesses.

We're going to move on to the open mike. You're free to stay for the open mike.

In the open-mike session, we have 22 people. Comments are limited to two minutes. I know it sounds short, but it has worked everywhere else, so it's just a question of really taking the time to focus on the main points that you want to get across.

We have two mikes at the front. We'll make sure that there is always someone at each mike so that when one person is finished the other person is ready to go.

With that in mind, I will call up Mr. Timothy Jones and Mr. Maxwell Gerald Anderson.

Mr. Jones is at mike one. We'll start with Mr. Jones for two minutes, please. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Timothy Jones (As an Individual): Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak.

You should have a handout which I've made up, and is in both languages. The first page shows the five ridings in the Fraser Valley, one of which I live in, and it shows the results of the 2015 election. The coloured portion of each chart represents the votes that succeeded in electing a member, and those other areas with the white sections show those votes that failed to elect anyone, not active votes. You can see from the material there that 44.2% of the votes actually actively elected, and 55.8% of the votes failed to elect anyone.

Turning the page, I chose to amalgamate the five first-past-the-post ridings into one multi-member district, and set a single transferable vote threshold. I found that I could elect two Conservative MPs, two Liberal MPs, and one New Democrat MP. You can see from this that we have a proportional result arising simply from the fact that we changed to a multiple member district. Because there are five members in the district, the competition between candidates is significant. Candidates are inclined to represent their voters very strongly.

The single transferable vote is a representative system. Because of the multiple winners, they each have a direct mandate from their voters and are responsible to them. The increased competition for seats loosens the party control over the MPs and increases choices for voters. STV is proportional. It's representational, primarily, and proportion follows naturally in this system. No additional compensation is needed to secure the proportion.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you. I think this visual is very powerful in terms of making the point about STV, and I thank you for distributing this. It's useful.

Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Maxwell Anderson (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, I'm surprisingly going to propose to you that your committee add an emphasis on deciding which voting system politicians would like.

To begin, the biggest problem is that half the voters do not have the representative they want in Ottawa. Any PR system would improve on that. Another big problem is regionalism, such as the shortage of opposition members from the Atlantic region and of government members from the Prairies. Any PR system would solve that.

Among the family of PR systems, the experts most commonly favour mixed member proportional. Fair Vote Canada's version, called rural-urban PR, would give excellent results. Another version, Sean Graham's dual member mixed proportional, is closer to our present system.

I will also mention a primitive version of STV we are submitting to the committee, called neighbourhood shared voting. Neighbourhood shared voting is exactly the same as our current system, except that the ballots which have not helped to elect the winner are shared out among the neighbouring ridings using two simple rules. Computer simulations of the last five elections show neighbourhood shared voting produces PR and fixes the regionalism problem.

The three PR systems I've mentioned have minor differences in terms of sorting out nominations and servicing constituents, and they will produce virtually the same results once members get to Ottawa.

Therefore, I believe the committee should recommend whichever PR system you feel would be most liked by the politicians and voters. I emphasize the need for the politicians to like the system because that is crucial to attracting the best candidates.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hutcheon.

● (1645)

Mr. David A. Hutcheon (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, and committee members, my name is David Hutcheon. I am a co-author of a brief proposing change to a version of mixed member proportional that has one single vote and no lists. If you haven't already read our 3,000-word submission, I have a shorter version in the from of a 17-syllable haiku available on request.

I wish to make two brief comments.

First, I view alternative voting and closed party lists as cures that are worse than the disease, and I would vote against them if offered the opportunity.

This brings me to my second point: a referendum is necessary, but not necessarily a referendum. The voting system has a huge impact on the success, even the survival of political parties. It may be impossible to convince the public that a change was made or opposed for anything but partisan advantage. Public acceptance may require a referendum. The kind of referendum should be something akin to the Prince Edward Island multiple choice, with the result to be serving as guidance to the politicians afterwards, the government and opposition. That may mean you don't make the 2019 deadline. If that happens, it's still better to do the job right than to try to meet some artificial deadline.

Thank you for your attention and thank you for all your hard work.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Lesley Bernbaum, could you come to the mike, please.

We'll ask Ms. Munro to speak for two minutes.

Ms. Krista Munro (As an Individual): My name is Krista Lee Munro. I live here in the west end, in the federal riding of Vancouver Centre. I'm a public transit bus operator in the city and am an elected representative and activist in my union, Unifor. My union work includes education, working on social justice and political action, including work on elections and electoral issues.

I'm here today because my membership is ready for electoral reform. At our national convention in August, delegates representing over 300,000 Canadians voted overwhelmingly to support change to our electoral system. We don't want to have to counsel our members to vote strategically in the next federal election. We want change.

I'm not going to offer my opinion on what form of proportional representative voting I think we should use. It's not an area I know a lot about. I'm not a political scientist.

What I am is a bus driver, and in this town bus drivers do know a lot about referendums. I hear every day from people who voted yes in our transit referendum and people who voted no in our transit referendum. Both groups of people are unhappy. Referendums don't work for complex issues. It won't work for this.

Unifor doesn't want a referendum or other process that will make proportional voting impossible at the next election. I don't want a referendum. I have here a loonie I got in my change earlier today. It commemorates 100 years of women having the vote in Canada. I'm not going to get into the big asterisk that should be asterisked, that not all women got that vote until 1960, but what I am going to say is if that referendum were called in 1916 or 1917, or 1949 or 1953, or any of the other times select groups of women were granted the right to vote, it would not have passed. It would have taken years and years for those voting rights to be granted. We don't have years and years. This opportunity is once in a lifetime and may never come again.

A large majority of MPs elected in our most recent federal election stated they were committed to electoral reform. They were elected with a clear mandate to eliminate first past the post, to govern. The Canadian people have already voted on this issue.

Again, I and Unifor are calling for a new electoral system where we maintain a local representative, where our politicians are elected proportionally to the votes they received, and where every vote counts.

Thank you.

The Chair: Just a moment, please.

I would just remind people to not speak too quickly for the benefit of the interpreters. A normal pace is fine.

Go ahead, Ms. Bernbaum.

Ms. Lesley Bernbaum (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, an impassioned bus driver is a tough act to follow. We have to appreciate our bus drivers.

I have a slightly different point of view.

I've listened really well today. This is the first one I've attended, and it's been really interesting. I can appreciate the tough challenge you all have.

However, I feel strongly that ultimately, the decision on changing essentially how we vote, our democratic system here, has to be made by the people, has to be made by Canadian voters, and not simply politicians. We've heard that. We can't have political parties making decisions as to what the ultimate picture is going to look like.

Now, I don't have an opinion for you on what I think is going to be best, whether we stick with the current system or adopt something else, but I'm concerned—and I've heard it today—about the timeline for your process. I think people do need to be informed. People need to be educated, and we have to have a chance to have that dialogue.

I would like to make sure that the cart, so to speak, is not put before the horse. I feel that having a referendum of some sort—and the challenge will be what question to ask people—is the way to go first. I'm not necessarily in favour of presenting an alternative and then asking people to say if they like it or not.

What would be really terrific is to ask people if they wish change or would they like to stay with the current system, and if they wish change, to ask what change would make the most sense.

That's the bottom line. The national collective voters' voice must count and come first, and from my point of view, that means to do some kind of referendum. I highly urge you to consider that and not allow the timeline to interfere.

Also, don't make budget an issue. The government spends money. If the process is needed, let's do it, but let's do it right. I've heard people say that. We can do it well.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If Mr. Forster can take mike number 1, we'll move on now with Mr. Mills, for two minutes, please.

Mr. Maurice Mills (As an Individual): Hello. I'm Maurice Mills, second vice-president of Unifor Local 114. I won't enumerate the seven questions we were asked to ask ourselves.

Electoral reform is important to all Canadians. In the last several elections, a party that got 37% of the vote formed a minority government, and a party that got 39% of the vote formed a majority government. The result is that 60% of the people who voted have no power in Parliament.

This system dates back several hundred years, to a time when the majority of the population was illiterate and did not vote. Decisions were made by an elite class that held all the power. The only strength to this system is that it is old, and the majority of voters understand how it works. In a time when the majority of voters can not only read and write but are also computer literate, the system needs to change. An educated population is not satisfied with a winner-take-all system. The majority of voters want to vote for a candidate who represents their beliefs and see those beliefs represented in Parliament. Canadians have demanded proportional representation.

One of the negatives about the first-past-the-post system is strategic voting. Ironically, the Liberals formed a majority government in the 42nd Parliament because of strategic voting. There was a significant movement in 2015 to stop Harper. Voters were encouraged to vote for the candidate in the riding who was most likely to defeat the Conservative candidate, regardless of their political affiliation. Many whose political beliefs are more closely tied to the NDP or Green Party voted Liberal in order to defeat the Conservative government. The Liberals would do well to remember that works both ways.

One of the reasons the Liberal Party was the strategic candidate of choice was Justin Trudeau's promise that in the next federal election, every vote would count. Every vote will count only with proportional representation. In the 2015 election, the Liberals got 54% of the seats with 39% of the vote, and 100% of the power.

Democracy works best when every vote has an equal voice. The whole of Canada should be represented, not just the interests of the governing party. The present system does not give every MP equal opportunity to represent the constituents or those who voted for a second party or a defeated candidate. The only way to ensure that every vote counts is through proportional representation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Forster, for two minutes, please.

Mr. Ian Forster (As an Individual): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. I'll save some time, because what I was going to say is very similar to what Mr. Jewell had to say.

I think it's really important to allow proportional representation. There seems to be a very simple way to do it, perhaps simpler than his method, and this would be if people go to vote and they vote one person who's a member of a party, and when they all get together and sort themselves into their parties those parties have votes that are based on the proportion of the election that was most recently held.

In other words, he used the example of the Green Party, and one person in that case would have the same proportion as the number of votes that they had. One difference that I might add is to have two votes. One would be the name of the people in the riding and one would be the party. Then you would have the choice of voting. They don't have to be the same.

At the end of the day, you would have the person who had the most votes who would be elected in that riding, but when they assembled together in Ottawa, it would be based on the result of the parties at that time.

Thank you.

● (1655)

The Chair: Open list is what you'd like to see.

Mr. Grinshpan.

Mr. Myer Grinshpan (As an Individual): Good afternoon, my fellow Canadians.

I would like to explain why changing the electoral system without a referendum sets a dangerous precedent. Without a referendum, we will provide a catalyst for the breakup of Canadian Confederation.

I remind everyone that in the 1995 Quebec vote, the separatists lost their drive by 1.16%. I still remember the words of a prominent separatist who proclaimed, and I quote, “the next time we get in power, we will separate unilaterally.”

If this government changes our current system without a referendum, this will give the separatists a dangerous precedent that they can unilaterally separate without consulting citizens. The Wild Rose Party will use the same principle to break Alberta away from Canada. This process of unilateral change is illegitimate without a referendum.

I respectfully demand that every Canadian have an identical opportunity to have their point of view counted. This view goes back as far as 1948. When Newfoundland decided to join Confederation, it was done by a referendum. Remember that our Canadian Confederation has survived many obstacles in almost 150 years. Are we ready to cause the breakup of our great experiment in coexistence?

Remember, united we stand, divided we fall. Do not accept the argument that we are a strong Confederation. If we break with legal precedence, one mistake can get this Confederation to fall apart. Are we ready to watch the breakup of Confederation and break up our great country?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Huntley, please.

Mr. David Huntley (As an Individual): Thank you very much for this opportunity.

I'm a professor emeritus of physics at Simon Fraser University, and a member of a small group of citizens called Burnaby/New Westminster Citizens for Voting Equality.

We've been working on getting electoral systems in place at several levels of government over the past nine years, systems that are fair to the voters. The basics are very simple. Every voter should have the same legislated power. I want you to put that into your mind. Every voter should have the same legislated power. If anyone doesn't agree with that, you're going to have to come out and tell me who should have more legislated power than others. I don't think it can be done.

The most important function of a member of Parliament is voting on legislation. An MP cannot vote yes to a bill with the right hand, and no with the left hand. An MP cannot represent everyone in his or her electoral district. In practice, an MP only represents about half the constituents. From this it follows necessarily that an electoral district must have several members of Parliament, multi-member districts.

There are about 50,000 actual voters in an electoral district. What we need to do is to form groups of 50,000 voters who have similar ideas, similar values, and each group to elect their representative, each group to elect their MP. This can be done with suitable ballots on which the voters indicate their preferences.

The best known system for doing this is STV. Voting in it is simple. The ballot has a list of candidates and the voter ranks some of them first, second, third, etc., as many as they want. The counting system is designed to accomplish the objective. STV is a candidate-centred system that gives the voters the most power. Thoughtful and popular independents can readily get elected without great expense.

It gives a party MP the power to exercise independence from the party since, if ejected, he or she can be re-elected as an independent. In these respects STV is superior to MMP, which is a party-centred system.

STV was the voters' choice in British Columbia in 2004.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll hear now from Ms. Milner.

Ms. Gail Milner (As an Individual): My first concern is the lack of publication for the hearings.

The Chair: The lack of what? I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

Ms. Gail Milner: The lack of publication for the hearings. I had to go looking, and the people in this room are those who went looking. Anyway, I acknowledge that it's not the committee members' territory, so you're not at fault in that, but I'm just disappointed.

Forty years ago I remember explaining to my then eligible-to-vote daughter about the split vote and what happens, and trying to get that through her head. Now, 40 years later, my granddaughter will be eligible to vote for the first time in the next federal election.

I am not a member of any political party, so I'll probably misquote Jack Layton who said something to the effect that if we wait until we have everything perfect, we won't get anything done, so try to go with what we have.

This committee represents Parliament. You're getting so much more information than I am able to comprehend, a lot of the public is not able to comprehend. I have to trust you. I do trust you. I trust that you're going to work together, that you'll come up with consensus, that there will be give and take, that you will recommend to Parliament, hopefully on a non-partisan basis, what you feel is best. Make the recommendation to Parliament, have a free vote in Parliament, and then have Elections Canada educate the public.

Speaker number four stated not necessarily a referendum. I'm actually against a referendum for a lot of reasons that you have heard before, but if necessary have a referendum, but not this or that. Give a choice at least.

Good luck and thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Tunner, it's your turn.

Mr. Alex Tunner (As an Individual): My name is Alex Tunner. I'm a retired engineer.

The first-past-the-post system has three problems. One is false majorities, where you often elect a candidate with 30% of the vote and sometimes even 28%. It has a relatively poor proportionality, which is point number two. Point number three is the question of lost votes.

Why not start by thinking about the objectives and values a reformed system should have? I have a paper, which I've left at the front desk, and have listed eight, but you can pick the ones you want. Once you've set your objectives, only then start focusing on the kind of system. I find that the discussions are often meandering. We have some new ideas, but a lot of the discussion meanders around AV, PR, MMP, STV, and so on. In regard to my multiple objectives, let's devise a system that balances these objectives.

In order to give this scheme a name, I've called it balanced voting. How about a made-in-Canada system that doesn't necessarily replicate what is going on elsewhere?

Objective number one is democracy. As Mr. Loenen said, it should be a candidate-based system. I'm not keen on having unelected party backrooms make up voting lists for us.

Majority rule is important. My idea of a balanced vote has two different aspects to it. One is at the riding level, where we'd have a first choice and a second choice. I don't think a third choice is valid because it may not actually be a proper choice. In the second step, you take the riding results to do what's called a proportionality check. The proportionality check takes the losing candidates from the ridings and lists them in decreasing order of their per cent vote, and there's a formula for selecting, at large, top-up candidates from the list.

Everybody has run the gauntlet of constituency contests—

● (1705)

The Chair: Are you able to give this to our analysts?

Mr. Alex Tunner: Yes.

The Chair: That would be helpful, because it's a bit easier to grasp in written form at that level.

Mr. Alex Tunner: It is in written form.

One final thing I'd like to say is that I consider this system that you have going here pretty good, because Parliament is pretty close to being a citizens' assembly. This is an honest, well-meaning group.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alex Tunner: Let's collect the myriad of information that's been written over the years and let you be the chef in the kitchen who makes an omelette out of all the ingredients you have. There's no point in looking for unicorns.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McLaren.

Mr. Jason McLaren (As an Individual): Thank you to the committee for coming all this way across the mountains to hear us.

I have three things that I'd like to tell you with my two minutes.

First of all, I've been voting since I was 18, and never once has the person I voted for been elected. Last year I held my nose and voted strategically, and even that person didn't win. That's 22 years of wasted votes. I figure I have about 10 elections left in me before I line up at that big polling station in the sky, and just once I would like my vote to count. Proportional representation can make that happen. Canada has about a 50% rate of wasted votes. Other countries that use PR have about a 5% rate. This is something we can do.

Second, I've felt left out of the divisive politics of the last decade at the federal level, and so have many of my contemporaries. We've had a minority of voters elect a false majority government that didn't do a good job of engaging with people who disagreed with it. The result was many laws and policies that made voters angry at the government. I would rather have a system where coalitions that may disagree with each other work out compromises that everyone can live with. Proportional representation can do this too.

Third, regarding a referendum, in the last decade I've voted in four provincial referendums, in Ontario and in British Columbia, and it turns out that they are a terrible way to make political decisions. They are polarizing; they provide a lot of misinformation, and they're just a way for politicians to avoid making tough decisions. Many of you promised to change the voting system. We elected you as representatives, and now you have our permission to make our votes count.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Gavin McGarrigle, it's your turn.

● (1710)

Mr. Gavin McGarrigle (As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Gavin McGarrigle and I live in Surrey, British Columbia. I'm a father of two children, ages 9 and 13. I'm also very active on transit issues and in my community of South Surrey—White Rock, I have a little bit of experience representing people in this province. Unifor represents about 27,000 people in British Columbia, and I'm the B.C. area director for that. I also have a bit of experience with referendums.

The fact of the matter is that power does not like change. To those who are arguing for a referendum, just be honest with Canadians. Tell everyone you don't want the system to change and that's why you want a referendum.

We've already had referendums here in British Columbia, and the fact of the matter is, a majority have already voted to change the voting system. In 2004, a majority of people in a majority of ridings voted to change the system, but because the politicians messed around with it, it required a supermajority, and it didn't pass. A few years later, there was another referendum. It was divisive.

Recently, you heard about the transit referendum. In that referendum, I served as the labour co-chair for the largest coalition that has ever been put together in British Columbia history, the Better Transit and Transportation Coalition. I can tell you for a fact, from being on the inside, that there is no way you can talk to people about all of the different projects and the nuances that you're hearing about here, in a referendum. It doesn't make sense.

Canadians have already voted to change the voting system. A majority of the parties have already said they want to see some system. The parties that won power and the Prime Minister clearly said that this would be the last election for the first-past-the-post system. That's what needs to be done, and that's what this committee needs to do. Take it back and put in the voting system, and don't give in to those who just want to keep things the same.

I don't want my 13-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son to stand up and say that they're not going to vote because it doesn't make a difference. We want more people engaged in the electoral system, not fewer.

Thank you very much for everything you're doing, and don't listen to the entrenched interests.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Prest, you have the mike for two minutes.

Mr. Richard Prest (As an Individual): Good afternoon.

I believe we have what we call a consensual democracy. I think that's what people want. The biggest threat to that democracy is corporate power. Corporatocracy, where money actually replaces the power of the vote, is not a functional democracy.

Attempts to undermine the law, regardless of motivation, are detrimental to the social order. One refusal to enforce the laws we have amounts to lawlessness. One person or an official can make law without justice through a process that is not the law at all. That is a dictatorship. Tomorrow, you may cry for the enforcement of these laws you refused to follow when it was to your benefit.

I think the real issue is what you get when you vote. They come up, and promises are made but never meant to be kept. That's what we get.

The two permits that were issued, including today's, are a prime example of that. We have a tremendous number of people against some of these projects, and it's understandable, but there's no bite to our vote. We elect these people, and then they just do what they want.

That is my point. I think we should think about what exactly we are getting, because we're on the hook for everything. We are the gold standard. We are the silver and the gold of this country. We pay for everything.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Brown, the floor is yours for two minutes.

Ms. Valerie Brown (As an Individual): I'm going to make 100% of us happy by being very short.

I have spent the last three months doing an online survey of all ages across Canada, and the consensus that I was able to conclude was that we must have a referendum that will also include at least three of the most simple aspects of electoral reform. They must be simple so that people are willing to understand them and vote on them.

Thank you to this wonderful committee for your work and your effort.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much and thank you for your kind words.

Mr. Keith Poore, you have the floor for two minutes.,

Mr. Keith Poore (As an Individual): First, I'd like to thank everyone on the committee for travelling to Vancouver. I know it's a bit of a trek from Ottawa.

I'm a 26-year-old. I've gone through three elections. I've voted in only two. I couldn't get to the polling station in time for my first one, so I missed out.

The problem I had with going to the polling station the second and third times is that I didn't feel as though the candidates actually represented me. There was a candidate in the neighbouring riding, in Toronto Centre, that I felt represented me, and I wish I could have voted for that person. If we had multi-member ridings, I would have been happy voting for someone I wanted to vote for instead of either strategically voting, thinking about strategically voting, or voting my conscience while knowing I wasn't going to get what I wanted, a representative in Ottawa who would represent my point of view.

If we continue down this path of staying with first past the post or even if we switch over to AV, that will continue to happen. As a young person, I know this is resonating with other young people. I may not be represented in my current riding because the options are limited or the opinions are not stated or shared with the current candidate pool. I wish that we would move to a proportional system or move to a multi-member riding with a proportional system, and that way everyone's vote would be represented and the young generation could ensure that they would be represented in Parliament.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sepehri, it's your turn.

Mr. Bijan Sepehri (As an Individual): I'm here because after having voted in every election I've ever been eligible for, I don't think first past the post has served us well. Some people have said it has served us well over the years, but I disagree. The system has been obsolete for nearly a century, since more than two parties have been on the scene.

More than two parties is the reality of the political scene. It is never going to go back to being just team red versus team blue. I think everybody needs to take that into account. I think the system must take that into account. Quite frankly, first past the post, of all the examples you've been given—and I'm sure there are dozens—is the worst of all possible systems. Even AV, a majoritarian system that it is, is preferable to it, but my own personal inclination is for a mixed member proportional or STV.

The main reason I'm here is that I've seen government after government after government with absolute power that they do not deserve. Quite frankly, a minority of votes should never be getting a majority of seats. I realize that each of you sitting here in the committee was elected under this system. This government and the previous one were elected under this system, but I think it takes a bit of self-sacrifice by our parliamentarians for the good of the nation. Get rid of first past the post immediately and decisively, and then have your further discussions or votes, whatever it may come to, about what replaces it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Watt, the floor is yours.

Ms. Alison Watt (As an Individual): *Bonjour.* Good afternoon, everybody. I want to thank the committee for the work it's been doing over the summer.

For many years the first-past-the-post system has resulted in the election of governments that are supported by a minority of voters. By all measures, millions of votes don't count in elections. They're wasted votes, having no local or national impact. My own vote hasn't counted for decades. Then there are people who don't vote because they know that their vote can't possibly count.

● (1720)

My right to vote, as guaranteed in section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is infringed upon by the current first-past-the-post system. My right to vote is negated by the fact that my vote doesn't actually count for anything. Therefore, I am being denied meaningful participation in Canadian democracy. If we go on denying millions of Canadians meaningful participation in the democratic process, particularly young Canadians, why should they believe in it? Why should they support it? How could they possibly trust it?

We urgently need to change our voting system to a proportional system that has local representation, and I personally prefer MMP or STV. I believe these changes would produce a more collaborative and effective Parliament.

Let us have proportionality in our electoral system for 2019, and —we haven't heard anything about this today—a reduction in the voting age to 16. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser, go ahead.

Mr. Grant Fraser (As an Individual): Good afternoon.

I live in Vancouver East. The first response I got to the request of my MP, Jenny Kwan, to be kept informed of the progress of this special committee, was to be told about the NDP proposal for electoral reform.

Please, stop lying to us about who you represent after the election. It's the parties not the constituents.

I think there are four problems of varying degrees with the work you're doing.

First, the Liberal position, that alternative vote is their preferred choice, is so bad that it has the possibility with some voter demographics of being worse than first past the post. Brilliant. That's a fine example of why not to trust Liberal politicians.

Next is the NDP proposal for MMP. I don't discount MMP completely, but most models are problematic, and that is certainly the case with the NDP concept.

If I had to choose between these two ideas in a referendum, I would almost certainly remain a proud non-voter, which brings me to point number three, a potential referendum. It is a bad idea. It would heavily rely not only on easily misinformed people who are unaware of how voting systems and governments function, but also large groups of people who support the electoral option that favours their party of choice.

The only idea worse than a referendum would be problem number four, leaving it in the hands of the 12 biased individuals with conflict of interest written all over their work to make a non-binding recommendation to a group where the power to make law undemocratically stems from less than 30% of registered voters and less than the number of people who, like myself, are so fed up with your processes that we opt out rather than condone your system.

Instead, what should be done? Simply impose a working system. Nothing is perfect, but it must contain three elements: use a ranked ballot, apply the Condorcet criteria, and ensure a large degree of proportional representation.

The Liberal and NDP proposals fail on two out of those three concepts, and the pathetic Conservative strategy to aid retention of the status quo fails on all three. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Harris.

Mr. Benjamin Harris (As an Individual): Thank you for letting me speak today.

Canada is a constitutional democracy. While there is no constitutional precedent for how to make a decision on this matter, I find it strange that our electoral system is not defined in the Constitution and that the current party in power can change our electoral system.

There is a spectrum of political philosophies that exist in this world, often defined by left and right wing. In looking at the historic leadership in Canada, there is a definite movement back and forth—left to right, right to left, blue to red, red to blue—and this is a very consistent trend. This historic balance between political philosophies is good.

In this country, we have two major left-leaning parties and one major right-leaning party. Pure proportional representation would likely lead to continuous left-leaning politics. Just because one side of the political spectrum is not popular does not mean it ceases to exist. A balance between left and right makes Canada strong and politics healthy. Having one side of the political spectrum in power for too many consecutive years has historic precedent for being dangerous. The interests of society become greater than the freedoms of the individual.

Another concern of proportional representation is the creation of too many minority governments that refuse to work together. Nathan Cullen says that electoral reform has been in process since 1914. But what happens when there are 20 political parties represented that refuse to work together? No legislation would pass, and stagnation can agitate citizens.

I also have concerns about the function of the electoral reform committee. To paraphrase Mr. Cullen, he said that forming seats on a committee based on first- past-the-post proportions to reform first-past-the-post elections doesn't make sense. Also, having this meeting in a riding that voted 56% for one political party doesn't represent the wishes of all the citizens of this province.

I heard today that these meetings have had tremendous public turnout, but even if one million people came through that door today for all 12 publicly open electoral reform committee meetings, it would only represent 33% of the Canadian population.

To quote Marc Mayrand, "not a single government, whatever the majority is, should be able to unilaterally change the rules of election". I believe that a constitutional democracy should pursue democracy to make changes as important as this one.

For the future of the prosperity of this country, this issue should be dropped or at the very least be put to a referendum. Also, saying that citizens can't learn electoral systems 101 is frankly a little bit insulting.

Thank you.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Soskolne, please.

Mr. Colin Soskolne (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members for being here and for being so receptive to such a diversity of views. I hope that I can contribute out of reactions to four points that I've heard.

My name is Colin Soskolne. I'm a professor emeritus in epidemiology, which is the science that underlies the formation of rational public health policy, so I'm coming from that vantage point.

In public health sciences, we have a discipline called health promotion, and we use social marketing and health promotion techniques through focus groups. You might think of employing focus groups as a quicker way of getting feedback from large constituencies.

The principle of transparency is something that I've placed a lot of weight on, and I refer here to Dr. Kam's position about the trade-offs that he was talking about. If we were to ask ourselves the question, in anything we do, as to whose interests are best being served, then I think we all agree that we want to serve Canadians' interests best, not those of the elected politicians of the day. If we ask what the trade-offs are for each, the pros and cons of each of the different options before us, that makes each option more transparent to the public and I think that could be very helpful to give people insight because it is a complex area.

Regarding surveys or phoning people, Mr. Canseco made a point, if I heard him correctly, that his surveys were accessible or the people who participate in his surveys are people who have access to computers for online participation. I submit to you that in the old days of doing surveys, only people who had telephones were accessible to participate. This is hardly representative of the larger public. We have to be careful on that point too, just to be cautious.

The final point I'll make is that I haven't heard any word about compulsory voting in this conversation. I'm just wondering if that isn't worth including at some level.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: It is part of our mandate to look at that, and it comes up from time to time, but it hasn't been a central topic.

Thank you very much.

I'd also like to thank everyone who took the mike. We're going to suspend now until 6:30 p.m. We have an hour and I'll see all the members back here at 6:25 p.m.

● (1725)

(Pause)

● (1830)

The Chair: Okay, we'll get the show on the road. If all members of the committee could take their rightful places around the table, then we'll start this panel session.

To begin officially, the meeting is now open.

We are about to start our third panel for today. It includes Ms. Barbara Simons. I'm pleased to have you here today. It's an honour to have someone with such a body of work as yourself here to speak to this important issue that we've been focusing on for a few months now. It's important to our democracy.

We also have Eline de Rooij. Am I pronouncing it properly?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij (As an Individual): It's de Rooij.

The Chair: Sorry about that. With a name like mine, I'm sensitive to the pronunciation of last names, believe me. I take it to heart when I mispronounce a name.

We also have Mr. Harley Lang.

Each witness has five minutes and then there will be a round of questioning from the MPs around the table. Each member is allotted five minutes to engage the witnesses, and those five minutes include the questions and the answers. It's possible that I may have to intervene as we cross the five-minute mark, and I apologize for doing that. I'm not trying to be disagreeable or rude, but that doesn't mean you won't have a chance to provide your response the next time you get the mike. You can always say, "I want to go back to that original question that I wasn't able to answer a few minutes ago, and I'd like to address it now". Everyone will get a chance to say what they want and have to say.

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

Ms. Barbara Simons (As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about a critical issue: the fundamental insecurity of all currently available Internet voting systems. If this were a medical hearing to determine whether to approve a new drug for human consumption, safety would be paramount. A drug that is likely to result in serious injury to patients would be rejected, no matter how many people wanted to use it. Internet voting is like a drug we are considering for the country.

If there is even a small chance that Internet voting might result in our elections being hacked, it doesn't matter how many people want it. If Internet voting puts our elections at risk—and it does—we must reject it until such time as it can be proven secure.

I have brought copies of the “Computer Technologists' Statement on Internet Voting”, which unfortunately hasn't been translated, so I guess I can't distribute them, but they will be made available later and I could address the recommendations made in that statement during the question period. It was signed by prominent computer science researchers from major universities throughout the United States. I think it's a fair statement to say that computer security experts are basically in total agreement that we should not have Internet voting at this time, anywhere.

The title of my talk is, “Internet Voting: Making Elections Hackable”. As you know, there are five principles for this hearing, one of which is integrity. Australia did an assessment of Internet voting and there's a quote from the Honourable Tony Smith, who was chair of the joint standing committee on electoral matters in Australia, which says, “it is clear to me...that Australia is not in a position to introduce any large-scale system of electronic voting in the near future without catastrophically compromising our electoral integrity.”

Those of you who have copies of my slides see that the next slide has a list of a large number of sites that have been hacked, starting with Yahoo, where half a billion users' accounts were hacked into, and that includes a lot of Canadians. It also includes, in Canada, the Department of Finance, the Treasury Board Secretariat, Defence Research and Development Canada, the National Research Council, The Ottawa Hospital, and the University of Calgary. In the United States it includes the Democratic National Committee, as I'm sure you've heard, the Office of Personnel Management, the Pentagon emails, the FBI, the White House, the U.S. State Department, Google, AOL, Symantec, and so on and so forth.

A question that I hope this committee will ask itself is, what will happen if we take up Internet voting in this country, and months after a government is seated it is discovered that the election has been hacked? This is not an unrealistic scenario. The Yahoo breach started in 2014 and it was just uncovered. The Democratic National Committee breach occurred months before it was discovered. It typically takes months to discover a breach after it has occurred. You can replace money that's stolen from online bank accounts—and by the way, millions and millions of dollars are stolen annually from online bank accounts—but you cannot replace votes.

Toronto did a security analysis of three systems that were submitted there for consideration. The conclusion of the security analysis was that no proposal provides adequate protection against the risks inherent in Internet voting. Their recommendation was that the city not proceed with Internet voting in upcoming municipal elections.

Quebec has had a moratorium on electronic voting since 2005.

British Columbia had a panel that investigated Internet voting. Their conclusion was, first of all, non-voters usually don't vote over the Internet. It's used primarily as a tool for voters who have already decided to vote, mostly middle-age voters. It's least popular among young people, and that reflects traditional voter turnout. Their recommendation is to not implement Internet voting for either local or provincial government elections at this time.

Estonia is often brought up as an example of a country that has successfully conducted Internet voting. Most people don't know that in 2014, an independent group of international experts performed a security evaluation of the Estonian system. They found that it's vulnerable to state-level attackers who could compromise the secret ballot, disrupt elections, or cast doubt on the fairness of the results, and it is vulnerable to a range of attacks, including vote-stealing malware on the voter's machine, and they recommended that Internet voting be halted. Unfortunately, in Estonia, it has not been.

● (1835)

Basically, Washington, D.C., was considering Internet voting for real elections in the 2010 mid-term. They opened it up two weeks beforehand to allow anyone from anywhere to try to hack into the system. This is the only time this has been done. Two weeks before, it was taken over within 36 hours by a team from the University of Michigan. They could change already cast and future ballots, and they could reveal the voters' secret ballots. They installed the University of Michigan fight song as their calling card, so it would start playing 15 seconds after voting in this sample election, which was quite interesting for those of us who didn't know they had broken in. They also discovered probes coming from China and Iran, and they protected the system from these probes.

I don't think that China and Iran were actually trying to break into a pilot system. It wasn't a real election; it was a toy election. But these probes are always on the Internet, and they are always trying to break in. As I said, no other vendor has allowed such a test because, I believe, they know that their systems would be vulnerable. In fact, the only kind of real-life test you can do is to let anyone from anywhere try to break in, because that's what reality is.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's fascinating testimony. I think there are going to be many questions to follow.

I wish I'd had all this information before my town hall. I would have had better answers when the issue came up.

We'll now go to Mrs. de Rooij.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: Thank you very much, Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to appear today.

I want to address one of the principles for electoral reform that form the basis of the committee's mandate, namely, that of effectiveness and legitimacy. In particular, the principle states:

> ...the proposed measure would increase public confidence among Canadians that their democratic will, as expressed by their votes, will be fairly translated and that the proposed measure reduces distortion and strengthens the link between voter intention and the election of representatives;

The fair translation of votes into the election of representatives to the House of Commons seems to have been a major theme in the discussion of electoral reform. The common argument is that an increase in proportionality of the electoral system will lead to better representation of Canadians' democratic will.

I want to make two observations related to this point.

First, while we might agree that the party system as a whole should be as representative as possible, I would argue that it is also important that each individual party is not based on too narrow ethnic, religious, or regional concerns.

More proportional systems tend to result in a greater number of political parties; thus, include more small and/or single issue parties. Although the actual numbers of voters for a given single issue party might be small, parties can create an ideological wedge, splitting up support for larger mainstream parties. Arguably, we have seen it occur in several European countries after a radical right-wing party gained an electoral foothold by exploiting anti-immigrant sentiments.

The existence of small and/or single issue parties is obviously not necessarily bad, but my first caution is that we should acknowledge the increased propensity of parties in multi-party systems to increase rather than lessen conflict in society for solely representing a single issue or small segment of society. The traditional counter-argument to this is, of course, that the rise in the number of parties that is likely to result from a more proportional electoral system will increase the need for parties to build consensus in governing. This brings me to my second point.

Not only must there be confidence among Canadians that their democratic will will be exercised through a fair translation of their votes into the election of representatives to the House of Commons, but there must also be a fair translation of votes into the policies pursued by government.

When parties form coalition governments or when minority governments must maintain the support of opposition parties in the legislature in order to stay in office, compromises over policy are more likely. This compromise happens in at least two different ways.

First, after an election, parties will negotiate who will form the coalition government and what policy priorities the government will pursue. The evidence on how representative the outcome of this process will be is inconclusive. Some political scientists argue that the composition of the government coalition will not reflect the composition of the parties in the House of Commons. Consequently, the policy positions of the government will not reflect the policy positions of the average voter. Others argue that the government coalition's policy positions will match the average voters' positions better than one might expect, given the positions of the parties in the coalition.

Second, compromise happens in the allocation of ministerial portfolios, both in terms of the number of portfolios, but also in their importance. Clearly, this ultimately will also impact policy. Here, political science theory and evidence tend to diverge. On the one hand, there's a concern that, because of their strong bargaining position, small parties will have a disproportionate say in determining the policy agenda as well as the allocation of portfolios of the government. Evidence so far, though, seems to suggest a fairly proportional distribution of ministerial portfolios according to each coalition party's relative share of the legislative seats, with a slight advantage for minor parties in obtaining a bit more than their fair share of the ministerial portfolios.

My second caution, then, is that electoral systems that make the House of Commons more representative will not necessarily make government and the policy it pursues more representative.

In closing, let me emphasize some of the points my many predecessors have already raised and which I think are worth highlighting again.

● (1840)

Although there are certainly aspects of the current voting systems that could be improved upon, some of these can be addressed through smaller incremental reforms. Moreover, as I am sure the committee is by now well aware, any electoral system design inevitably involves trade-offs. In overly focusing on what the current system's weaknesses are, we are failing to appreciate its strengths. In weighing the weaknesses and strengths of our current system, we should also take into consideration that changing the electoral system will take time, energy, and a substantial amount of money in particular, given the need pointed out by a number of my fellow political scientists for wider public consultations over an extended period of time.

Thank you.

● (1845)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Harley Lang (As an Individual): Good evening, everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to the special committee for the invitation to appear before you tonight as part of this truly remarkable survey of Canadian opinions on electoral reform.

Before we begin, I wish to make a few acknowledgements. The first is to the ancestral and traditional aboriginal territories of the Musqueam, Stó:lo, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish first nations of metro Vancouver, on whose territories we work, live, play, and here stand. I also wish to acknowledge Canadian citizens, including those who are behind us here tonight.

I'm here as an individual with alternative perspectives on how to go about electoral reform. I want to discuss specifically how to increase voter turnout. I draw these perspectives from multiple influences, one being my coursework and research at St. Cloud State University. My graduate thesis, which I'll touch on in a moment, employs a scientific method used in laboratory, clinical, educational, and other applied settings to evaluate the influences on voter behaviour. This method could possibly bring about error-free policy, that is, policy that always produces acceptable change, in this case, high voter turnout. My hope is to share some of its potential tonight with everyone.

Tonight we have the privilege to work on reforming an electoral system. Many other nations are still struggling to establish their own. It is important for us all to recognize that our current electoral system affords us a means to influence each other in an orderly and peaceful manner. In some nations citizens have no choice but to escape, to resist, to protest. At worst, those citizens resort to violence as a means to impact their government. Over the decades many Canadians spent their time establishing and refining our current systems. Many more have shed their blood to keep this great land in the hands of the people. Their efforts have allowed us to draft policy to better our nation, to better our people, and to better Canada's future.

Thus, we're all here tonight and we should all acknowledge that we are in a special position. We are lucky to have the opportunity to work with government rather than against it. Why? Because many fine Canadians before us have established and refined our system to work this way. Tonight our job is to not let anyone down.

To that end, we have to understand that what we're doing is quite risky. We are engaging in a dialogue about how to go about changing how citizens influence government. It is a responsibility at the very least to ensure that our electoral system remains as effective as it currently is. Our responsibility is to ensure that any change is as acceptable as it is effective.

With responsibility in mind, we need to tread carefully. Special committee, you have, and are going to continue to receive, some fine ideas from Canadians. Truly, this special committee is on the right track in conducting this survey, and my hope is that this committee will be a model of community consultation for the world.

Undoubtedly, it will be difficult to weigh which ideas best fit the special committee's five criteria for successful electoral reform. For some ideas, we can readily sense the probability of their success. When we refer to probability, we are really referring to gambles or guesswork. In our brief, Dr. Witts and I note some qualities of guesswork that may aid the special committee. My thesis research, which is presented in our brief, uses compulsory voting as an example of guesswork. In summary, after analyzing 42 nations with and without compulsory voting, we are unconvinced that there is a consistent effect of compulsory voting in regard to voter turnout.

It is true that some countries showed some effects, but these are idiosyncratic and are owed to the regional differences or severe coercive measures. Consider, for example, that Belgium observes high voter turnout with compulsory voting, and in Belgium absent voters risk temporarily losing the right to vote. While some might see this as an argument for pursuing threats, the side effects of such threats on a large scale need to be taken into consideration. Regional guesswork such as considerations for compulsory voting, given the success in Belgium or Australia, put our nation's electoral system in jeopardy.

Canada is a unique nation with its own constituency, legalities, current economic affairs, and political party system. We must sidestep guesswork and the risk by recognizing that Canada requires an individualized reform to address the needs of Canadians and fulfill this special committee's mandate.

Special committee, we here are on the right track by surveying Canadians' opinions. Our suggestion goes one step beyond this.

● (1850)

Our idea is radical. Our idea is that public policy, at all times, should be treated as a social experiment. Social experiments do not need to be confusing. These methods would enable the committee to make error-free policy. The methods are transparent and accountable, and they bring about naturally self-correcting conclusions.

Our next step is that we need to execute small-scale local government research. Doing so would bring about valuable information that would solve questions about electoral reform. It would fulfill this committee's mandate. Most importantly, it would ensure that the electoral system we leave behind is best for the citizens of Canada.

While it is true that compulsory voting may be found to be acceptable and effective through this research, it is also true that it would only bring about citizens who have to vote. Our expert impression is that research is much more likely to bring about tactics that would influence citizens so that they want to vote. The former leads to feelings of coercion and disdain. The latter leads to feelings of justice and fairness.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Lang. I'm sorry, do you think you could wrap up in about 20 seconds?

Mr. Harley Lang: I definitely can. I have one more page here.

By conducting more research, what we leave behind will do justice to the efforts of everyone before us by improving upon our system with facts rather than gambling its integrity with guesswork. An experimental approach to policy change would be a significant step forward for Canada and democracy, and would be a model for our world. We can impact Canadian society for the better. Our expert opinion is for this committee to move for the adoption of a pilot experimental analysis.

Thank you so much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll start our round of questioning with Ms. Sahota, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. de Rooij, you brought up a point that I've been mulling over in my mind for quite some time, since I've been sitting on this committee. My colleagues here have heard me ask this question before.

I fear some of the...and it may be due to social circumstances or the world circumstances these days. I'm a proud Canadian. I'm sure everybody in this room is. Canada has given so many people the opportunity that not a lot of places in the world do. I'm a daughter of a taxi driver, of immigrant parents, and I say that proudly. Not too many countries afford people the kind of opportunity where they can say, “Well, I may be doing this, but one day my daughter may be a member of Parliament,” and maybe more. I'm not a one-off. I have so many colleagues, some of them ministers, who have achieved the same thing. They came as refugees. They came from various corners of the world.

My fear is about the sentiment we're seeing around the world right now, in the U.S. and in Europe. Especially in Europe right now, you have these really small parties that are gaining momentum. They're right-wing parties. Anti-immigrant sentiment is growing. My fear is that if we allow these parties to gain power, we may not anticipate that as being the effect of a change to the system. It could occur. In Sweden we have the extreme right-wing Sweden Democrats, who in seven years have gone from 4% to 20% in power.

In your opinion, why are these things occurring? Does the electoral system have an impact on these things, or do you see them as completely separate?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I most certainly think there is a relationship between the electoral system and the chance of a radical-right party gaining ground. It's not the only explanation. Look at what happened in Britain. It has a similar system as we have, and we've seen radical parties there under specific circumstances.

That said, I think it does increase the chance of having a radical-right party. Whether that would happen in Canada or not is of course an open question. It depends on the sentiments that are there in the population. But who knows what those sentiments might be in 10 years, 15 years?

● (1855)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: As we move to adopting a new system, of course we don't want to restrict differences of opinion, but do you think there are certain safeguards or something that we can put in place to make sure that the parties that form do have, on the whole, Canada's best interests at heart? Are there ways to safeguard and put some mechanisms into a new system where we could avoid perhaps getting into that extreme situation?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I think it's very difficult. You can play around with the thresholds, and make thresholds higher or lower in order to ensure that certain smaller parties don't get elected. However, if you're opening a system that's more proportional, which I don't think is necessarily a bad thing, it also means that small parties of all sorts of persuasion can get representation in Parliament. I don't think you can avoid that when you're making a system more proportional.

Again, I'm not saying that I'm necessarily against more proportionality, but you have to accept that this is one of the things that might come with it, a greater chance for parties, such as radical rights or other types of radical parties, to gain a foothold.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: As I see it right now, within the few large parties that we have, you have various different opinions within your caucus, within your party, which bring you to sometimes a balanced approach on many aspects, sometimes not, on different political opinions.

As a party, we're all individuals that represent our ridings. We represent certain interests that are there, but we're able to discuss among ourselves, and come up with a solution to some of those ideas. We hear a lot of that about PR systems in that they will be more collaborative and different parties will work together.

What are your feelings about the system we have now and the collaboration we have among our own colleagues versus the type of collaboration a PR system would have?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: Regarding collaboration, whereas we have two or three major parties, what happens then, of course, is more interest between parties. One important thing to bear in mind is that, for instance, we know from research that if you look at the coalitions that form, they tend to not cross the centre divide. What you'll see are left-wing coalitions or right-wing coalitions.

That means you have more representation of ideological values of voters within the legislature, and what that actually means for the co-operation within governments is that it now may be more likely to be coalition government if there's a change in electoral systems versus a single party government.

That might just have the similar level of co-operation to some extent with the big difference, though, that there's always a bargaining position between parties now rather than consensus building. If one party exits the coalition, the government will fall, and that sometimes creates, some argue, some stronger bargaining positions for a small party.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you so much, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Ladies and gentleman, welcome to our parliamentary committee.

[*English*]

I will continue in English, and take the opportunity to practise my English.

I would like to speak with Madam Simons first.

First of all, we have a variety of points of view with this panel. It is quite interesting. This is all about democracy. This is what you are talking about.

I'm very proud to be here as a member of Parliament, but also as the son of an immigrant, and for being elected by the people of my riding that I represent strongly and proudly here at this committee, and in the House of Commons.

Madam Simons, if we change the way we elect our people, we are open to discussion, but at the end of the day, the people shall decide by a referendum. It's not up to parties and politicians because we are in a conflict of interest with regard to the decision.

What do you think about that?

Ms. Barbara Simons: I think that a referendum may be fine for certain issues, but when it's a heavily technological issue like Internet voting, you really need to listen to the experts. In fact, when I first heard about Internet voting, I thought it was a great idea. I really wanted to do it, and most of my colleagues—almost all of us are geeks, I should say. Notice that I'm here with this. I mean, I live on a computer. I spend all day long on the computer. I love my computer. But I don't want to vote on my computer, not in a major election.

Look at what's happening in the United States right now, where the Democratic Party is terrified that the election is going to be rigged by Russia. Now, I'm not saying that's going to happen, but the very fact that people are even contemplating that idea is very disturbing.

I was in Estonia a few years ago, at the invitation of the Estonian Centre Party, which is the second-largest party in Estonia, and remember, as I said in my talk, people hold up Estonia as the model of Internet voting in a country.

They invited me there because they are convinced that their elections are being rigged. They are the second-largest party, and if you look at who votes over the Internet, members of their party do not.... At least they don't get votes over the Internet very much. Most of their votes come from paper ballots, because Estonia has both paper ballots and Internet voting. They wanted me to go there and tell them that the election was rigged. I couldn't do that, because there's no way to know.

That's one of the terrifying things of Internet voting. You could have malware, election-rigging malware, on the voter's machine which could change the vote before it goes out over the Internet. What you see on your screen is not necessarily what goes out, because there are different components in a computer. It could change what goes out and the voter would never know.

That means that when you get the electronic ballots at the other end, these bits, you cannot know if they accurately represent the will of the voters, and therefore, you cannot do a recount. I could not therefore tell members of the Estonian Centre Party that the election was rigged, nor could I tell them that it was not rigged.

I think that is a very unhealthy situation for a democracy.

● (1900)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Madam Simons.

I would like to ask Madam Rooij the same question.

Madam Rooij, do you think at the end of the day, if this government would like to go with a new way of electing people, we should have a referendum? What do you think about that?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I find it a very difficult question. I do agree with my colleague that maybe certain issues should not be put to a referendum.

When it comes to an electoral system change, I think there first needs to be an extensive public consultation. I know there are numbers currently of people who even aren't aware that this is happening. Discussions are extremely low and very biased in terms of the type of people who are involved with this discussion in the larger Canadian public, so I think we'd have to have a very large consultation first, campaigning, informing people, and that takes time to do.

At the end of this, I do think something like electoral system change might have to go to the people to vote on. I'd like to see something like they have done in New Zealand in a several-step process, where people can familiarize themselves and maybe in one or two elections even vote on whether they want to keep the system or not.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Madam Rooij.

May I have a few seconds to hear from Mr. Lang?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Please be brief, Mr. Lang.

[*English*]

Mr. Harley Lang: I'll be the first to admit that I am not sure what the answer is to that. My day-to-day work is designing interventions with kids with disabilities, so I'll be the first one to admit that I am not as familiar with what would be the best way to go with regard to a reform.

That said, I can see an option being some kind of melding of the two worlds. Why can't we have experts figure out what could be the best solution, then pose those options to citizens?

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, please.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Ms. Simons, I think I'm very much like you. I started off, even at the beginning of this process, very much a fan of the idea certainly of exploring it. I think I need to put this quote on the record from your book, from Professor Ronald Rivest from MIT. He said that coming up with the best practices for Internet voting is like coming up with best practices for drunk driving. You don't really want to go there.

We've had several moments of testimony from people in your field who have advised us very strongly to either not do it—that's usually what we hear—or be so exceptionally cautious to leap ahead into this because of that question. I've always imagined the scenario in which during the course of an election night, if the system were to crash, whether the results would seem valid. I've not yet fully contemplated the idea of some months after an election someone comes up, as Yahoo just did—which I assume are pretty good at the Internet, being Yahoo—and says, "Oh, by the way, two years ago we were hacked."

Ms. Rooij, I take your point well about any system that would lead to, as Ms. Sahota was exploring, the idea of anti-immigrant policies or xenophobic policies. We wouldn't want an electoral system that produced policies like Japanese internment camps or Chinese head taxes or banning Muslims from a country, as was a suggestion by a leading Republican candidate for president. Any system that would produce those types of policies must have an inherent flaw within the system, clearly. Yet, all of those came and continue to come. Having parties elected purely on one issue, narrow regional principles like the Bloc Québécois becoming the official opposition under first past the post, or the Scottish National Party winning 50% of the vote yet 95% of the seats under first past the post....

It reminds me of the caution, as you just pointed out, around referendum. It's much easier to spread the myth and the fear than it is to explain change, and it's easy to spread the myth that somehow a proportional system leads to racist parties running countries. We look for a system that expresses the will of Canadians, and I don't think the will of Canadians is actually for things like banning Muslims or for barbaric practices hotlines. Our system has a way of correcting. We just need a system that doesn't distort the will of voters.

A last point is that the mandate of this committee is change. We're changing the voting system. That's our work here. Under that rubric, because that's what we're doing, which system would you recommend we change to?

● (1905)

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: First, I want to point out that just because you might see anti-immigrant parties—and by no means is this a given—that doesn't mean they will be the ones making policy, which relates to my other point. They might not end up in government. I know of some research which shows that even if they end up in government, we don't necessarily see a substantial shift to actual changes in policy. That's a big caveat I do want to make.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's a big caveat.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: Yes.

Then when it comes to Canadians, and with all due respect to Canada.... I love Canada as a country. I love the people. I love the values of tolerance. But I come from the Netherlands, and I grew up in a country that was very tolerant, very multicultural, and then there was a sudden shift. I think it is a bit, I'm sorry to say, idealistic to believe that somehow Canadians are above that. I think tensions can play out. You don't know what situations will look like in 10 years. If there's an economic downturn, we know that people tend to find a scapegoat, so we don't know what will happen further down the line.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The questioning from my Liberal colleague was to ascribe that to somehow a proportional system encouraging such wedges, such shifts. We all imagine a proportional system. No one has advocated a purely proportional one, and most recommendations that have come to this committee have suggested that there be a national floor, that if you do not attain some number—5% or 6% of the national vote—you can't gain power of any kind, any influence. No one is looking at Israel as a model, nor Italy—

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I know that, yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —for various reasons. So the idea of just simply removing the distortion, wherein 39% of the electorate who choose to vote...granting a party 100% of the power is, as the Prime Minister currently has described it, a false majority.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So, again, which system do you prefer if you were to follow under this committee's mandate to develop a new one?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I'm certainly open, and you misunderstand me if you think I'm necessarily against more proportional systems. That's not what I say. I see my role more as placing some caveats and opening up the information to the Canadian people.

As for the system, I will refrain from actually setting a system for Canada because I feel I can talk about systems, and I can talk about costs and benefits of systems generally, but my knowledge of Canada is fairly new. I don't feel comfortable in a place saying what would be best for Canada. I came to provide information.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, ladies and gentleman.

You can put your earphones in to hear the interpretation. Unlike my colleague Mr. Deltell, I am going to continue to speak French, since I have no aspiration to become the leader of a Canada-wide party. I am kidding!

Thank you for your presentations. I am going to start by addressing you, Ms. Simons.

Thank you for coming and warning us against electronic voting. The points you raised are disturbing. As you said, in the American election campaign, Russian computer scientists got hold of emails belonging to the woman who is a candidate for the office of president of the United States. In Canada, it would be unthinkable to realize, a year or two after an election, that the entire thing had been tampered with by foreign interests and that this had even put, who knows, the Bloc Québécois in power. That would be hard to believe, but in any event, we have to be careful.

What is good about our system is that we have a little piece of paper and a little pencil, we mark an *X* and we put the paper in the box, so it can be counted and examined.

I have a concern about electronic voting. The fact that the person voting would not be alone in a booth concerns me. We could have vote-buying, negative influence, fear, and so on. In your eyes, do these factors also amount to obstacles to electronic voting?

● (1910)

[*English*]

Ms. Barbara Simons: I think when you talk about the person not being alone with Internet voting, that's an issue for any kind of remote voting. It's the same for voting by mail. With Internet voting, you have to worry about voter coercion and vote buying and selling. That's of concern to me. I think remote voting should be held to a minimum. There are people who have to do it because they are not well, or they are away and they have to vote remotely, but generally speaking, it shouldn't be, as it is in many parts of the United States, made available to everybody. My experience in Canada is that it isn't made available to everybody. It's not that easy, and I think that's a good thing.

You talked about the paper ballots. I was a poll worker in a provincial election here, and I thought the way the election was run was wonderful. I've also worked on an election in the United States, and believe me, it's done much better in Canada. It really is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Barbara Simons: One of the things that's nice about the way it's done in Canada is that when the election was over, we all tabulated the ballots. There were all these rules. They had to come out right. There was a lot of double-checking and triple-checking, and nobody could leave until it all worked. There was one table that hadn't quite...they were off by one, and the rest of us were hungry, but we couldn't leave until they finally worked it out. I thought it was wonderful.

Another thing I hope you will keep in mind when you think about moving to another form of voting is whether you can retain this spirit, this counting locally, and this being able to check locally and have observers from all the parties who can look at what's going on. If you move to a complicated form of voting, then you're going to have to use computers, and you won't be able to see what's going on inside the computers. You'll be dependent on the software, which could have software bugs or it could have malware.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Ms. Simons.

I have a brief question to ask you, Ms. de Rooij.

Thank you for warning us about the rise of far-right parties in the event of a reform involving proportional voting. In France, Socialist President Mitterrand had reformed the system to favour the rise of the National Front, cause a decline of the right-wing party and retain power. He did not retain any more power, but since 2002, at least, the National Front has started to become an increasingly serious threat. There are also right-wing ideas in the major parties, as we see in the American election. I think the best way of arming ourselves against this kind of rise is through citizenship education and conveying a culture to the public.

Otherwise, in the event of a voting system reform toward greater proportionality, what can you suggest to us for arming ourselves against the possible rise of far-right parties?

[*English*]

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I wish there were a simple solution, and I'm not convinced there necessarily is a way to avoid a rise of a radical... other than if it's not an issue in the population and if it's indeed not an issue that is relevant. In that sense maybe what's more important is the social base. If people don't see this as an issue, and if you can create a society that is based on mutual trust and co-operation, then it won't have to become an issue. That is maybe more important.

If there are tensions in society that are not being addressed, and people are not able to give a voice to them, or people are in insular communities, then a more proportional system may—and I stress again, may—give rise to certain radical right parties. But this should not be the only consideration of political party change, I should emphasize that.

● (1915)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you to all the panellists who are here today.

I'm going to start by picking up on the conversation that Gabriel was having with you, Mrs. de Rooij.

Are you familiar with the work of Professor Arend Lijphart, who's also originally from the Netherlands?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: Yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: What he's found from his 36 country study of patterns of democracy is that the countries that have PR are more likely to have greater social cohesion and have a more egalitarian society, less of a gap between the very rich and the very poor, as a pattern.

Given that, isn't it at least possible that such voting systems will create the conditions that make extremism less likely?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I'm very familiar with his work. I think one of the programs is the causality issue. We're not quite sure whether changing electoral systems creates the types of society he described.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Fair enough, but in terms of looking at the evidence from PR countries on a basis of statistical evidence, and I'm not making the case for causality, what we know of PR countries is that they are less likely to have great gaps between the rich and the poor than countries that operate under majoritarian oppositional systems.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: Yes, but some of these countries are also very different. Some of these countries are smaller. I know he claims to control for some of these small sizes, but certain factors are hard to control for. When we have only a limited number of countries in the world, statistical analysis is limited. I do a lot of statistical analysis—

Ms. Elizabeth May: In fairness to Dr. Lijphart's work, it's 36 countries and he has looked at every election since the end of the Second World War, so there's quite a body of information there and data, don't you think?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: He looked at several elections, but—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Several...it was every election since the Second World War for 36 countries.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: But there are just 36 countries, and I'm not saying that he doesn't make a number of very good points and he is one of our major political scientists in this discipline, but I think you have to be very careful with drawing causal conclusions.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I wasn't drawing causal conclusions, but I appreciate your raising it. Let's just tease out some of the things to eliminate concerns on this point. I know you said you don't want to make a recommendation for Canada, but in terms of the concern you raised, we have to look at everything and none of us wants to create a system that increases the rise of an extremist party that has very small support but somehow makes its way into Parliament.

Would you agree with me that it's very unlikely that single transferable vote systems would give rise to small extremist parties? They would have to at least have the voting power to win a seat in a multi-member riding where they have no guaranteed seat based on a small proportion of the vote.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I find it very difficult to say since we also, again, have a very limited number of countries where they have STV —

Ms. Elizabeth May: No, it's a matter of the way the math works. A party that doesn't have substantial support basically in our current Parliament.... We've had representations from smaller parties at our microphones here who have said, if you go with single transferable vote you're basically saying that none of the parties that exist, that are the roughly 20 parties that collectively get less than 2% of the vote across Canada, will ever get a seat in Parliament. At least that's what they've said at the mikes here. They're very concerned that unless we go with a list system, the smaller parties will never get into the House.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: Sure, depending on how large you make district size, STV can be less proportional than a classical PR system and then, yes—

Ms. Elizabeth May: In terms of the kind of influence that smaller parties.... I'm co-chair of the Global Greens Parliamentarian Association, so I talk a lot to the Greens who have been in other coalitions around the world. Certainly, the experience they have is that it's not that they've ever had disproportionate influence, but the concern within the Green parties of Germany, Finland, and New Zealand and all around the world is that when you go into a coalition —it certainly happened to the Irish Greens last time, two elections ago—you get lost because the larger party basically squashes you out. That seems to be the real life politics of the Greens in Germany or Finland. Certainly, if you look at a first-past-the-post coalition between Nick Clegg and Lib Dems and David Cameron, the Lib Dems did very badly as a result of going into the coalition.

● (1920)

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: That's what I believe I said in my statement, that policy portfolios tend to be allocated proportional to the seats.

Ms. Elizabeth May: So it's not the case that we have any evidence of really small parties gaining undue influence in coalition governments. It's more—

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: Very little.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

The Chair: That was an interesting exchange.

Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

To begin, I thank all of our audience members. I see that people continue to come in. We have a great turnout from the greater Vancouver area. I see a number of faces from my riding out in Cloverdale—Langley City. I just want to thank the many of you who have made the trip in from the valley, and those who are more local, for coming out this evening. We look forward to hearing from you as we get into the evening.

In the spirit of a little rivalry we've had about which riding is the most beautiful, we've been to Mr. Deltell's, Ms. May's—

Ms. Elizabeth May: —and Gabriel's.

Mr. John Aldag: Yes, and Gabriel's.

I'd like to throw out that perhaps we're here in the most beautiful suite of ridings in the country. I just wanted to weigh in on that one —including my own riding of Cloverdale—Langley City. There you go.

Ms. Elizabeth May: It's breathtaking.

Mr. John Aldag: Exactly.

Dr. Simons, I want to start the questioning with you.

I found the information you provided fascinating. As Mr. Cullen had noted when we started, it seemed that online voting could be a solution to a lot of our problems, including accessibility. You've just taken that and thrown it in the trash can for me. It causes me some concern. Is there any hope for any application down the road?

One of the things we've been asked to look at is increasing accessibility and voter participation. I know from my own experience during my first election in October, I did have people who were unable to make it to the polling booth, and Elections Canada did some great work to make their votes accessible. I thought there could be some great opportunities for those who are homebound dealing with disabilities.

Then we had a witness from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind who spoke with us more recently. Her testimony really touched me. She talked about never having been able to have a secret ballot. One of the many messages I got from her is that many persons with disabilities, particularly visual disabilities, have technology that they work with at home that uses oral prompts and other things to help them. I thought maybe we need to go with a limited-reach online voting. We heard that from our Chief Electoral Officer, to maybe go small and do some test populations.

Until you spoke, I was hoping that we could convince Elections Canada to start with a population such as those with sight disabilities and pilot something, but with what you're saying, the risks are so high.

Would you advise us and direct us away from even going that far, because of the vulnerabilities?

Ms. Barbara Simons: There are safer alternatives.

In the United States there's been a lot of concern about voters in the military overseas, because it takes a long time, and about people with disabilities. What's done there, and I think this could be done in Canada, is that you can make the blank ballot available online. In the U.S. for military voters, by law it's made available at least 45 days in advance of the election. They download the ballot, print it out, fill it out, and mail it in.

Now, with voters with disabilities, you could download the ballot onto the computer, and they could use their tools to vote. One thing you need to be careful about is that when that happens, you don't want their computer communicating with the main server, because that's basically Internet voting again, and you have lots of issues, such as the secret ballot. But they can download it onto their computer, disconnect from the Internet, and then fill it out locally so that they can take advantage of the tools they have. A blind voter can fill it out, print it out, and then mail it in by postal mail. Again, they can use the tools, and if it's done enough in advance, they don't have to worry about the time for the postal mail.

● (1925)

Mr. John Aldag: It's a wonderful suggestion, very practical.

What else have you encountered in this area of research that you can get to us while we have access to your expertise, before the chair cuts me off? Are there any other gems you can give us that will help us reach out to some of these populations that have been disenfranchised from our voting system?

Ms. Barbara Simons: I know there's been concern among first nations. I've heard some testimony in another event where a first nation person was strongly advocating for Internet voting.

Again, I think it does a disservice to voters with disabilities, to first nations, to anybody, to provide them with a tool that is fundamentally insecure. We owe it to them when we provide them with alternatives to make sure those alternatives are secure.

That would be my recommendation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I don't have any questions for you, Dr. Simons, and that's because you've resolved matters in my mind. I'm now firmly committed to not moving to electronic voting. In fact, I'm completely paranoid. That was very convincing.

A voice: Don't blame her.

Mr. Scott Reid: Nathan says, “Don't blame her”, but you are the one who tipped me over the edge.

Dr. de Rooij, I wanted to ask you some questions that relate to some of the practical, potentially negative implications of a more proportional system. One thing I want to state at the starting point is that nobody is advocating a purely proportional system for Canada for several reasons. We must have our seats allocated within provinces, so we're tied up one way in that respect. For the most part, what is being advocated is either some kind of multi-member districts like single transferable vote in the Irish model, or multi-member proportional in the German model. You probably already knew that, but I just think it's important to set parameters.

When I look at countries that have pure proportionality, I think we have to be careful not to make generalizations. For example, Weimar Germany had pure proportionality, and one looks at them and sees the rise of a profoundly anti-Semitic party. However, when you look at Israel, which also has pure proportionality, there is no similar rise of anti-Semitism, suggesting that there may be something underlying in the culture that would be the basis for all of this. We should be a little bit careful about saying the rise of anti-immigrant and xenophobic parties in Europe is connected to the electoral systems. I suspect that the electoral systems were the same for a long period of time. That these parties started to rise in various countries suggests to me that the political culture and other situational factors are the primary driving factors. I think you'd agree with that statement, but I'll just stop there for now to confirm whether I'm right about that.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: I do want to say that it's definitely not just the electoral system. The general theory in political science suggests that it's both what we call the social cleavage—the structure of society, the issues, the ideals that are in society—as well as what we call the permissiveness of the electoral system, how tolerant it is of small parties. It is definitely a combination. On top of that, we know that severe economic downturns also enable the rise of such sentiment, so it's definitely not just the electoral system.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

The question to me at the practical level is this: Do we create a situation, number one, in which these smaller parties.... To be clear, there are smaller parties, and then there are parties that we are characterizing here as extreme parties. It's very difficult to make a distinction. You know Elizabeth May, my colleague, represents a party that got about 3.5% of the vote in the last election. They're a small party, but I don't think anybody would want to call them an extreme party. However, these are inherent judgment calls as to what is extreme versus what is merely small and getting a start. You can correct me, again, if you think I'm wrong, but I think we have to be very careful about doing things like setting high floors, for example, percentages of the vote, as a way of keeping out the extremists. We might simply keep out those who are trying to start out and who have ideas that are different, that perhaps, in the long run, would become mainstream, and that are entirely tolerant and reasonable.

Again, am I wrong in expressing that concern?

● (1930)

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: No. For me, it is a way of seeing two sides of the same coin. I'm not advocating for either more or less proportionality. I agree that small parties are not the same as what we classify as radical or extreme parties. I'm just saying that if you want to open up the system to more smaller parties, and there are many good reasons why you might want to do that, the flip side of that coin might be that you might also see parties that you, as a society, are not that enthused about, depending on certain circumstances and on what society looks like. It's two sides of the same coin. It doesn't mean that you have to go one way or the other. I just want people to recognize that trade-off.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm out of time to ask more questions, so I'll use my last 15 seconds to make a final comment. The tone of my questions may suggest that I am hostile to your testimony, but that's not the case. I actually think the facts that you are presenting are very good. I was just worried that they might be interpreted as leaving an impression that I don't think was the one that you intended to leave. That's just the nature of the question.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'd like to thank our three panellists for being here this evening.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the people of Vancouver for being here today.

[*English*]

Thank you so much for being here in such large numbers tonight.

Dr. Simons, like my colleagues, I have to say that if we weren't already unsure about Internet voting, your testimony this evening scared some of us. I'll add to this, so please forgive my little sidebar.

In addition to sitting on the committee for electoral reform, I also sit on the Standing Committee on National Defence. We've just completed part of a study on the defence of North America, specifically on aerial readiness. We spent some time at NORAD during this study, where we heard about the emerging threats, conventional and asymmetrical attacks, and specifically, cyber-threats and cyber-attacks here in Canada.

You brought up a point that I hadn't thought of. We heard that there was an increase in the potential for cyber-attacks in Canada, and in fact Canada is now looking at a consultation to upgrade our national cybersecurity policy. You mentioned the actual machines to do the count, and I thought that was interesting, because I had only heard about the e-voting or online voting. You mentioned that whatever system we decide to put into place, if there are requirements for algorithms or calculations coming out of whatever we choose, those are also susceptible to cyber-attack.

For instance, it's simple to count the ballots—and I think most of us have volunteered at elections where you get to count the ballots—but if we actually have a system where we have to run these ballots or votes through a machine for it to then do the calculations, whether it be a proportional system or whatever system we choose, those too are susceptible to attack.

Could you elaborate a bit on that? I hadn't thought of that portion.

Ms. Barbara Simons: By the way, before I do that, here's one other thing to help make you more paranoid with regard to Internet voting. Think about ransomware and how that could be applied to Internet voting.

Getting back to your question, in terms of being subject to cyber-attack, that would depend on whether or not it has access to the Internet. I'm not saying that introducing computers into the election process necessarily would make them vulnerable to cyber-attack. What I'm saying is that when you bring in the computers, you are dependent on the computers. You're dependent on the algorithm for counting the votes.

In the case of some of these systems, that can be complicated. You have to be careful that the algorithm is correct, that the code was written correctly, and that no bad person has gotten their hands on those machines and changed the software to rig the election in some way. You can't really open up the machine and look at it the way you can pieces of paper. You just have to be more careful. There are risks whenever you introduce computers into the system.

It's kind of funny, because the people who are raising the alarm, by and large, are the computer scientists, and when I first started this, we were being told by people who really didn't know anything about computers that we were Luddites to talk about these issues.

I'm just counselling you that if we move to a very complicated system that can't be tabulated manually, it means that computers will have to come in. That means that in some sense we're going to be outsourcing the election to the vendors. Even if it's homegrown software, you still are dependent on the people who write the software and on the algorithms being correct. You introduce an element of risk, and you also don't have the transparency that our elections currently have, and I think that transparency is really a wonderful thing.

There are other forms of voting that aren't first-past-the-post systems where you can manually count, so I'm not taking a position on first-past-the-post systems or not.

● (1935)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I wasn't asking what voting system.... I'm looking at what the possible ramifications are of using that.

Given that, you did mention our military who are serving overseas. I have two sons currently serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, so it's something that's important to me. Is there a possibility of leveraging technology, knowing the risks, to reach folks who want to be able to vote?

You mentioned the downloading of the form and filling it out and so on and so forth, but is there a possibility of leveraging technology to increase the efficiencies in how we handle our elections? Is there still something that can be done in terms of improving it?

Ms. Barbara Simons: In terms of downloading, the example I gave of the United States for the military overseas—the mail is expedited and is paid for by the government—is a way of doing it without looking at more technological fixes. The government could expedite the return of the voter ballots for free. That would certainly help.

I'm reluctant to suggest having a small number of voters vote over the Internet, just because we have seen certainly in the United States and here too that sometimes a small number of voters can change an outcome. I'd hate to see even a small number of ballots being vulnerable. It's better than a large number, but—

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Simons.

Monsieur Boulerice.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

I would also like to thank all the people who are with us tonight to talk about a subject that we are all passionate about and that is extremely important to our democracy.

I would simply like to clarify something and for it to be said officially. The various voting methods are not always the best way of blocking the path for political opinions we do not like or preventing more extremist parties from gaining power or having an influence on society. The rise of the National Front has nothing to do with the proportional voting method. Since 1945, a two-round first past the post system has been used in France for legislative elections and that has not prevented the rise of the National Front. There was a proportional legislative election, in 1986. That is the only example in France.

The ultranationalist Shiv Sena party in India has 18 members of parliament and that is a one-round first past the post system. The Republican Party primaries in the United States operate with a one-round first past the post system and that produced Donald Trump. I agree with my colleague Scott Reid when he says that it is what is happening in the society that creates these results rather than something else.

Mr. Lang, regarding mandatory voting in Belgium, you said that one of the possible punishments for someone who did not go out to vote was to take away their right to vote.

[*English*]

Mr. Harley Lang: Yes, that is correct. Doesn't that seem backwards? It's like sending home the student who doesn't want to be at school.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Go home.

Mr. Harley Lang: Exactly. How it works in Belgium is that there are increasing fines for each consecutive year you don't vote, and if you don't vote in four consecutive elections, then you lose your right to vote for 10 years thereafter. To me, that seems a little bit backwards and counterintuitive, but nonetheless, they see high voter turnout.

Again, I would return to my point that that produces people who have to vote rather than people who truly want to vote.

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Ms. de Rooij, you mentioned something interesting. You said that a more representative Parliament does not necessarily produce more representative public policy. That is an interesting nuance, but I think people can accept that quite well. Opening the door to the diversity of views that exist in society is not necessarily going to put everyone in power or ensure that everyone participates in making public policy, but, even in opposition, some voices that were kept silent before will be heard. Some people may think that is a good thing.

I do not know who put this on our tables, but I have a table in front of me. It shows the 2015 results for the five ridings in the Fraser Valley. Where it is coloured, it shows the political party that won the election. The electors who voted in those ridings but whose candidate was not elected are shown in white. So we see that for a majority of electors—56% of them, on average—their candidate was not elected.

If we had had a five-member multi-member district voting system, and they were divided based on the proportion of votes, then, instead of having three Liberal members and two Conservative members, there would have been two Conservative members, with 100,000 votes, and two Liberal members, with 102,000 votes, and the NDP would have one seat with about 50,000 votes. In that scenario, 96% of the votes cast would have elected a representative to Parliament.

Ms. de Rooij, do you not think that this system represents the will of the electorate better?

[*English*]

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: It comes down to what you mean by the intention of voters and what you mean by representation. Does it increase representation of ideological positions of voters in the legislature? Yes. There's no doubt about that. It does. Does that change policy outcomes? Arguably, you might want to say that what voters ultimately want to see is better representation of a variety of policy outcomes, potentially.

Government makes policy, and if there are no necessarily more representative governments, then it depends what you're after, and again—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Your time is up, unfortunately.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Kelly, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thanks for being here for this important hearing.

To all of the members of the audience, and to those who were also here all afternoon and who have chosen to stay for the evening, thank you for your attendance.

On this business of mandatory voting, which is one of the things the committee has been tasked to examine, we've heard a variety of explanations for people's choices to not vote, and in some cases this may be a choice people make. We've also heard, or it has been said, that some of the vulnerable and marginalized members of Canadian society may be less likely to vote and that there are obstacles to voting.

Does mandatory voting, for example, fining somebody for not voting, perhaps punish people who can least afford to be punished?

Mr. Harley Lang: Thank you so much for your question. It's an interesting one.

I think we have to point out that what is punishment for one person may not be punishment for another person. For example—

Mr. Pat Kelly: A fine is punishment.

Mr. Harley Lang: Yes, a fine is punishment. Some people might find that reinforcing. They might think, "Ha ha, I stuck it to the government. I did not vote, and look at me, I got a $20 fine." For other people, that could make or break their budget for the week.

● (1945)

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'll ask Dr. Simons to comment on this. Although much of the panel has been in concurrence over the non-desirability of Internet voting, nevertheless it struck me that, if online voting was merely an enabling tool to address people with mobility problems or those who are in remote areas—although we've heard from other witnesses about the challenges there—then does that take the target off an election? If we are talking about a relatively small number of votes that may be identified in some cases with geographically remote places, then does that take the target off? Is it safer if it is not the default, or is there absolutely no acceptable use or application for online voting?

Ms. Barbara Simons: I think there are acceptable uses for online voting for elections that don't matter much. For example, for prom queen, I don't care. I think it depends on how important you think the election is and how much of a risk you want to take. Obviously, fewer people voting over the Internet means the risk will be smaller. If the election doesn't matter, then who cares if it is risky or not?

Mr. Pat Kelly: In your opinion, there's no acceptable way to do it, if you place value on the outcome of an election, which we most certainly do at this committee.

Ms. Barbara Simons: How much risk do you want to take?

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'll ask Dr. de Rooij a final question. We've had quite a bit of back and forth on what preferential voting does to the possibility of what many would see as odious parties of extreme belief.

Can we safely make the point that in examining proportional representation it's unreasonable to do so under the lens of the current party structure, and that once you enter into proportionality you have created different avenues for parties, and that the electoral landscape would look radically different with the greater possibility of small parties or parties of extreme belief?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: You would expect that over time—and this might not happen noticeably in the first election—the types of parties might change somewhat. You'll see new parties entering the system and different issues coming up.

Mr. Pat Kelly: So the consequences of going to a proportional system are really unforeseeable.

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: You'll see more parties, but that's the whole point of more proportional systems. I'm pretty sure about that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: My thanks to our three presenters and everyone here this evening.

Professor de Rooij, I wanted to pick up on the conversation you were having with my colleague, Monsieur Boulerice, about the notion of more representative legislatures serving as a proxy for voters' true desire for more representative public policy and how that might not necessarily be achieved. I know my colleague and a lot of us could conceive of a smaller party holding a minority government to account and demanding certain things they felt were more representative of public policy.

Your contention that this might not always be the case could lead me to believe that a smaller party could, for example, pull the plug on the government at a time when it had reached a historic agreement with first nations, or early learning child care agreements with the provinces, or when we're about to host an international conference on climate change.

Are these the sorts of trade-offs that we need to consider in different electoral systems?

● (1950)

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: We do know that on average the duration of government is shorter under more proportional systems, which seems to suggest that they are more likely to have, at some point, somebody pulling the plug.

In respect of policy outcomes, however, it might not necessarily be that different from what we see now. I want to emphasize that there's little evidence that small parties carry more weight in policy decisions within the government. There is, as far as I know, little empirical evidence for that.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: You've done a lot of work studying the political behaviour of newcomers, immigrants. Can you talk to us about how newcomers to Canada experience and participate in the present electoral system, and what we should be mindful of when we're considering different electoral systems, and how newcomers might interact with a different system?

Mrs. Eline de Rooij: One thing I know is that immigrants adapt pretty quickly to new situations, including electoral situations. That's a positive. As to party choice, what we know about people choosing parties is that it's social. It's what your surroundings choose, the information you provide. Party mobilization is a very important aspect, and I think that is more important than the electoral system.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: That's perfect. Thanks very much.

Mr. Lang, on your idea of social experimentation and pilot projects, is the thought of experimenting with an electoral system in a localized area something that you've talked about or considered?

Mr. Harley Lang: Yes, it's something I considered. I think there are tactics out there that we can explore to increase voter turnout. One would be systematic prompting. For example, Stats Canada recently reported one of the highest response rates to its latest census. That might be in part due to the mandatory nature of completing the census. However, I know for a fact that I received knocks on my door to complete the census, and there were forms left at my door and the doors of other neighbours in my condominium. I think we could explore that route, how we can prompt individuals to come out to vote.

I echo many citizens who have talked to you, both here earlier tonight and at the town hall earlier this month, who have suggested exploring avenues to reinforce citizen behaviours for coming out to vote. What incentive can we establish that will bring voters out? Is it a tax rebate? Is it something else? I'm not sure, but I think it's something we have to look into.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: What about the idea of trying to demonstrate, or pilot, a different electoral system in a part of the country as a way to demonstrate it more broadly? I'm even thinking of the localized way of demonstrating a different urban-rural system for the country, as has been proposed to us many times throughout our deliberations.

Mr. Harley Lang: Yes, I think that's totally something we can look at on a local government level.

Again, we have to think about what we are evaluating. Are we looking at the stats of this political system on voter turnout, that is, the number of citizens who actually come out to vote, or are we looking at the representation of the different thoughts of the individuals in the House, or wherever it may be that they're represented?

I think we need to figure out what it is we're measuring and from there we can find other avenues to explore further.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Wonderful. Thanks so much.

The Chair: Thank you to our witnesses. That was really interesting. It got people thinking, for sure.

We're going to take a two-minute break, and then we're going to come back to our public input session.

● (1950)

(Pause)

● (2000)

The Chair: We're at the part of the meeting that many of you have been looking forward to, the open-mike session. I really need your help in this part of the meeting because we need to make sure that everyone who's on this list gets a chance to express themselves, and that can only happen if we keep to the two-minute limit per person. We've been able to achieve this everywhere across the country, and I'd say Vancouver is no different. So please don't be offended if I have to invoke the time limit at some point.

We'll start with Ariane Eckardt and Siegfried Eckardt at mikes one and two, please.

Ms. Eckardt, go ahead for two minutes.

Ms. Ariane Eckardt (As an Individual): Good evening, ladies and gentlemen and thank you all for coming out.

I'm very happy that we've already dealt with online voting.

My next point is that if the system isn't broken, don't fix it; maybe improve it.

As far as lowering the voting age is concerned, that was raised here earlier. We had another session where an ex-MP came up and said, “My teenagers have asked me to say not to foist this additional burden onto them at this stage, when they have enough to worry about with their studies and they do not need to be burdened with also having to find out who to vote for and when to vote.”

The other thing I'd like to bring up is about the radical parties that are springing up. For instance, in Germany, Ms. Merkel, I think, is letting the German people down, which resulted in the radical party that sprang up, the anti-immigration party. If our leaders listen to us and do the right thing by us and our country, there is less chance of those radical parties springing up.

One situation we should consider also is that we have currently a lot of foreign money pouring into our country at election time and also other times. I would urge you to find a way of curtailing that. Israel has the same problem.

I am for a referendum.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siegfried Eckardt, go ahead, please.

Mr. Siegfried Eckardt (As an Individual): I'm Ziggy Eckardt, and I am the husband. I'm going to try to make it fairly short.

There is only one thing I wanted to bring up, but in the meantime things have happened as I have been listening this afternoon. With all the different reasons and the different options we have for change, something hasn't been mentioned. I personally would like to see voters who are a bit better informed when they go into the voting booth.

The other thing is I am very much in favour of what has been said this afternoon by our statistician, and I would like to remind the panel that 68% of all Canadians would actually like to see us all vote on whatever we do.

Besides that, I have a little something here from Germany, and I've shown it to about 700 people already and there hasn't been a single one who has been in favour of adopting something like what I have here. With your permission I would like to unfold this ballot from Germany.

Thank you.

● (2005)

The Chair: I bet it's a ballot. It's very long. Go ahead. Unfold it, absolutely.

Wow.

Mr. Siegfried Eckardt: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll hear from Ms. Angela Smailes now for two minutes.

Ms. Angela Smailes (As an Individual): Thank you. Good evening.

This is a historic moment in our country's electoral life. I'm hoping that you will put forward an alternative system and usher in a new era of robust democracy. In order to achieve success you will need to come to consensus, or at least partial consensus, so I'm exhorting you to take the time you need to get up to speed on the systems that are likely to be real contenders: STV and MMP.

Call in more experts to fill in the gaps that you have and spend time to deliberate between yourselves. In particular, I would strongly recommend sequestering yourselves in a nice resort with no distractions for as long as it takes to hash out the best system for our country, one that fulfills our values, those very ones that are on your initial guiding document, and—this is important—one that meets the equality provisions and the democratic rights of citizens enshrined in our charter.

The question is, will you as 12 paid professional parliamentarians be able to achieve what 60 random unpaid citizens accomplished, coming up with a system that reflected our values and was approved by a majority of us in B.C.?

All great endeavours require sacrifice, or what looks like sacrifice. In your case, I believe it will be letting go of partisanship. This is perhaps your greatest challenge. I wish you courage, creative thinking, and success.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Smith, the floor is yours for two minutes.

Mr. Derek Smith (As an Individual): Ladies and gentlemen, you will agree that there is no greater matter as important as the nature of our democracy, which heretofore has been defined as our ability to vote by secret ballot those to represent us. The ability to elect those to represent us without fear or interference has served us well since Confederation. Now we are being told to change.

The guiding principles of this committee are, in my opinion, indefensible. Further, they do not advance the cause of the alternate systems cited either. Among the principles is an effort to restore effectiveness and/or legitimacy to our electoral system. Is our current system ineffective and/or illegitimate? I don't think so.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Please, in all other places it went very smoothly because everyone respected alternative positions. So perhaps we can mute the cheering a little bit, even when it's something you agree with, because it takes time away from the speaker.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Derek Smith: I hope that didn't affect my time.

Are the alternate systems more effective or legitimate? I think not.

As well, the change sought has at its basis greater accessibility and inclusiveness. This can be achieved without change to our electoral system. Our electoral system is robust; as evidence, voter turnout has increased over the past four federal elections.

Presently, we are being asked to comment on a system about which little facts are known and fewer details are presented. When asked at a town hall meeting, members of the majority party refused to comment, saying that it's not the time to get down into the weeds on this issue.

I disagree. Now is precisely the time to have all the facts before us so that we can make an informed decision. I call on Canadians of all political stripe—and I am Conservative—to have a say in a peaceful and polite forum on this matter and then come to a consensus and referendum. Only—and I underscore only—then can those elected to govern us move forward. I also ask that this committee call upon the words of the Chief Electoral Officer, Marc Mayrand, on this matter.

In closing, generations of Canadians who have come before us have established the rights we currently cherish. Any action to modify this would deny the ability to select the method of our government and would impair the right we have to vote.

Thank you very much.

● (2010)

The Chair: Ms. Reid, go ahead, please.

Ms. Kelly Reid (As an Individual): I'd like to thank you all for this opportunity to tell my story tonight. I don't think it's a unique story.

From the beginning of my son's life I've taken him with me to vote. He grew up believing that voting was fun and that it was important. He would ask, “Did we win?” And my answer was always the same, “Hedy Fry won.” I want him to feel like a winner when he casts his first ballot. I want his vote to matter and he wants this too.

He spent his summer with Leadnow, talking with fellow citizens about the importance of changing our electoral system, and though my son and I both admire Hedy Fry, we know that no matter how we feel about the Liberals, she will always win our riding, and that is my point. It doesn't matter how we feel about the Liberals in Ottawa, because a vote for any other party in this riding is a wasted vote. It quite simply doesn't matter. Almost 51% of votes cast in the 2015 election did not matter because they did not go towards electing an MP.

When Canada incorporates the principle of proportional representation into the electoral system, it will allow more votes to matter, more voices to be heard, and will allow the election of a Parliament that represents all of its citizens. A Parliament elected by a system of PR would break the pattern of limiting our vision to four-year election cycles and to governments undoing what the previous governments did. A system of PR would allow the Canada of the future to have long and lasting environmental policies, long-term planning for the military and for our educational and health systems.

These are priorities for many Canadians whose voices may not be heard in our current system. Yes, a Parliament elected through a system of PR would require parties to work together. It would require the best of our politicians, and I believe our politicians can rise to that challenge.

I do not require a referendum. A majority vote in Parliament would satisfy me.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would remind everyone that even though we're not on Parliament Hill, we have to operate according to House of Commons rules, and one of the rules of the House of Commons is that people cannot film or take photos at committee meetings once the gavel has dropped to open the meeting. You can take pictures after. You can take pictures right before the gavel comes down, but unfortunately, photographs and video-making are not allowed.

Mr. Macanulty.

Mr. Ian Macanulty (As an Individual): Hi everyone, and thank you so much for coming to listen to all of our opinions tonight. I speak in favour of proportional representation. I think it's the fairest way for voters to be represented in Parliament.

I would like my MP to represent me directly on policy and to vote in Parliament according to the way I would like that policy to be represented in Parliament. I think that the only fair way for me to get that is for everyone to get that, so that's a proportional system.

I think it enhances our democracy when the number of seats that a party wins in Parliament represents the proportion of the vote that they got. It takes away a little from our democracy when we have a majority that actually only represents a minority. The distortion is what people call it. That's kind of the wrong thing. Basically, it's an issue of fairness.

I just want to talk about three points that I think are important when considering which PR system to choose because I think a lot of people have brought that up this afternoon. How do you choose a PR system? Here are three things that I think are important.

First of all, proportionality should apply equally across the whole country in every region, whether you're in northern B.C., urban Vancouver, or anywhere in between. You have to make sure that the level of proportionality isn't scaled by local population.

Second, I think all MPs should be elected by the voters. There should not be party lists. Lots of systems work this way. STV works this way. Any system with an open list works this way. I think that it strengthens the tie between the MP and the local voter. That's why it's an important thing to do.

Third, I believe multi-member ridings are better where possible than single member ridings, because you can make sure that all of the different groups within a riding have a direct representative.

● (2015)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Allan, go ahead.

Ms. Elaine Allan (As an Individual): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to Vancouver.

It is a pleasure to be here.

[*English*]

Imagine having a federal election and not knowing who won for one week. This is the new reality in Australia. Imagine having five federal elections in five years. This is Australia's new reality. Proportional voting can create instability, so before you go ahead and change our electoral system which has been in place for 150 years, Canadians deserve a vote in a referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Spitz.

Ms. Jane Spitz (As an Individual): Hi, and thank you for letting me come and speak to you guys tonight.

I believe it should be the voters and not politicians who have the final say in changing the voting system. If the Prime Minister really wanted to include Canadians in the process, he should propose his alternative, state his case to voters, and let us have the final say by holding a referendum.

The Globe and Mail has stated that with less than 40% of the vote last election, our government has no mandate to transform the oldest practice of Canada's democracy. Changing the voting system without consent from the electorate would be unconstitutional.

Thank you, guys.

The Chair: Ms. Hardwick, please.

Ms. Colleen Hardwick (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

My name is Colleen Hardwick. I am the founder of PlaceSpeak, which is a Vancouver-based civic tech start-up that we've been developing for the last five years here.

About six years ago I was looking at the west side of Vancouver, specifically the Arbutus corridor, trying to figure out how to consult with the residents that lived along that corridor in such a way as to be able to prove it. We looked at traditional methods, such as public meetings and door-knocking and landline telephones, and quickly came to the conclusion that we weren't going to be able to get reliable and defensible data in this way.

The question then became how we could connect people's digital identities to place online, and prove it in such a way that was defensible and legitimate. This led to the development of this platform, which we have been developing with the support of the National Research Council of Canada through its industrial research assistance program, or IRAP.

We've learned over time that there is no silver bullet with identity, and that digital identity authentication in terms of citizen engagement, which is a natural part of the political process, the democratic process, is achievable. There is an organization that you may or may not be familiar with, called DIACC, the Digital ID and Authentication Council of Canada. Digital identity to authentication to place has the potential to be quite transformational broadly in democratic processes.

I missed some of the earlier discussions around Internet voting, but I wouldn't be so quick to throw the baby out with the bathwater, because there are developments that are under way where this country is actually taking a leadership and pioneering role in digital identity authentication, protection of individual privacy, and data encryption.

If we want to be engaging with people on an ongoing basis, it has to be through what we're referring to as a digital identity echo system that consists of different levels of government, banks, telecommunications and technology companies, which are all leading the way to take us to the next level of actionable feedback from individuals broadly, not just in elections, but throughout the democratic cycle, because citizen engagement and popular control is as important as the payoff of empowerment with voting.

Thank you very much.

● (2020)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Dunkley.

Mr. WIlliam Dunkley (As an Individual): Thank you.

Mr. Chair, members of Parliament, thank you for being here. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you.

Canada is widely respected around the world for its stability and good governance. This is because we've been one of the world's oldest functioning democracies. For 150 years we've elected people the same way. From election to election, from generation to generation, although we don't always like the choice of government, we've never questioned the validity of the actual election.

Our current Prime Minister, however, does wish to make changes and made it part of his election platform. As such, I respect that the elected government has a mandate to promote change in our system; however, I would submit that he did not specify exactly what form that change would take. Therefore, respecting the right of the government to proceed with changes, I submit that it would be important that the government present a referendum to the people on whatever change or changes the committee and the government come up with.

This is too important an issue to leave to a simple vote in the House, and I am not at all denigrating the importance of votes in the House of Commons.

I do not believe in government by referendum, but I do believe a referendum is necessary to elect future governments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Mndebele.

Mr. Zak Mndebele (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

I would reiterate the brilliant points made by the person right before me. Whatever the outcome is of this process of electoral reform, let's ensure that the process we choose reflects the highest in the democratic ideals that have made this country great.

Let's ensure that the future of this country remains as democratic and as free as it has been for the generations before us, so that my generation and the generation that comes afterward can look at this country and continue to respect the democracy that has been preserved from day one.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Tetrault.

● (2025)

Ms. Rachel Tetrault (As an Individual): Good evening. It's a pleasure to speak directly to the committee this evening.

My first introduction to electoral politics was when I was six months old. My mom took me in a stroller door to door right before an upcoming election. By the time I was 14, I was an expert at canvassing apartment buildings to get out the vote, and when I turned 18, I spent the entire election day at a polling station registering folks to vote.

Some 10 years later, I now work at Leadnow. Last night, Leadnow teamed up with the UBC political science student association to host a youth town hall on electoral reform, and I found myself in a room with 75 other young people who also care about democracy.

The theme of the night was how changes to our voting system could better represent young people. We used some of the questions from your guide, facilitated discussions, and collected written input from participants. Today, I am bringing you some of what we heard last night, and we will be submitting a formal brief along with the results from the youth town halls happening in Winnipeg tonight and Toronto later this week.

We asked those in the room if they felt that our current voting system represents young people effectively. About 86% of them said no. Arian Zand, one of the participants, wrote that our current system does not represent young Canadians because of the wasted vote argument. If we know our vote is going to be wasted because of the structure of the system, we are less likely to vote.

We asked the group how we could improve our current voting system. Different themes emerged particularly around the importance of proportionality, accessibility, and education. Dylan Williams wrote that proportionality is a mental must; whether STV or MMP, trying to balance a proportionality of votes with the need for geographic representation is key to the Canadian context.

Megan Pratt said that we work with people with physical and cognitive disabilities that require extra assistance with voting. More voting booths, longer hours for advanced voting, and fewer barriers to providing ID were also mentioned.

When we asked the group whether or not voting age should be lowered to 16, 56% said yes, 38% said no, and 6% weren't sure. Sophie Harrison said that with such major decisions being made about our future, young people deserve a say. One of the biggest crises in our democracy is lack of youth engagement. Starting a habit of voting when young people are still in high school, paired with more voter education, will increase turnout. We need our leaders to be brave and forward thinking.

You have an opportunity to create an incredible legacy for our democracy, and there are young people across this country that are counting on you.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Ms. Valerie Turner.

Ms. Valerie Turner (As an Individual): I am not a democracy geek. I am a professional theatre artist who believes deeply in social justice, and speaking from a social justice perspective, I have three points to make about electoral reform.

One, to increase engagement in voter turnout, I support lowering the voting age to 16. I know this is controversial, but hear me out. When I was 16, which was much longer ago than I would like to confess, a federal election was upcoming, and despite the fact that we could not vote, my social studies teacher had us bring in newspaper articles that discussed party platforms which we would analyze and compare with the platforms of other parties. We discussed the impact of those policies on ourselves, our families, and our communities.

We looked at our local candidates, and given what we had learned from our research, we decided on which candidate we would have voted for if we had been eligible to do so. From the moment I turned 18, no matter whether I lived in Victoria, Toronto, Vancouver, and no matter whether it was a municipal, provincial, or federal election, I have voted in every single election in which I was eligible to vote.

I believe that this kind of critical thinking and electoral literacy is a stellar way to create a young and an engaged citizenry that crosses socio-economic barriers, geographic divides, and racial and gender biases.

Two, as some of you may be aware, an Ottawa police officer posted the following online comment, as reported by the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper, on the tragic death of Inuk artist Annie Pootoogook: “Because much of the aboriginal population in Canada is just satisfied being alcohol or drug abusers, living in poor conditions etc….they have to have the will to change, it’s not society’s fault.”

The problem is not so much that this police officer is a racist, the problem is that he's not alone in thinking this way. Canada has a well-documented history of disenfranchising women and racialized minorities, and institutionalized systemic racism and sexism continues to effectively disenfranchise women and racialized communities today.

First-past-the-post and winner-takes-all models reinforce systemic racism and sexism. Therefore, I am 100% in support of some form of proportional representation.

● (2030)

The Chair: Mr. Grinshpan, please go ahead. You have two minutes.

Mr. Roy Grinshpan (As an Individual): As it happens, I think the right balance is not touching our existing seats, but giving each voter two ballots and having the second ballot used to proportionately choose just another 25 seats. With 4% of the minimum threshold, people can feel that we're making a cautious incremental approach to change. As our third expert witness strongly cautioned that we do, we can take it slowly. Rome wasn't built in a day. Let's not rush things, although it doesn't matter what I think or what anyone else in this room thinks unless the limited consultation we have here is legitimized by a national referendum on any and all changes.

Having personally attended all the meetings of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly, we in B.C. know what a legitimate process actually is. Citizens like me who lived through that expect the federal government to actually practise the fundamentals of federalism, learn from the world-acknowledged best practices of our province, which included a process that was not politicized by its actors, a process that was careful to take its time to thoroughly educate the participants. It did not ram through a sham process as is happening here with three hours of open mike for a metro region of three million people, to speak nothing of Alberta that has one pit stop, in one city for the entire province. Also, we require a citizens' assembly process that is legitimized by a referendum. We absolutely need that.

To the honourable member from the Bloc Québécois, my other point is a very cautionary tale for everybody here about Quebec. God forbid you actually decide to proceed without a referendum and hide for cover under the Liberal platform that promised non-specific electoral reform amongst a host of other promises that have been broken without any thought. The next time a Parti Québécois government gets elected because the population happens to be tired of the current governing party, you are handing the separatists carte blanche to declare a unilateral declaration of independence under the same cover as this process. Everyone knows the separatists' platform has separation in it and it is implied that a referendum is not necessary because the federal government didn't need one.

The Chair: Okay, time is getting—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roy Grinshpan: That may be what my friend from the Bloc Québécois would like to see happen, but as federalists, we should not support that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Michael Redman, please come to the other mike.

Ms. Deroo, you have two minutes.

Ms. Jackie Deroo (As an Individual): Thank you.

I am a retired senior citizen and mother of three children. I worked all my life in business, paid my taxes and always voted. I thought I lived in a modern democracy; however, four years ago, my husband and I faced a family crisis when I found my adult son in tears one day. When I asked what was wrong, he confessed he was deeply afraid of climate change and afraid of the future. He doubted he even had a future. He didn't think he would ever have children. He wanted to know why politicians weren't doing anything. We discovered that our two adult daughters felt the same way. We were upset to hear this. When they asked if we could do something, we said yes. We wanted to be positive and diligent, so I am now a full-time volunteer inspired by an organization called Leadnow. We are working for a vision of the future that I want for my children, an open democracy, a fair economy, and a safe climate.

In my work over the last two years, I have spoken to hundreds and hundreds of Canadians face to face. I have concluded that there are two overarching problems with our present electoral system: It is not fair to citizens and it is not right for the future of our democracy.

I would like each of you to ask this question when you evaluate the elements of our next system: Is it fair, but more than this, is it as fair as it can be? Furthermore, our new system must be right for the future. I agree with the Prime Minister that diversity is the real strength of our country. It will be even more diverse in the future. This is the story of Canada. We need the trust and engagement of as many citizens as possible to give ourselves the best chance to address the big problems our children will be facing in the future.

Declining trust in government eventually can only lead to civil unrest, as we are seeing in the U.S. I ask each of you to have the courage to support a proportional voting system that would give us a fair, inclusive, and more collaborative democracy.

● (2035)

The Chair: Thank you.

Is Mr. Redmond here? No.

Mr. Derek Brackley, go ahead.

Mr. Derek Brackley (As an Individual): Good evening. It's my pleasure to be here and to address members of the committee.

My father immigrated to Canada. He came from a place where there were no elections. He came here because he loved democracy.

I learned a lot about that when I was growing up. I have voted in every election. My kids are in Labrador and Ontario, and they vote. I'm a Canadian citizen first, and a member of any particular part of the country second.

In our first-past-the-post system, about nine million votes in the last election didn't count. Our Prime Minister has said it's broken and promised to change the system. Who wouldn't be in favour of a better system that, for instance, provided effective government, accountable government, provided an effective opposition, valued votes where every vote counts, gave regional balance, and engaged in inclusive decision-making? These are values that formed the basis of the Law Commission report in 2004.

There has been a lot of time since 2004, and maybe we could debate what has been learned since then, but I think many of the comments I've heard today suggest that the population needs to be educated, and there needs to be a common base of knowledge as we engage in this discussion.

Some form of proportional representation is in use in 85% of OECD countries. It has been proven to work. It identifies, and you can read this in the Law Commission report, that participation of voters has increased. The responsiveness of politicians to the citizenry has increased. These are values that I think are really important for Canada.

Many young people don't vote. My kids vote, but they tell me about their friends who don't vote because, “Why would I vote? It doesn't matter”. I have voted in many elections and most of the time I think, “Okay, this is my first choice, but wait a second, I'd better vote some other way because I'm more concerned about who the two leading candidates are, and I need to vote in such a way that the worst outcome doesn't happen.”

The Chair: You're referring to strategic voting, of course, but we're way over time. I have to go to the next speaker.

Mr. Derek Brackley: I would ask the committee to recommend some form of proportional representation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lumer.

Mr. Jon Lumer (As an Individual): Thank you for your time.

My name is Jon Lumer. I came this evening also to speak in favour of proportional representation, and against a referendum. I spent the last writ period in several different ridings on both sides of the country. I worked first with a candidate in Laurier—Sainte-Marie in Quebec. There were nine candidates in the riding. Three candidates received more than 10,000 votes each. The NDP kept that riding. Hélène Laverdière is the MP, with less than 40% of the vote. However, 61.7% of the votes were not translated into representation in the House.

I spent the last half of the campaign in the north Okanagan. Most people I spoke with in downtown Vernon were trying to decide how to vote strategically. The consensus was that the NDP had the best hope of beating the Conservatives. This ended up being false. The Liberals beat the NDP by four points, but in any case, the Conservatives maintained their seat with less than 40% of the vote; 60.7% of the votes were not translated into representation in the House.

My family's home is in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec, and in that riding of Laurentides—Labelle the vote was split fairly evenly among four parties. The Bloc took the riding with less than 30% of the vote; 70.3% of the votes were not translated into representation in the House.

I arrived in Vancouver on November 1 with my wife. Our MP is the Honourable Hedy Fry. Dr. Fry was elected with 56.1% of the votes, which is to say that 32,554 ballots were cast for Dr. Fry, but she only needed 11,619 votes to secure her seat; so, in fact, even in a safe riding where most people had the pleasure of actually voting for the person who speaks for them in Parliament, 80% of the votes were not translated into representation in the House.

Under our system, the more familiar you are with the workings of democracy, the more difficult it becomes to convince yourself that your vote matters. The less motivated you are to participate, no matter where you are in the country, no matter who you would like to vote for, that is a very sad state of affairs, but it can be easily corrected. Please do what you can to ensure we obtain some form of proportional representation.

Thank you.

● (2040)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Schulz, go ahead.

Mr. Andreas Schulz (As an Individual): Hi.

There were suggestions made here that proportional systems might lead to extremism. I would like to point out that the current first-past-the-post system in Canada gave us the Japanese internment, and it's given us the ongoing systemic discrimination against our first nations. We don't need proportional representation to give us extreme views.

One of the most important aspects of a voting system is not only that it's fair, but also that it's perceived to be fair by the voters. I think we've heard enough tonight to know that many voters don't feel that the system is fair to them. A perception of fairness may outweigh some of the disadvantages of the systems that have been explained to us.

I'm very much in favour of a proportional system. I was very encouraged by the work of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform that was undertaken in British Columbia. These are normal citizens from all over the province who got together and made excellent recommendations. I think the only downfall was that it wasn't enforced. In other words, the recommendations of the committee should have been accepted.

I don't think a referendum is helpful. Very rarely have I seen the effects of referendums coming out the way they were intended to come out. We only have to look at the recent Brexit referendum in Great Britain to understand that it can create huge problems. My understanding is that out of 600-some MPs in Great Britain, only 132 were in favour of leaving the common market.

I encourage you all to pick the best possible proportional system so that we can all be well represented.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Woodsworth.

Ms. Ellen Woodsworth (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

My name is Ellen Woodsworth. I'm a former Vancouver city councillor and chair of Women Transforming Cities, an international society. I'm also a cousin of Grace MacInnis, who for a number of years was the only woman MP in the House of Commons.

I chained myself in the House of Commons, with other women from the abortion cavalcade, to ensure that the House of Commons listened to the voices of women calling for a woman's right to choose on abortion. Women did not have free access to either abortion or birth control in the 1970s, and were not being heard by the government because women were not in the government.

Today there are issues that have not been heard by a government that does not equitably represent them. The voices of murdered and missing first nations women are only now being heard. There is a creeping disillusionment in this country since the last federal election that people will not be heard on a number of commitments.

I'm pleased today that the government representing all parties is listening to citizens about the current undemocratic electoral system. I'm very concerned that there are so few voices of women being heard at these hearings. I'm concerned that aboriginal, lesbian, trans, immigrant, refugee, young and older women, from all cultures and races, are not being encouraged to attend these or special hearings. They are the ones bearing the brunt of the economic and housing crisis and climate change. Their vote needs to be reflected.

Of the 62 witnesses who appeared before the special committee this summer, just 13 were women. In almost half of all meetings, fully 100% of the witnesses were men. At one point, the committee convened seven meetings in a row without hearing from a single female witness. This committee is meeting during the day and has no child care available. I understand that in Ottawa there was a special meeting convened for women. Only 25% of this committee is made up of women.

Nancy Peckford of Equal Voice stated:

> Recognizing Canada's first-past-the-post system has been woefully imperfect in terms of the electoral outcomes it has shaped for women who remain chronically and severely under-represented, the committee must be much more thoughtful about who precisely they hear from.

Women currently comprise 26% of federal members of Parliament. Only three of Canada's 13 premiers are women. Canada ranks 64th internationally for women's representation in national parliaments.

● (2045)

The Chair: We're really quite over the time limit now.

Ms. Ellen Woodsworth: I support proportional representation. I support the three points of Equal Voice, and I think we need not have a referendum, which often is just unfair.

The Chair: Mr. DePaco.

Mr. Greg DePaco (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening, panellists.

I'm grateful to Dr. Simons for making many of the points I was never going to be able to say in just two minutes.

I concur with Dr. Simon's conclusion that online voting shouldn't be embraced before it can be made secure, but I go still further and suggest that even if online voting could one day be made 100% secure, it could never be visibly and demonstrably secure in the way a properly scrutineered paper ballot can. Without a visibly secure process, rumours of secret fixes will abound, rumours that would surely increase cynicism about the electoral process and quite possibly cause a decrease in voter turnout.

Not every citizen can be a computer expert. The idea that everyone marks a paper and puts it in a box, and in front of representatives of each candidate the ballots are dumped out and counted is on a human scale. Any move to online or electronic voting is another level of "trust the experts". This yields conspiracy speculation. Would such speculation be baseless? Perhaps. However, a conspiracy theory need not be well grounded to deter voter participation.

Gathering at a voting place to cast the ballot makes voting visible to the community. Voters are urged to bring their children with them to impress on them the importance of voting. Voting by mobile phone, by contrast, would to an onlooker be indistinguishable from ordering a pizza. As former B.C. Liberal leader Gordon Wilson said, there's simply no substitute for showing up at a physical polling station and having one's identity verified before being allowed to vote.

The push for online voting is essentially based on the supposition that it will increase voter turnout, but this notion assumes that a significant number of non-voters would vote if it were more convenient. The evidence, however, shows that non-voters are not deterred by the inconvenience of voting, but rather feel disengaged from the democratic process. Canada has changed from a largely rural to a largely urban nation over the past century, making voting much more convenient, but turnout has dropped in tandem.

Two British members of Parliament recently toured England speaking to voters and non-voters and reported that those who don't vote are as uninterested in politics as it is possible to be. We have work to do in re-engaging such citizens, but online voting is not the solution.

The Chair: Do you have many more points to make, Mr. DePaco?

Mr. Greg DePaco: Very quickly, finishing up, the paper ballot is the key physical proof of our power as citizens. No citizen should ever have to wonder whether his or her vote was counted, let alone be called upon to trust that it was.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Quarmby.

● (2050)

Ms. Lynne Quarmby (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm Lynne Quarmby. I'm a professor at Simon Fraser University. I am a scientist. I direct a research lab studying the molecular biology of cells.

I have voted in every election I have been eligible to vote in. I have never voted with much enthusiasm. I've never had an option to vote for someone I believed could be elected, who would go to Ottawa and represent my values.

Last year I ran as a candidate in Burnaby North—Seymour. I learned many things. One thing I learned, because I heard it thousands of times on doorsteps, at rallies, by email, and on social media, was that people liked me. They thought, “Here's somebody who can represent my values and someone who will be a strong voice for me in Ottawa; however, I'm not going to vote for her.” Strategic voting....

Of all the systems you consider, please bring us a system where strategic voting in Canada means voting for the person you believe will best represent you. That's the strategy I want to see.

Very quickly, as a scientist, I can't resist hypothesizing that there's a strong correlation between those calling loudly for a referendum and a partisan allegiance that would benefit from the status quo, because a referendum will give us the status quo.

Thank you.

[*Applause*]

The Chair: You're free to clap and cheer, but I find it takes something away from the meeting. However, as I say, it's a free country.

Mr. Couche, please.

Mr. Brian Couche (As an Individual): Good evening.

I was here earlier this afternoon and I picked up one of your cards, #ERRE. You'll have to excuse my accent. I'm from Ontario, but from where I come that says “eerie”, not as in Lake Erie, but as in eerie or scary. The path we decide to take with this committee is going to determine Canada's role in democracy, how we're going to shape our society and everything else.

Mr. Trudeau did get a mandate for electoral reform, but he also got a mandate to legalize marijuana, and look at the fine mess he's making with that committee.

When I was walking around this afternoon thinking of what I was going to say, I came across a mural on a wall that said “Voodoo Veritas”. So I brushed up on my Latin and I went to Simon Fraser University, and the dictionary said that Veritas was the Roman goddess of truth.

Ronald Reagan said it best when he said “trust but verify”. We need a citizens' committee so we can verify that what you're putting forward as recommendations is going to be the best for our democracy.

All I can say is that any proposal not put forward for a referendum is a slap in the face to democracy. As an active member of the Canadian Labour Congress, which represents over 3.5 million union workers, we'll make sure that we can trust and verify.

Thank you.

The Chair: David Matthews.

Mr. David Matthews (As an Individual): Good evening, everyone. My name is David Matthews, and first I'd like to thank all members of the committee for committing their time to this important electoral reform process.

I believe the first-past-the-post system must come to an end, simply because it's not democratic. When you have a system in place where a ruling party with less than 40% of the vote can unilaterally sign off on a so-called free trade deal negotiated in secrecy, a deal that will have a profound outcome on the people of Canada, a deal that was not part of the party's electoral platform, you have a major problem.

The alternative must be simple to understand and understood to be democratic. In my view, that alternative is proportional representation. It's easy to understand that if your candidate is elected, he or she will be a member of Parliament. Also, it necessitates greater consultation and collaboration among the members of Parliament to get business done, which is sorely lacking at this time.

While proportional representation may not be perfect, it's a whole lot better than what we have now as well as the current alternatives. It should be decided by referendum.

This should be just the first step. There are so many other areas that need to be explored. Based on my experience as a canvasser for a party over many years, I can tell you that education is critical.

I trust that this electoral reform process is not just another smoke-and-mirrors initiative by government, undertaken just so they can say they have consulted with the stakeholders and rammed through as a predetermined outcome. We have all been down this road so many times before, federally, provincially, and civically.

Thank you.

● (2055)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. MacDonald.

Ms. Jana MacDonald (As an Individual): Good evening. My name is Jana MacDonald and I consider myself an average Canadian. I am here not to present argument or evidence. I am here tonight to present my plea.

My Canada is a community and all that this word invokes. As Canadians we value a unique balance between individual autonomy and collective responsibility. My Canada is diverse, not divisive; inclusive, not exclusionary; and collaborative rather than combative.

During the previous government's rule, it became apparent that exclusion and division could be fostered by a false majority government that represented a minority of Canadians. Perhaps we can thank the former government for reminding us how first past the post can be applied at its worst.

Many of the expert witnesses who have presented to the committee have thoroughly outlined the shortcomings of first past the post. It is an electoral system that fails to ensure that all votes are equal and hence fails to deliver true representative democracy. It's now time for change.

I want an electoral system that ensures that most Canadians are represented, ensures that all Canadians can vote their conscience and be confident that their votes will elect a government that represents the median voters and the median views of all Canadians. I want a government that reflects my Canada, a government that's collaborative and consultative, that includes women and minorities in proportion to the population, that engages citizens in the political process, and that is committed to the development of stable and long-term policies. All this is possible with proportional representation.

I believe that the intersection of the best of Canadian culture and a PR electoral system will ensure that the political, social, and economic advantages that PR offers can be provided in the Canadian context. With a system of PR we can all achieve a kinder, gentler democracy.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Dolezar, please.

Ms. Dana Dolezsar (As an Individual): Hi, my name is Dana Dolezsar.

I want to thank you for allowing me to speak today, and I particularly want to thank the Leadnow community for informing me of this event. They also sent me the link to the survey, and I did complete the survey. I sent it to several of my family members and friends who unfortunately had not heard of it at all, nor did they know about the event. I feel that there's a bit of an oversight there and that bringing people out to things like this needs to be pushed further.

I chose to speak because I'm 26 years old and I do represent a lot of voters under 30. I voted in the last election, and before I voted I watched the debates. I talked with my family, my friends, my peers, and my co-workers, and unfortunately, what I heard from a lot of them was that they were upset with the voting system and they weren't going to vote. My response to them was that unless they were standing there with a sign that said, "I'm not voting because...", then nobody would know why they were not voting. I think that means you're giving away your vote to the winner, and that's not an effective system either.

Many people begrudgingly said, "I know the party that I want to represent Canada is not going to win in my riding, so I'm going to vote strategically", and they encouraged me to do the same. I didn't like that at all and I had to do my research. I discovered that my particular riding had either been NDP or Liberal for the past five years, and I felt confident voting for the Green Party, which was the party that I felt best represented Canada and my priorities for this country. A lot of my friends couldn't do that and didn't do that, but when they watched the debates, and they heard what Trudeau and the Liberal Party had said, they were confident that the first-past-the-post system would be finished after this election and that in the upcoming elections, we would have a new system.

I feel that the number one reason young people are discouraged from voting is not only because of the first-past-the-post system, but because we're witnessing politicians not following through on their commitments. We have heard this commitment being made, that the system is going to change and that this was the last election in which we would have a first-past-the-post system. Even if we have a referendum, and I have not made a decision on whether I feel a referendum is necessary, it needs to happen clearly and quickly before the next election.

Thank you.

● (2100)

The Chair: Mr. Carter, go ahead.

Mr. Dave Carter (As an Individual): I recommend a mixed-member proportional system for federal elections. The MMP system balances the need for regional representation and the need to have a fair and accurate reflection of voters' political preferences. The MMP system should be designed with approximately one-third of the MPs elected by party ballot to ensure proportional representation. Our current first-past-the-post system fails to meet the most basic principle of democracy, namely, the right to fair representation. I give the following example to illustrate this point.

In the 1993 federal election, the Progressive Conservative Party received 2,186,000 votes and won two seats. During the same election, the Bloc Québécois received 1,846,000 votes and won 54 seats. This sort of distorted election result serves no one's best interest and results in an unstable political landscape that is subject to volatile swings. Please remedy this by replacing our outdated voting system with one that is accurate and proportional. Regarding the concerns of extreme views being represented by small parties, I believe it is better to have these views represented so they can be debated openly, rather than having them suppressed where they will grow in alienation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Shank, go ahead.

Mr. Gordon Shank (As an Individual): Hello. I'm Gordon Shank from Burnaby. I'm a parent and a small business owner. I also come here representing 457 people from an industrial association mainly involved in biotechnology and green energy. This includes 12 people, like myself, who are of first nations descent.

I want to start and finish with a warning, and the first one is that this brief speech contains the word "trump", so please strap yourselves in.

Democracy is really the heart and soul of Canada, and it's a rare item that is the highest common denominator of all Canadians, but we do have some flaws. The current administration doesn't have a clear mandate with 39% support of voters—and maybe in the mid-teens in terms of all Canadians—who elected a government on a basket of election planks, for example, strong opposition to change, yet, that could be trumped with a much stronger desire for legalized marijuana.

As for solutions, who knows? But it needs to be rigorously debated, and we need a social licence. It also should be decided by Canadians, not our political proxies. Therefore, I and we, our group, advocate a referendum with a very high quorum to validate it, or alternatively, a clear and detailed plan to be presented by each party for the next federal election.

My last and ending conclusion contains a warning. I would caution you to be very leery of any unintended consequences. Very poignant examples of this may be the U.K. Labour Party, with an increased voice for anti-Semitism, or even in the Green Party of Canada, with an increased voice in BDS advocacy. These haven't had a positive effect on either party.

Thank you.

● (2105)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Zahavi, go ahead.

Mr. Rod Zahavi (As an Individual): Good evening, everybody.

I will start on a personal note. I'm a Canadian Israeli who first got to vote in the past election. We voted, had dinner, and by dessert time, there was a winner. In my country, in seven years, this has never happened, and, by the way, the threshold has been going up and up and up, and by now it's about 5%. My point is no system is perfect, but boy, this is risky business. I'm just leading in to what I have to say.

The electoral system of the nation has far-reaching impacts on the democratic rights and representations of its citizens, but to an even larger extent casts an everlasting effect on the culture, values, and stability of a nation. It just does. If it is important enough for us Canadians to elect our leaders every four years within our existing election framework, it doesn't seem reasonable that altering the framework itself, a much bigger, long-lasting decision, can be decided without the democratic participation of all Canadians. This is why we must have a referendum on this issue where all Canadians, and not just the nice people in this room, can have their say.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: I give the floor now to Mr. Norman Franks.

Mr. Norman Franks (As an Individual): Thank you for allowing me to speak this evening. I have two points.

First past the post has served us well for nearly 150 years. It is simple, and it is easy to understand. Please don't change it.

Using versions of proportional representation can generate unintended consequences where a single-issue party can receive enough votes to secure a few seats and find themselves in a position of extracting commitments from a coalition partner that may be good for that single-issue partner but not good for the country. A preferential ballot system would be a self-serving agenda cloaked in electoral reform.

If a changed electoral system is put forward, that proposal must be put to a referendum so all Canadians can have an opportunity to approve it or not. Anything less will truly disenfranchise large blocks of Canadians who will have no say in changes to the fundamental democratic process of electing their federal representatives. No electoral reform committee and no Parliament can make changes so basic to Canadian life without committing to a referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Paulsson, you have the floor.

Mr. Erik Paulsson (As an Individual): Thank you very much for hearing me. I am a local film and television producer. I'm also a Generation Xer. Many of my friends are millennials. In speaking with many young people, what we've all heard a lot is that many feel disenfranchised, and the vast majority of young people have stated that they want some form of proportional representation.

In addition to this, having gone to many different town halls around electoral reform, I know that this is also echoed by most people. Most people want some form of proportional representation.

Also, in Canada people are used to electing a representative. We like to have a representative. Therefore, mixed member proportional representation is the system that will make the most Canadians happy. It is actually a fairly easy system. I really like the idea that you can vote for a candidate and a party, because you might want to vote for two different people. This gives you a lot of excellent options.

A lot of people have said that what's happening right here might actually be just a ruse—I'm not sure—and that the Liberal government is actually planning to put forward their own agenda and not listen to the people by putting forward the system of alternative votes, the ranked system. I want to point out that under a ranked system.... Currently, the Liberals have 40% support and 54% of the seats in the House. According to statistics, if there were a ranked system currently, the Liberals would have probably around 66% of the system, which would greatly skew in their favour and is kind of why they want that system.

Therefore, I want to make it clear that if the Liberal government does decide to put that through, it will make a lot of Canadians very angry. I do hope that you are going to listen to the vast majority of the people here.

● (2110)

I want to add one last thing. If we are going to have a system that is mixed member proportional representation, we could actually introduce a ranked ballot within the election of a candidate. This system brings in both strategies, because it would prevent an extremist or a very unlikeable candidate from getting elected. Thirty-three per cent of people might vote for one candidate while 67% may actually despise that candidate, yet they're representing them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Erik Paulsson: My choice is an MMP system with a ranked ballot for candidates. Thank you.

The Chair: Now it's Jerry Chen's turn.

Mr. Jerry Chen (As an Individual): Ladies and gentlemen, today we have seen a debate not between electoral reform and its alternatives, but between the consideration of the opinions of average Canadians and its alternative.

There are two issues that have been presented today that I wish to push back on: first, the claim that we do not need a referendum; and second, the claim that a supposed system predicated upon proportional representation is fair in any meaningful sense.

I would like to start by addressing the first issue, and I'm going to make it clear that we need a referendum. Why? Let me explain.

Fairness and justice are a huge part of Canadian culture. It would be a grave mistake to allow Liberal bureaucrats to simply institute electoral reform without first consulting with Canadians. Canada is one of the most stable and admired democracies in the world. Any change to what our vote means needs to be done with the consent of the people and needs to include an option to maintain our current system. If you call yourself a supporter of democracy, then you believe in voting on an issue as fundamental as this.

Regarding the costs of the referendum, if we can afford, under the Trudeau government, to renovate 24 Sussex Drive, we can afford to hear from average everyday Canadians.

Now I have just a simple note regarding proportional representation. No, it isn't fair. Communities understand what is best for them, and it is our duty to stand behind the decisions of those communities, yet regardless of whether you may agree or disagree, that won't matter without a referendum.

It is clear that Liberal bureaucrats already have their minds made up. The rest is just an act. Nothing they hear between now and an announcement will change their minds, yet let us hope that the committee before us today hears the voices of millions upon millions of Canadians and calls for a referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Now we have Mr. Whiteford.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brian Whiteford (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I would like to welcome you.

[*English*]

I'm going to present in English; I speak French like a Spanish cow.

I worked on the Hill for a great many years and I worked also in the Senate, so I really appreciate the stamina, and the length of time that you've been here, and the deliberation that you're doing. So kudos to you. I know the hard work that goes into it.

I have a caution, though, before considering biplurality majority systems. I think it should be understood that the number of House of Commons seats assigned to each of the provinces and territories is a matter separate from the electoral system. There is no reference to an electoral system in any part of the Constitution Act. Each system has its own properties, its own strengths, and its own weaknesses, and with more than 15 political parties in Canada and a strong sense of regional identification on the part of many voters, the major parties have generally aimed at accommodating rather than exacerbating regional and linguistic differences.

It is within that context that consideration of any alternative to the present electoral system take place, weighing in the balance the respective capacities of the various electoral systems to ensure continued inter-regional and interlinguistic accommodation, and to enable those who have previously been outsiders in the electoral system to become full participants. Voters must be educated that pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. It is dialogue, an open challenge of ideas, give and take, criticism and self-criticism about everything, speaking and listening, and that reveals both common understandings and real differences.

Dialogue does not mean everybody at the table will agree, but everybody needs to understand that pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table with one's commitments. I submit that Parliament educate the voting public on the benefits and drawbacks of each choice, and ensure that a clear, well-defined referendum takes place, and not a long drawn-out campaign like the “never-endum” of the yes-no vote of the early nineties. I also suggest we look at compulsory voting.

Merci.

● (2115)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Graham.

Mr. Duncan Graham (As an Individual): My name is Duncan Graham and I'm a retired geography teacher and very active with a worldwide organization that's intent on democratizing the United Nations. There's a proclamation we have in this context that also applies to my ideas in Canada, that we are a rich mosaic of ethnicities, languages, and culture, but we are also the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind. So you might keep that context in mind when I'm for proportional representation, but against the idea of a national referendum.

A few quotes came to mind when I thought about being able to talk to you. There's one of Churchill's where he declared of democracy that's it a pretty poor system; the only thing going for it is it's better than anything else. We all know that one. There's another saying, though, that isn't as often quoted. He mentioned, on the other hand, on the values of democracy, that his despair was increased every time he talked to the average voter.

These thoughts came to mind with not having a national referendum.

The other visionary idea that I would propose for thinking outside the box is that the four candidates in a constituency should all go to Ottawa—Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Green—and in Ottawa they would vote according to the percentage of the vote they got, so that every vote would really count. Instead of quadrupling the number of constituencies, the size of the constituency could be quadrupled. There's no mathematical problem with it, but that's thinking outside the box and probably far too visionary for your intellectual—

The Chair: Actually, if I may intervene there, I think what you're talking about is weighted voting. We've had a couple of presentations on that. It's an interesting idea.

Please wrap up now.

Mr. Duncan Graham: There were two letters in *The Globe and Mail* a few years ago, during the past Parliament, not the current one. One talked about the number of bloody fools there were in Parliament. The other letter in response said that well, there are bloody fools in the electorate and they deserve to be represented like any other group.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll hear from Ellena Lawrence.

Ms. Ellena Lawrence (As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'd also like to give a shout out to everyone who came out and wasn't able to get off work at 3:30 the way I was to come out and talk. I know that especially a lot of young people were unable to talk in this hearing.

I'm 24. I've had the privilege of voting in two elections. My vote has never counted. My vote will never count because of where I live. That breaks my heart. Our system is broken. Fifty per cent of the people who voted in the last election do not have proper representation in Parliament. That makes me extremely scared and sad, because we are facing issues as a nation that are going to be hard and complicated and long to fix. If not everyone's voice is at the table, not everyone will be represented. The number of aboriginal, immigrant, and women representatives in Parliament right now is inadequate considering what our society looks like.

I believe a proportional system would give us an opportunity to rectify some of that lack of diversity. But I do urge the committee to make sure that the process is legitimate. I do urge you to have a citizens' council, because this is a complicated issue and I don't think a referendum will work well unless you're willing to invest a lot in education. I spent over 20 hours prepping for a 15-minute presentation that just skimmed the surface on the different electoral systems for the youth town hall last night. I'm pretty sure people left with more questions than answers.

This is not something a quick referendum can fix. I think a citizens' assembly with lots of consultation and education is the right way.

Thank you.

● (2120)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bohus, please go ahead.

Mr. Stephen Bohus (As an Individual): Thank you very much. My name is Stephen Bohus.

I first wanted to point out that because of the geography, because of where I live, I really don't have a voice. It doesn't matter if I vote, if I stay at home, if I vote for the incumbent, if I vote for someone in opposition, or if I spoil my ballot. The reason is that I live in Vancouver East. Vancouver East is a party stronghold, and my vote doesn't make a difference because of my geography.

For my vote to make a difference, I believe that a true proportional representation system is what we need. We have to leave the system of first past the post, which I never consented to, move away from the system from the middle ages to a system of PR.

I believe that any system of PR would be excellent. A single transferable vote would be excellent. Let me suggest that we look at some of the examples in European countries and some of the EU parliaments where they use a list system. In a list system, a minimum threshold for Canada would be to divide one by the number of seats in the House of Commons. That's about 0.3%. If a party receives 0.3%, they get one seat. I think if it's 0.6%, they get two seats and so on. That's proportional: one vote and one representative. It's fair.

How can we do this with a list system? I'll give you one example. If you take five ridings, put them into one and make one super-riding balanced for population, every party puts forward five candidates, nominates five candidates in order of preference. When a voter votes for a party, the first party that receives 20% of the votes will have the first person on their list receive a seat. If party B receives 20% of the votes, they get a seat. If an independent receives 20% of the votes, they also get a seat. That way you get the top end.

At the bottom end, any party that gets 0.3% meets the minimum threshold and gets a seat, and then you would use mathematical formulas to balance for geography and different parts of the country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay, Mr. Keenleyside.

Mr. Paul Keenleyside (As an Individual): Good evening, Mr. Chairman and honourable members.

Let me tell you a story about multiple member ridings. I'm very much against multi-member ridings. This riding that you're in right now used to be called Vancouver—Burrard, and it was a two member riding at the provincial level. Just over in another part of Vancouver was another two member riding, Vancouver—Point Grey. What used to happen is that the candidates used to be nominated, and then they used to be elected in pairs. In other words, two MLAs from the same party were elected to the constituency. That worked up until 1988 when there was a by-election. What happened after that is one of the candidates who was elected in 1986 stayed, and the other one who left was replaced by an MLA from another party. Now the problem with these multiple member ridings is that you will never, and I will repeat this, you will never get all of the MPs from the same riding from different parties working together in the same constituency office.

For example, we have five people over on this side of the table. Let's consider that as a fictional riding. They will not work in the same constituency office. You will have four of them working together, but the fifth one will not, and that will create confusion for the voters. Who do they go to for help? Who do they go to for assistance? They will go to the MP of the party of government, but which one?

Then you have a problem of ego. You have a problem of one MP trying to get ahead of the other MP within the same party, so that's a big problem. It will cause a lot of trouble at the party level because, I can tell you, ladies and gentlemen, I've seen it from every party, and in some cases, the local riding association can't even handle a simple nomination meeting. I've seen it.

With that, ladies and gentlemen, please join with me and all Canadians by saying, Mr. Trudeau, give us that referendum.

● (2125)

The Chair: Go ahead for two minutes, Mr. Hayer.

Mr. Dave Hayer (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

My name is Dave Hayer. Actually I'm a former MLA from the B. C. assembly from 2001-13. I was involved in three different elections, and I won all of them by more than 50%.

I can tell you I never had any issues that 100% of the voters, the constituents, supported. There are people who are happy with the government policy, people who are not happy with the government policy, and people who are neutral.

When I was an MLA, we had two referendums on electoral reform in the province of British Columbia. The first one was in 2005, and we had set a limit of a minimum voting of 60% in order to pass the referendum. The first time, 58% said yes and 42% said no. Since it was so close to 60%, the premier at that time and the assembly members decided to have a second referendum to see if people really wanted to change. So in 2009 a second referendum was held. At that time, only 39% voted yes, and 61% voted against it. At least people had the right to say why they wanted it.

The reason they wanted to have a referendum and they wanted the change was that in 2001 when we won the election with the Liberal as a majority, we won 77 of 79 seats. But to have a good democracy, my personal belief is that you must have a good opposition in order to keep everybody in check. But in the second election in 2005, the results changed, because the Liberals went down to 46 seats and the NDP to 33. Therefore, people were not so keen about changing the voting system.

I have met with many people from different parts of the world. They have different electoral systems. No one is always happy with the electoral system, including ours and other ones. All I say is, if you really want to have a change in our democratic system, please have a referendum and have the majority of the people vote for it across Canada. Otherwise, you will be changing our democracy without having a democratic system.

People are smarter than politicians. They can understand and they will vote for the right system, as long as you educate them and make sure you provide enough information.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much for sharing your direct experience with those two initiatives.

After Ms. Lockhart, we'll have our former colleague from the House of Commons, Andrew Saxton.

Go ahead, Ms. Lockhart.

● (2130)

Ms. Elizabeth Lockhart (As an Individual): Thank you, committee, for this opportunity to speak.

I'll say at the outset that I disagree with anyone who characterizes this process as democratic reform. Whatever reform results from this process is anything but democratic. It is the antithesis of democratic, in fact. Sure, you're consulting with Canadians about values they would like to see in their electoral system, but you're not consulting, and indeed have no intention of consulting, with Canadians about the process that you'll eventually propose. There won't be a referendum. A referendum would make it democratic.

Whatever option or alternative the committee proposes, there's one option that you won't be proposing, that you're not even allowed to consider. You're not going to even give it any merit. That's the current system. Forcing the committee to propose anything but first past the post is unnecessarily prescriptive. It's not democratic, and it's not Canadian. Whatever we think about first past the post, it should be, in my submission, something this committee should consider or should be allowed to consider.

To be genuinely consultative, the committee must conduct a national referendum on one or both questions. First is whether Canadians actually want a change to the current system. Second is whether Canadians want to adopt the system that's ultimately proposed by the committee. That might amount to democratic reform.

Don't kid yourself into thinking that asking Canadians about the values they think are important or inviting Canadians to tell you they feel compelled to vote strategically is actually democratic reform.

I'm aware that the committee has invited each member of Parliament to conduct town hall sessions in their respective constituencies, and to provide a report to the committee by the middle of October. I've attended several town halls, during the summer, I might add, when most people were away. In one case, a total of 187 people attended the town hall in a riding of 88,000 voters. Few of those 187 people were under the age of 60, and few had English as a second language. So whatever report results from that riding town hall will not be reflective of the majority of those constituents' views.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Saxton, it's good to see you here today.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (As an Individual): It's nice to see you, Mr. Chair, members of the committee. Thank you for coming all the way to the west coast to be with us tonight.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for all the work you are doing for us.

[*English*]

My name is Andrew Saxton. I'm the former member of Parliament for North Vancouver. I'm not here tonight to advocate for any particular system. I'm here to advocate tonight for a legitimate and defendable process.

I want to remind the committee, because nobody seems to have brought this up, that the Chief Electoral Officer came out with his report today, in which he said that a simple majority of parliamentarians should not be enough to change our electoral system. He suggests a special majority of 75% of MPs or a national referendum should be the standard. He goes on to say that no party or government should be allowed to change the playing field without widespread support.

Every single jurisdiction in Canada that has contemplated making this change has decided to take it to a vote of the people. This is a strong precedent. To go against this precedent would be to go against the decisions of these democratically minded provinces.

But don't take my word for it. Here's a quote: “Precedent makes holding a referendum necessary in Canada...”. Who said that? It was the Honourable Stéphane Dion in 2012.

Some people have said we should leave it to our MPs because we've elected MPs to make tough decisions, and this is just another one of those tough decisions. But it is not just another one of those tough decisions. This is a decision that directly affects the future of how those MPs are elected.

In the private sector this would be considered a conflict of interest. In fact, those people would have to recuse themselves from even being part of the decision.

Some people have said that the cost is prohibitive, but a decision of this magnitude should have no price on it. If changing the system is such a good idea, then it shouldn't be too difficult to convince Canadians to agree.

I want to conclude by emphasizing that the only defendable process, the only process that could not be challenged, would be to allow Canadians to decide for themselves how they want their system to change.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

● (2135)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Andrew.

Go ahead, Ms. Jansen.

Ms. Tamara Jansen (As an Individual): Good evening. My name is Tamara Jansen and I'm from the Langley—Aldergrove area. I, too, am a child of an immigrant, as is my husband. I can say along with the other person who said it that Canada is an amazing place and we're very thankful to our grandparents for choosing in the 1950s to come to Canada and make this their home.

We've had some amazing opportunities. In 1991 we took over the family farm with two employees, my husband and I, and when we retired we had 200 employees. Canada has given us incredible opportunities and for this reason I am very passionate to preserve what makes Canada such a great place.

I have been going to different town halls. I went to the first one with MP John Aldag in Cloverdale, because I didn't know if there was going to be another one. I found it unfortunate that for the first hour and a half I felt like I was being lectured about PR. I found that a bit disconcerting. But I was able to say something, so that was awesome. Then, of all things, there was another one held only five minutes from my house. It was held on the very last sunny Saturday of the summer. My kids were at the lake, so I thought, well, we're bored and we could do something, and Justin wants us to be there, so we did go to that one as well.

It was interesting. Again, we had a lecture for about an hour and a half on what made PR the right thing to do. Interestingly enough, a young fellow came up to the mike and turned around and he pointed at me and said, “I know that lady. She's a Conservative.” It didn't bother me at all, because I think this is a wonderful opportunity to preserve what makes Canada a great place.

I have to say, from what I can tell, the statistics on PR show that it encourages single-issue parties and coalitions that are sure to cost taxpayers more and get less done. As a business owner, the last thing on my Christmas wish list is a bigger government and more taxes. Also, after 150 years of democratic voting, the existing electoral system has precedent and precedent matters in a country built on rule of law.

I would love to encourage you to let Canadians not be considered too ignorant to vote in a referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Pickard.

Mr. Les Pickard (As an Individual): Thank you.

You've been tasked with developing a new electoral system for the country. I ask you to please consider the possible negative consequences of the proportional representation system. Under that system it's easy to look at what the House of Commons would look like right now, based on the past election. For example, the Green Party would have more than one seat, which I think would be a good thing. However, this new system is going to be in place for possibly 50 or 100 years, so I think it's important to look at what could happen in the future, something that we may not even visualize now, based on the nice people we have in government currently.

I was in Israel last year when Netanyahu was forming his coalition. I know this isn't Israel, but you never know what Canada might look like in 50 years. Israel, in my opinion, is now held hostage by right-wing extremist minority parties. Whatever system we have, I would like to make sure that it doesn't allow coalitions that would include extreme parties that might lead us in a direction we don't want to go.

Thank you.

● (2140)

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

Mr. Schenker, go ahead.

Mr. Marc Schenker (As an Individual): Thank you.

I want to say that I consider myself a pretty average Canadian. I think Canada is a great example of a western democracy. Therefore, I think it's only right to have something as critical as changes to our electoral system decided by a referendum. I want a referendum.

It's extremely disturbing to me when Justin Trudeau and the Liberals, who won only 39% of the vote, which isn't even close to a majority, think they have some sort of mandate to unilaterally push through changes to our electoral system, without a referendum and with only some public consultation.

Furthermore, all the polls asking Canadians if they want a referendum or not unanimously show that a majority of Canadians always want a referendum on any changes to our electoral system.

Here's an example. An Ipsos poll from last month, just this past August, shows that 55% of Canadians want a referendum, while a *Global News* poll from this past May shows that a stunning 73% of Canadians want a referendum. In light of these numbers, the only decent thing that the Trudeau Liberals really should do is capitulate to the will of the majority of Canadians and agree to a referendum, period.

As a millennial—this is more of a personal note—I'm totally disillusioned in and disappointed by the insistence of Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party on changing our electoral system without a direct vote. This runs counter to their so-called sunny ways disposition and approach in last year's federal election. The way I see it, Trudeau and the Liberals, after a year in power, now are just trying to make a shameless, naked power grab by potentially fixing the electoral system to their advantage. I completely reject that. That's why I want a referendum: so that all Canadians can make a direct decision on the changes to our electoral system that have been proposed by the Liberals.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll hear from Mr. Ben Cornwell-Mott.

Mr. Ben Cornwell-Mott (As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I first want to say thanks to all of you for being here. It's pretty late and you guys are still paying attention, so that's really good. I have a lot of respect for what you guys do. I'm going to dive right in.

The electoral reform committee has been given less than six months to provide recommendations to change our electoral system, the one we've been using for well over a century, for 150 years, I think.

While I'm deeply concerned about the pace we're going at and also about how many Canadians can be consulted in this time without having a referendum, I'd like to highlight a few other issues.

First, by focusing on these replacement voting systems right from the start of the process, we're breaking down the question to Canadians in terms of what electoral system best benefits the party they support, really, instead of first trying to establish what Canadian values are and what we want in an electoral system. When the primary question of the committee becomes so politicized because of its mandate, the legitimacy of its recommendations obviously comes into question. That's going to cause a lot of Canadians to feel even more disenfranchised with the system they have. If the reason we're doing this is to engage voters more, let's be clear: this is undermining that goal.

Second, while some of the proposed reforms will have the desired effect of better representing voters' intentions on a macro scale, there is a negative effect associated with those options. I really don't think they address the greater cause of voter dissatisfaction, which is that people's views don't really match the policies of any one political party. Voters are forced to whittle down to a single decision their opinions on hundreds of issues and on the candidates. I know that most of my friends plug their noses when they go to vote because they don't really like any of the parties, strategic voting aside. Even political leaders and party leaders have trouble agreeing with every one of the policy decisions of their parties.

I don't think any of the proposed solutions really address this fundamental flaw in our system. I'm afraid that without letting voters express that type of viewpoint with the ballot, disenfranchisement is going to continue to be a problem.

To conclude, I'd encourage the committee to really review its timetable. Even though the deadline to implement changes for the next election is coming very close, we still have three more years in the current term to actually pass a law. Please take the time to broadly consult Canadians and come to a conclusion.

Thank you.

● (2145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Jacquelyn Miller.

Ms. Jacquelyn Miller (As an Individual): Thanks for the opportunity to speak. Speaking for myself, I've had a very active involvement in electoral politics.

First, a friend of mine hosted one of the sessions recommended by your committee with a group of friends last week. It was very informative. We spoke about all of the issues, but most importantly, I want to talk about lowering the voting age to 16. We had a group of about 10 people speaking about this, and about one or two were in favour of this before we discussed it at length, and then afterward everyone changed their mind to be in support.

The key argument that persuaded them was that if we lowered the voting age to 16, while people are thinking about learning how to vote and while they're in the learning environment, the learning environment will accommodate itself to inform them, and they will take on a practical education approach, which will get more people voting.

The current electoral system does not prioritize young people. It prioritizes property owning, older people, who are wonderful people, but young people and renters also need a voice. We need to lower the voting age to accommodate them, to change that structure, and to encourage greater voting participation rights overall.

Aside from that, I want to speak to the fact that during the last federal election, I was an organizer for the Green Party of Canada. I was involved with many volunteers, and as many people are asking you to make every vote count, I want you to make all active plural participation count as well. I worked with hundreds of volunteers and active participants across the province, and they all put their blood, sweat, and tears into it, and hearts were broken.

The feeling that their huge amounts of time that they put into their passion for the party that they believed in, that matters. I want you guys to hear that on behalf of the hundreds of volunteers that I worked for, many of whom have been in the room today, a number of whom have spoken, but a number of whom didn't. They're hard-working citizens. I want you to hear them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hans Sloman.

Mr. Hans Sloman (As an Individual): I'm 22 years old and I am from Germany. I grew up there, and was originally born here. So I did see and experience, vote and participate in the German system as well. It's not as hard as people make it look. That huge ballot is not something I've ever seen before. I don't know where that's from, maybe Berlin. But either way, even in the German system some people feel there isn't enough representation, and even we have protest votes. But you vote for a protest party; you don't just not vote, because there's always something that you can find in the system to voice your opinion.

Earlier we heard about the threats of extremist parties gaining public medium. Of course, if you have an opinion that is in the populace, and they can voice their opinions then, yes, you would have also extreme voices being heard. But they can be squashed and addressed in a proper forum. However, as we saw in Britain when the ruling elite, the politicians, got too out of touch with their populace because there wasn't that representation, we can be quite surprised when all of a sudden the populace behaves much differently from what we would have expected, based on their just not knowing what they actually wanted. In Germany right now, for me, that's scary. There is more right-wing party activity than normal, than when I grew up. But it's not random.

Here it can be fake. It can be blown out of proportion, like the example that was given earlier about what happened in Quebec. It would be really representing what's going on and the opinions of the voters at that particular time, and that means we need to educate. It shows us where we have to do the next work.

So, please move on to a representative system so that all voices can be heard and don't get lost as in the current system. They're either wasted or not heard. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would ask Hana Kucerova....

Okay, we'll go with Mr. Collins for now.

● (2150)

Mr. Derek Collins (As an Individual): Thank you, everybody.

For all the people on the committee and all the people in the audience who are still here, first off, I think we're all here because we believe in democracy, and for almost 150 years the best country on earth has enjoyed a working democracy that has largely brought power to the best party that has best appealed to the largest number of Canadians. It's simple, it works, and it has led to effective government.

I know if I'm a member of the Green Party, the Communist Party, the Marijuana Party, the Marxist-Leninist Party, the Pirate Party, the Rhinoceros Party or any one of the 19 federal parties that exist, there are basically two ways that I can change the success of my party. I can either change the rules about how we count your vote, or I can change my platform to appeal to more Canadians. Naturally, I believe that if I want better results, I'll work harder and I'll get those better results. Despite that, we find ourselves here today because our governing party wants to change our electoral system to something they believe is called more fair proportional representation.

We can look to other countries to see how it has worked there. We can suppose what this may look like if we replicate this here in Canada, but the facts are that no one knows. It doesn't matter how much of an expert you are. No one can say with any degree of certainty....

I would just ask everybody on the committee if you wouldn't mind paying attention. If you're on your phone, I find that extremely rude.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm just waiting for you—

The Chair: Your comments are being broadcast.

Mr. Derek Collins: I just know to put my phone away if someone is speaking to me.

In all seriousness, though, the facts are no one actually knows how this will transform Canada, what the electoral system will look like here, and I can think of nothing that is more paternalistic and insulting to Canada or to Canadians than to say, “By the way, I believe in democracy, but I don't trust the most democratic tool that's available to us, which is a referendum.”

I believe this is something we should hold near and dear to our hearts. We should listen to Canadians, and if we truly trust democracy, then we should trust the most democratic tool available to us, which is a referendum.

Electoral reform is a low priority item for a majority of Canadians, and it has the potential to change our country for a long time. If you respect the significance of what we're embarking upon, trust in the electorate, as the electorate is never wrong, and then table a referendum.

The Chair: Thank you. We're way over time now.

Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: If I can reassure Mr. Collins, I have no intention to be rude. I hope this captures what you've said: “Mr. Collins: for 150 years first past the post worked; he thinks we should trust electorate; he wants a referendum.” And I've hashtagged ERRE so people who aren't in the room will know what you said.

I'm trying to be fair and live-tweet to larger numbers of people all the time, and that's why you see me holding my BlackBerry. I apologize.

The Chair: Okay, we have Mr. Ivan Filippov, and Mr. Sheldon Starrett.

Mr. Ivan Filippov (As an Individual): My name is Ivan Filippov. I came to Canada with my family 32 years ago. I'm a very proud Canadian and I love this country from the bottom of my heart.

This electoral system, which we have had for 150 years, has survived incredible worldwide events and has served us well. People have been saying that we don't know anything about the future, but we know one thing, that this system which is already in place is strong and will carry us without any doubt into the future.

I am not proposing any referendum at all. For me, this process, which gives me a voice, for which I am grateful, is something I would like to see disappear. I am questioning the motivation of whoever set it up, whether Mr. Trudeau or maybe his adviser, Mr. Butts. It doesn't matter to me, because I understand one thing. Out of the blue, when finally the Liberals have the power, they use it to their advantage. How they will modify the electoral system to their benefit, I don't know, but I know this is the purpose.

I look also at the committee of 12 members. Out of those 12 members, only three are members of the Conservative Party. So when we are talking about proportional representation, how about your committee? I'm very skeptical and I would like to let this process die.

Thank you very much.

● (2155)

The Chair: Mr. Sheldon Starrett, go ahead, please.

The Chair:

Mr. Sheldon Starrett (As an Individual): I want to thank you all and everyone who came here to speak today.

I had some statements prepared, but actually, I came here to register earlier in the day and then, just after I registered, I found out that my member of Parliament, Mr. Joe Peschisolido, had his electoral town hall meeting today while this meeting was going on here in Vancouver. I just went back to Richmond to participate in that town hall, where only 13 people attended, in a very ethnically diverse riding. That causes some concern for me, because I very much care for the future of our country and where we are going as a country, but I think it's unfair to call this a broad consultative process.

Millions of Canadians are unaware that this committee has been travelling the country seeking their input. Millions of Canadians have not been informed of these town halls and they've been switched. The one today was actually scheduled for eight days ago; it didn't happen, and he just announced it today while this was going on.

I believe it is of paramount importance for all Canadian citizens to participate in how they select their government. They should have a say in how they elect their government and through which system, so it is imperative that a referendum be held to let Canadians make the decision.

Each member of this committee has a duty to the Canadians that elected them to sit as a member of Parliament. When the time comes, it's up to each member to advise the government on how to proceed with changing our electoral process. There is only one truly representative option, and that is to hold a referendum. It is unwise for any government to impose something upon the people or a group thereof, as has been done historically in this country. I'm not saying the system is perfect—far from it—but the only means to effectively change the electoral system is for all Canadians to have a say in it.

This is no trivial matter. It's the very foundation of our democracy, which many men and women have sacrificed their lives for. We must tread carefully without treading upon the democratic process.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, could we have Ms. Meara Brown, please.

Ms. Meara Brown (As an Individual): Hello. *Bonjour*. My name is Meara Brown. I just want to thank all of the members here today. I realize this is a gruelling experience and I would like to thank you for being here and listening to my thoughts.

As an aside, Mr. Aldag, I'm a member of your constituency, but I have lived in Ms. May's constituency, and I grew up in Nathan Cullen's. I have to say Nathan Cullen's is the best. It's the most beautiful. I'm sorry.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Is she out of time?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Meara Brown: I would also like to thank everyone who has spoken here today. It's given me a lot to consider.

Ultimately, I would like to express my support for proportional representation.

As a millennial, I have felt completely disenfranchised from the federal political system. My generation is known for disengaging from systems we consider broken, and the voting record for my demographic speaks for itself. I have volunteered, talked, cajoled, and argued for getting the vote out on every election since I first had the ability to vote. My peers, especially my west coast peers, all had valid reasons for not participating. We were not represented in the makeup, policies, or rhetoric of the ruling parties. Our concerns were not Ottawa's concerns.

The majority of us self-identify as left of centre, and yet we've never seen an NDP rule or more than two Green Party members in our federal makeup. As a millennial, I want to see issues like crushing student debt, the wage gap still present between men and women, and even paternity leave truly discussed by a government that visibly expresses the celebrated diversity of Canada. As a member of the group of Canadians who has ruled since colonization, I'd be happy to share some of my power and privilege with the rest of my country.

I want a system where 30% of the vote means 30% of the power. I want a government where compromise and discourse is the norm and not the exception. We live in a democracy and majority rules, but majority should not rule absolutely.

Thank you.

● (2200)

The Chair: Thank you.

That concludes a long, but fruitful and interesting day of hearings here in Vancouver. We had a good diversity of opinion and a lively audience.

I would just mention that there are other opportunities to have input into the process. You can go to the website of the committee. There's an electronic questionnaire. You can submit a brief by October 7, as long as it doesn't exceed 3,000 words.

You can follow the work of the committee through the website. We still have a lot of hearings to hold and work to do. I hope you will all read the report when it comes out. It should come out on December 1.

Thanks very much to all of you, and have a safe drive home.

Sorry, just a second, we have Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, earlier I mentioned a concern about the non-random nature of the presentations we've been hearing.

To illustrate the point, I chatted with our organizers outside. We have a limit. We simply can't take more than a certain number of people, obviously. We filled up the allotted time, and it's now 10 p. m. We had to have a cut-off, and 17 people were turned away. There was no avoiding it. There's not a lack of professionalism on the part of the excellent people who are working here, and this is not a complaint about the way the meeting is structured.

I simply want to observe that those who arrived earlier all got on the list until we hit the limit. Those who came after a certain point were simply turned away. In practice, an inevitable consequence of this is that those who have had to come from farther away, who had employment that kept them occupied, who had to go pick up a child in day care, or any of these things you can imagine, but who were unavailable earlier on, were the ones who were excluded.

That leads, I think, to one of the problems we face at these meetings, which is that while the people who come here are clearly deeply committed, and believe very much that they're adding to a better vision for the country, they're not an accurate random selection of where the average Canadian is. It's simply a problem we face, and I don't mean any disrespect for those who did come. I admire them for taking the time, but it is an issue for us.

The Chair: Point noted.

Yes, Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm not going to pretend it's a point of order, but I'm going to try to get it in anyway.

I wanted to reassure everyone, regardless of what your viewpoint is...tonight for the first time of all the meetings we've had across the country, there were a lot of statements that suggest there are decisions that have been made about what this committee can say or can't say. That's not the case. We are 12 MPs around this table from five parties. We're working diligently to listen to everyone. It makes me sad when people think it's a sham process. We're doing our best, and we heard you all, and I want you to know that as you leave this place.

Thank you for coming, and please continue to encourage your friends in Leduc, Yellowknife, Montreal, St. John's, Halifax, Charlottetown, Fredericton—especially Fredericton—and Iqaluit to show up, because this does make a difference, and it is an exercise in democracy.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. Have a good evening.