HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

ERRE • NUMBER 039 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Friday, October 7, 2016

Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (1335)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. Good afternoon.

[*Translation*]

We are very happy to be in Fredericton to conclude our three weeks of touring Canada to consult experts, stakeholders and citizens about electoral reform in Canada.

This afternoon we welcome Ms. Lise Ouellette, who was co-chair of the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy between 2003 and 2004.

Welcome, Ms. Ouellette. I am very pleased to meet you today.

We also welcome Ms. Joanna Everitt, professor of political science and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of New Brunswick.

Welcome, Professor Everitt.

I have to point out that Ms. Ouellette has to leave us around 2:30 p.m. because she has another engagement. I wanted to let you know that she will have to leave us at that point.

[*English*]

For the benefit of those in the audience, there are interpretation devices that connect to the interpretation booth. You can use those to listen to the testimony in the other official language or you can use them simply to amplify the acoustics because sometimes it can be hard to hear everything.

We'll start right away with Madame Ouellette, for 10 minutes. Each witness will have 10 minutes to present, and that will be followed by a round of questioning. In the round of questioning, each member will have five minutes to engage with the witness, and that includes questions and answers.

[*Translation*]

Without further ado, I invite Ms. Ouellette to take the floor.

Ms. Lise Ouellette (Co-Chair, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In 2003 and 2004, I had the pleasure of co-chairing the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy, together with Mr. Lorne McGuigan, who unfortunately could not be here today. Of course over the years we have kept an attentive eye on these issues, but it is really interesting to come back to these matters 12 years later. I thank you very much for this invitation.

The commission was made up of eight citizens that I would describe as ordinary people, more or less. There were people who had active political experience and others who did not, but none of us were experts on electoral systems, certainly. We learned a lot as we went along. Fortunately, we were able to benefit from the support of Mr. Bill Cross and his team; Ms. Everitt was a member of that team, and I am happy to see her again. To study these questions, we benefited from strong support from the scientific and academic community. We held several working sessions to train the members of the commission, but also to share this information with the population.

In the beginning, the members of the commission were rather skeptical as to the necessity of changing the electoral system in some major way. That said, we were also interested in several other issues. I'll get back to that. Of course, we learned as we went along. The issue is complex. Voting is a sensitive and important topic for the population. After having heard all sorts of viewpoints and analyses, we finally recommended a mixed proportional representation system. We also made other recommendations, naturally.

What led us to change our position, to some degree, on the matter?

The discrepancy between the number of votes and the number of seats obtained in the Legislative Assembly or in Parliament is very obvious. Sometimes it is considerable. It really is a major flaw in our electoral system that needs to be addressed, whatever our convictions are in other respects.

Moreover, over the decades there has been a decrease in voter turnout at elections, and this is concerning.

Women are also chronically under-represented, still today. That was an important concern for the members of the commission.

As for the low level of representativeness of the Legislative Assembly, we talked about women, but third parties are also a concern, other minorities. The fact that a legislative assembly is not really representative is problematic.

Those are the main factors that led us to think and change our position in favour of a mixed proportional system. That is the system we recommended.

Which issues were most important for the commission in this process?

Certain systems, such the single transferable vote, are very appealing. For citizens it is powerful, extraordinary, but in practice, it's a revolution. It can also have consequences on the stability of governments. Contrary to what British Columbia did at the same time, we did not opt for that system, despite the fact that it was really attractive to citizens. Government stability was a factor we took into consideration. There are more ways than one to further that stability, such as the single party and coalitions. Political coalitions are not a part of our culture, but they work very well in some other countries.

As for the issues, the Legislative Assembly needs to be more representative. The quality of governance depends on it, as many studies have shown in other circumstances.

We also wanted to find ways to increase the engagement of citizens, that is to say encourage them to take a greater part in the governance of our province.

As for the idea of a referendum, it was appealing in the beginning, but it lost some appeal as our discussions progressed. Referendums can be extremely dangerous tools. Look at Brexit, for example. The commission became increasingly less favourable to referendums, as they can pose a significant threat to democracy, except when they concern more innocuous questions, less sensitive issues that are less emotionally charged, more neutral or less complex. However, generally speaking, when it comes to our democracy, they are not a panacea, quite the opposite.

Of course, these are my personal opinions. Here we are 12 years later, and I think that change is even more necessary federally than it was, or than at the provincial level. The risk of regionalization of the vote, particularly, the partisan regionalization of the vote, is very great. We are really playing with fire. Up till now, we have been lucky and there have not been any historical accidents, as I like to call them, but it is very clear that our current system makes us vulnerable to this type of risk.

The risk of an unrepresentative federal government or of an unrepresentative Parliament, be it geographically, ideologically or demographically, is even greater within a system like the one we have. So changes are needed to our electoral system, especially at the federal level, but also at the provincial level. That seems very clear.

In New Brunswick, if you add the votes obtained during the last election, the Conservative Party and the NDP, if I remember correctly, obtained 43% of the votes, and yet those parties have no representatives in the Parliament of Canada. The discrepancy between the percentage of the vote and the number of seats is clear, whatever the allegiance. This is very clear. We have seen situations in this province where a party that obtained fewer votes than another formed government. That does not respect the will of the population, obviously, and it is clearly dangerous in several regards.

In Canada, a party could govern without any representation from a given region, or with very weak representation. A party could easily govern without a region being represented, or with very weak representation. That is not healthy. That the two most populous regions dominate the federal government while the other regions are practically absent is really not healthy, and it is dangerous for Canada.

Some form of proportional representation is really the only way to ensure better regional, ideological, and demographic representation, as well as better representation of the various interests, whatever they may be, within the Parliament of Canada.

I also spoke about the representation of Canadian values in Parliament. It is in the interest of all of us that the various tendencies be represented, so as to avoid that at a certain point in our history, for all sorts of reasons that may also depend on circumstances, some minority current in Canadian values forms power. This could lead to an upheaval in the values and functioning of our country. These situations could happen easily enough.

As for the representation of women and third parties, our current system is not very conducive to that. In fact, I do not believe there is any government in Canada, either federally or provincially, that has more than a third of women members, despite some very great efforts. This is a very clear signal that changes have to be made at that level.

I also want to talk about minorities, and I will use Nova Scotia as an example, where the Acadian community has launched a court case. I don't know at which court level this is taking place. With the redistribution of electoral ridings, the Acadian community is now in the minority everywhere, and so it runs a very high risk of not having any representatives in the provincial Legislative Assembly. I think our representation system has to be sensitive to minority issues.

We could also talk about the first nations. I think we have to find innovative representation models in order to ensure that those communities, those minorities, are well represented within the Parliament of Canada or legislative assemblies.

● (1340)

In New Brunswick we have developed various formulas, which we call superimposed electoral maps, in the school environment. There are models that exist to represent the communities well, so that they will be represented in the decision-making structures, whatever they may be.

Another major element is the need to encourage citizen participation and improve the credibility of the electoral process. That is extremely important.

The funding of political parties is a matter of capital importance. On the issue of public funding, you have only to look at what is happening south of the border, in the United States. We don't want to wind up with that type of system. From a democratic point of view, there are incredible risks. We have to take advantage of the exercise being conducted by this committee to examine the funding of political parties.

It is also extremely important to recognize the importance of the role Elections Canada and the Chief Electoral Officer play. The Chief Electoral Officer has to have the tools he or she needs to carry out extremely rigorous monitoring, otherwise the credibility of the electoral process will suffer, with all of the cynicism and disaffection this implies.

I think the time has come also to start using electronic tools. We have to encourage voter turnout. In a lot of cases, it can be difficult to vote.

We also have to think about the possibility of reducing the voting age. This is being discussed in New Brunswick at this time. I think that young people as of 16 years of age are just as well informed and perhaps better informed than those who are older than that. I think we have to look at that issue.

I'd like to get back to the issue of referendums. From a democratic point of view, they are very risky. We have to be careful. The risks are enormous. We must not fall into this trap as they can be very appealing on the surface, but they harbour enormous risks.

In conclusion, we first have to determine the objectives we wish to reach. The discussions should clarify what our objectives are. In this regard, several models can be of assistance.

Thank you.

● (1345)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ouellette.

[*English*]

Before we move on, I just thought I would highlight the fact that we are meeting today on the traditional territory of the Maliseet people along the beautiful Wolastoq River, also known as the Saint John River.

We'll go on now to Professor Everitt, for 10 minutes, please.

Ms. Joanna Everitt (Professor of Political Science, Dean of Arts, University of New Brunswick, As an Individual): I know you've been listening to people for a long time, and you've probably heard all the different arguments, so I'm not going to go into a broad range of points. I'm going to focus primarily on the question of representation.

I know there are five principles driving this commission: trying to make sure you have a good balance between voters' intentions and electoral results, encouraging engagement, creating a system that's accessible and inclusive, safeguarding the integrity of our voting process, and preserving the accountability of local representation. Those don't always work in conjunction with one another. I'm going to highlight how there is a bit of a disconnect.

As I said, my main focus is going to be on point number two, and that's greater participation of under-represented groups, and the most under-represented, which are women. My comments today are drawn on over 30 years of research in the field of gender and politics, with a particular focus on the Canadian political system.

When I first began looking at the impact of the electoral system on gender representation, Canada ranked quite high in the world in the representativeness of its federal Parliament. At that point, probably about 20 years ago, we were ranked in the low 20s in the world of, say, 190-odd states. In 2003, when I was looking at this for the New Brunswick legislative democracy commission, we had fallen to 33rd. Five years ago, when I was looking at this again for another presentation I gave, we were 44th. Today, in 2016, we rank 64th in the world in the representation of women within our political structures.

In terms of the overall gender equality index, we rank 25th in the world, but as I said, 64th in political representation. Now 25th is better than 64th, but I would argue that our ranking at 25th could be a lot higher, a lot better, if we didn't have our political representation numbers that are built into that index pulling us down.

Why are we ranked so low? I would argue that, given the majority of those who are ranked higher than us in Canada are using a more proportional system, a PR system or an MMP system, it's hard to question the conclusion that the electoral system is having an effect. Since Wilma Rule's influential 1987 paper on the impact of electoral systems on women's elections, study after study has shown that SMP systems, such as we have, typically result in lower numbers of women being elected to legislative bodies than do proportional systems.

We in Canada do quite well in comparison to other SMP systems, but we fall far behind MMP or PR systems. The reason for that is—I'm not telling you anything you don't know, but let me just say it, anyway—in a single-member system, parties have to choose only one candidate, and so they're going to choose the best candidate. Frequently, the best candidate looks like candidates they've had in the past, coming from the networks of people they have been drawn from in the past. Typically, those individuals have been men.

In the PR system it's easier to challenge a party's list, where you put together a list of however many candidates you need to represent your size of district, and it's much more difficult to have all the people at the top being men, or anglophone, or from a particular region. There's much more public pressure to make sure that those lists are representative, and that people are distributed in a representative way throughout the ranking of that list.

It's much more difficult to challenge individual riding choices, where a party has nominated individuals in one place after the next, after the next, who they think are the best. Ironically, the majority happen to be men: 70% to 80% of the parties select men. In today's society, that doesn't seem what you'd expect to happen.

Proportional systems tend to have greater central party control over who they put forward. It's much more difficult in our system, where individual decisions are being kept at the grassroots level, to encourage parties to seek out and nominate more women, minorities, under-represented groups. As a result, I would argue that real representational change is only likely to occur with significant electoral change: electoral reform to a PR or an MMP system. Simply changing the balloting structure to a preferential list, which is one thing that has been proposed both federally and provincially, but keeping that single-member option would do little to increase the number of women because you'd still have one person being put forward by the parties.

● (1350)

Having said this, I acknowledge that these systems present some challenges to that fifth principle of local representation. Canadians are very used to having a member of Parliament or an MLA to ask questions of and to seek support from. I think our members play a really important role in Canada being ombudspeople for their constituents. That's a really hard principle to move away from, so your task is going to be very challenging as you try to grapple with the disconnect and conflict between these different principles of representation versus local accountability.

However, I would suggest—and I think this is what is really important here—that there is a possible solution to this conflict. The most obvious is to provide parties with some carrots and sticks, some incentives and penalties, to encourage them to be more inclusive in seeking out a diverse range of candidates. This could easily be done through our current electoral rebate program that we have had in place for decades. As it stands now, candidates and parties recoup a significant percentage of their electoral expenses if they meet minimum thresholds of votes. This was put into place decades ago because we, as Canadians, believed that different voices should be participants in our electoral system and not just those who had deep pockets. That dramatically changed how parties engaged in election campaigns, opened up opportunities for new parties to become involved, and ensured new ideas could be incorporated into our political system.

I think it's important to note that by funding parties, we are in a sense supporting them, but we can also hold them accountable to the values that we hold important as Canadians. If equality and diversity are important to us as principles, we can use that rebate system as a way of enhancing those principles.

It's only, as a result, a small step further to argue that, if Canadians are really committed to ensuring the participation of all Canadians, and in particular female Canadians, more could be done to use these rebates as a way to encourage parties to nominate more women. Decisions would still be left with the parties, but it would be more likely for the party to nominate, go out and seek more women, if they could be guaranteed a higher rebate if they had female candidates. More importantly, it would be an even higher rebate if they were nominating them in winnable ridings.

One of the real challenges, I think, that we face now is that women are being nominated, not in equal numbers to men, and likewise with minorities, but they're not being nominated in the strong ridings, the ridings where they're likely to win. We just have to look at what happened here in New Brunswick in the last provincial election, where all the Conservative women lost their seats and all the Liberal women won their seats, and not one of the incumbent Liberal seats in that election, where someone had stepped down and resigned, was replaced with a woman. The strong seats were all replaced by men. The swing seats in both the Conservatives and the Liberals were nominating the women.

I would argue that here in New Brunswick, where we're at the back of the pack of the country with a 16% representation, we're not likely to see much change going forward if parties continue this way. There have to be incentives to nominate more women and nominate them in strong seats.

Similarly, parties could be penalized by having their rebates reduced if they don't meet a certain threshold.

These reforms would not result in significant changes to the electoral system. They wouldn't require major referendums to make changes with. They would be easily legislated, and they would have an impact on the way parties react and respond to the nomination processes. They could still choose not to if they didn't want to, but there would be incentives for them to do so.

The end effect would be enhancing representation while maintaining those other principles that you've outlined here as being the goals of this commission's tasks.

I'll leave it there.

● (1355)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start our round of questioning with Mr. DeCourcey, please, for five minutes.

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

[*Translation*]

I thank you very much for your testimony today.

I also want to thank all of the participants for being here this afternoon.

[*English*]

It's great to be in Fredericton with my committee colleagues. We've had a wonderful couple of weeks.

I will note that this is the first committee of the House of Commons to come to Fredericton since the Committee on the Status of Women came to Fredericton in 2010, appropriately enough. We're glad to be here.

I'll also note the presence today of MLA David Coon, and former MP Maurice Harquail, who've joined us here.

Professor Everitt, I'm sure that my colleagues beside me here will speak to the issue of women's representation in legislative bodies. I want to expand that a little bit further to talk about other minority groups, indigenous Canadians, persons living with disabilities, racialized minorities, and young people. Do you have any advice on how the electoral system can potentially privilege or disadvantage other groups of Canadians from having the opportunity to serve as elected representatives?

Ms. Joanna Everitt: I think they're disadvantaged in the same way women are. I spoke with some women, as an example, about the challenge in our electoral system, because it is the greatest imbalance. Fifty-one per cent of our population are women, and you see the greatest disproportionality in their elected numbers.

That's not to say that we don't have an imbalance with respect to visible minorities or indigenous Canadians or those with physical disabilities or other under-represented groups in legislative bodies. Focusing on women is easy, but it's possible to say that we should create a rebate structure that requires parties to look not just at the traditional norms but at, say, candidates currently under-represented within our political structure, or something like that, to encompass a wider group of individuals.

It's hard, and I wouldn't necessarily advocate saying that *x* per cent have to be this and *x* per cent have to be that, but there can be ways parties can be encouraged to be more inclusive in looking at new candidates.

This is a commission on electoral reform. There are issues with the electoral system, and as I said, if you really want to make a change, change big and go to a more proportional system. That is going to have an impact.

In my mind, however, parties are the real roadblock. They are the gatekeepers in getting individuals. If you ask me how you can change parties and what they do, I can tell you that part of it has to do with making some rules and regulations for parties. But that's not really what this commission is tasked to do, and parties are private organizations, so I hesitate to make those sorts of recommendations at this point.

● (1400)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Your testimony, though, corroborates testimony we heard on Tuesday in St. John's from Professor Bittner at Memorial University, who talked about the symbolic advantage of having a more representative legislative body in encouraging more Canadians to participate in the democratic process. Western democracies, right across the board, regardless of electoral system, are seeing a trend in the decline in voter turnout. My conversation with her focused on the difference, as well as the intersection, of both appearance representation and ideological representation. Her view was that as much as ideological representation is important as a substantial element of legislative bodies, the symbolic nature having someone you feel you look like in a legislature is important as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ouellette, in your presentation you said that you had also thought about ways to increase the participation rate of minorities or unrepresented groups. Could you give the committee your thoughts on that?

Ms. Lise Ouellette: I'm going to talk about young people a bit, as their rate of participation in elections is declining precipitously. It is urgent that we intervene. I think that the voting age is an important factor. At 16, young people are still in high school. They have a lot of guidance and take civic studies courses. So we could as of high school involve those young people in the electoral process and help them to develop a sense of critical analysis as to the importance of the electoral vote and the positions of the parties.

It would be an important step to lower the voting age to 16. It would allow us to involve those young people. At this time, given the information tools they have and use a great deal, it would really be in our interest to lower the voting age.

As for minorities, I understood that you did not want to talk about the participation of women, but that you would leave that topic to other colleagues.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: I am going to let others talk about that. I don't have enough experience.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Lise Ouellette: That's fine.

With respect to language minorities, I want to bring up Nova Scotia again. I think there should be flexibility in terms of the size of electoral districts. Other models can be considered to ensure that minorities are represented. For example, I referred to superimposed electoral maps.

At the time, we wanted to place greater emphasis on the representation of the first nations. However, we didn't manage to engage them. We didn't want to submit recommendations without the first nations being involved in the process. The recommendation instead was to sit down and hold a discussion with them.

I think certain options can ensure quality representation. However, there's no doubt the electoral quotient could easily be lower for the first nations.

We have options, but clearly we must innovate. When there's only one representative of the first nations at a large table, it's very intimidating and it doesn't encourage their participation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lise Ouellette: We need to find options that ensure quality representation for them and encourage their full participation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ouellette.

Thank you, Mr. DeCourcey.

We'll continue with Mr. Richards.

[*English*]

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

Thank you both for being here.

Professor Everitt, I certainly appreciate and commend you for the work that you're doing to try to encourage more women to be active in running for office, and hopefully gaining office. Hopefully I'll have a chance for some questions for you, but I want to start with Madame Ouellette.

In your opening remarks, you made mention of the change in viewpoint you had on referendums. I noticed that the commission here in New Brunswick made the following three recommendations. I'm going to read them because I want to ask you some questions related to them.

The first recommendation was:

> That the government of New Brunswick take the steps necessary to hold a binding referendum no later than at the next provincial general election, to allow the people of New Brunswick to choose whether or not to adopt the Commission's proposed regional mixed member proportional representation electoral system, in order that it be in place in time for the 2011 provincial general election.

The second recommendation was:

> That the referendum be held under the rules and procedures recommended by the Commission and set out in detail in the policy framework for a New Brunswick Referendum Act contained in Appendix "K".

Then the third:

> That Elections New Brunswick initiate a comprehensive education and information campaign for New Brunswickers to allow voters to make an informed choice on the proposed question.

My questions relate to the second and third recommendations because if we were to decide to make sure that voters have an opportunity to have a say in this in a referendum—which I certainly hope we will—we would obviously want to make sure that we're setting proper, clear rules and parameters. The recommendation here indicates that the referendum will be held under the rules and procedures recommended by the commission.

Would you give me some comment on the rules and procedures that would be recommended? What would be important to us if we were to conduct a referendum to make sure that referendum was conducted in a fair manner?

I also saw in the report that there would be consultation on the wording of the question with the Leader of the Opposition and other leaders of political parties, and the question would then be tabled and debated in the legislature. Would you comment on the importance of those things in terms of the procedures and on the importance of an education campaign so that voters are well informed on the choices that they would have to make?

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lise Ouellette: You read the report. I read it some time ago. I looked at it quickly yesterday evening, but I think you're more familiar with it than I am now.

Regarding the referenda, the report warns us to be careful about using a referendum and to hold one only under certain circumstances, when no minority issues are at stake.

It has been a hot topic within the Commission on Legislative Democracy. Strong positions have been taken, and discussions have been held. Throughout the conversations within the commission, the warnings about the use of referenda have become increasingly significant.

Now, it's still possible—

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Sorry, can I interrupt you? I only have so much time. I'm looking at the recommendation here. It seems to be pretty clear that it's saying there should be a referendum held, a binding referendum. My viewpoint is that we should be having one, and so I'll obviously be advocating that that should be happening. If that's to be done, if the committee would agree to that, I would be interested in any advice because it does indicate here that there were rules and procedures that were recommended as well as an education campaign. I wondered if you could provide me with some thoughts and advice on what those rules and procedure would look like and what an education campaign would look like in order to ensure that a referendum would be successful.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lise Ouellette: Your question specifically concerns referenda. I'll answer by telling you what's going on with the recommendations made by the commission 12 years ago.

Some parts of the recommendations you read focused on limiting referenda, because we recognize the risks inherent to referenda. Take the current example of the Brexit. As soon as the question becomes the least bit complex, there's so much manipulation that misinformation is generated, either accidentally or on purpose. Education then becomes almost impossible. Why did the English population vote in favour of the Brexit? Was it really to leave Europe? Was it because Prime Minister Cameron's popularity was plummeting? Was it because of the migrant movement? In short, it's situational. I don't have the answer to these questions, and neither does anyone else.

That said, I think we must be aware of the risk. In this context, education is not a solution, because it's almost impossible. We must recognize the risks of referenda.

I'll give you an example from New Brunswick. A referendum vote was held in the 1990s. I think it concerned the voting age. I forget the question, but it wasn't emotionally charged and it was fairly neutral, so to speak. The vote was held, and a north-south-east line corresponding to the language communities was created. Afterward, everyone said that we needed to be careful with referenda and that they could have an absolutely enormous impact, even if the questions are innocuous.

Since no consensus was reached within the commission, we wanted to provide a framework to recognize the risk.

● (1410)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not certain it really responded to the question I asked, but I appreciate your thoughts.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen.

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

Thank you to our witnesses and the audience for being here, and also to the Maliseet people for allowing us to conduct our business here today.

[*Translation*]

My first question is for Ms. Ouellette. It relates to the last question asked by my conservative colleague regarding the referendum, which you consider a dangerous tool.

We're going through this now in Prince Edward Island, where a referendum will be held. In terms of knowledge and education, almost everyone says it's easy. The referendum is a very easy tool. It's a direct question, and it's truly democratic. If we educate people, there's no problem.

In this case, does the problem relate to the topic's complexity? The vote is not a matter of democracy. It's a matter of choosing a different system and determining the impact of each option. Maybe it's easier for liars to tell the population things that aren't true and it's harder for people to explain why something isn't true and describe the realities of the different options.

I have one more quick question. Is there resistance to change? Normally, people resist change if there's no culture of change. I'm very familiar with this practice, this system, when something is new.

Your commission recommended a referendum. Was it a good decision? What's your opinion now?

Ms. Lise Ouellette: I'll answer yes to all your questions.

Yes, it's a complex problem. However, there's also all the noise around a question. Even when we ask a question that seems simple, all sorts of issues are at play. I'll use the Brexit again as an example. It may be an exaggerated case, but it's an extremely blatant example. The question may be simple, but like it or not, given all the noise around the question, events can take unpredictable turns. We can't deal with these things through education or legislation, or by establishing regulations for the yes or no side. All the noise is significant and unpredictable in many cases.

Resistance to change is also a factor, but if it were the only factor, I could deal with it. It's a reality and something we need to deal with. However, all the noise around the question is another matter and it can't be controlled.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Exactly.

[*English*]

I am going to continue with Ms. Everitt for a moment.

I had not known this. I just learned yesterday that Swiss women didn't earn the right to vote until 1971. It was put to a referendum a number of times, in which men were voting. And I imagine, in Canada, in 1960 or 1921 for, first, women, if the question had been put to men whether women should vote or not, and then later if non-aboriginals were exclusively given the right to decide whether first nations people in this country could vote, I'm a hopeful person. I have great hope for human nature that in all cases we would have passed a referendum vote in favour of enfranchising others. Yet the Swiss are nice people and it took them into this generation in order to do that.

I want to talk about this. Canada ranks 64th right now in the world with regard to women in our Parliament, behind Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, and other such notable democratic outposts. My question, more broadly, is in terms of representation not just of the diversity of Canada but also the will of the different regions. Madam Ouellette spoke of this, the regional expression. I assume it was the will of Atlantic Canadians to send 100% Liberal representation in the last federal election and everybody is—

● (1415)

Ms. Joanna Everitt: It was not all Atlantic Canadians. You have to take a look at the proportion of the vote—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, but you sent 100% Liberals, so that must have been your intention.

Ms. Joanna Everitt: That's because of our electoral system.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right. Someone said Canada has worked well despite our electoral system, not because of it.

Ms. Joanna Everitt: I would agree.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

We have a bill in Parliament right now, Bill C-237 from a colleague of mine from the west coast that would do exactly what you suggested, incentivize parties to nominate more women. I'm assuming, after we've heard so much testimony from people like yourselves, that we're going to get near-unanimous support for this, at least one part of it, while we change the electoral system. Should the committee be considering doing these two things together—changing the way parties nominate and also changing the voting system—rather than saying we can only do one thing at a time? Should we consider both the mechanisms of the party nomination as well as the way that Canadians vote, and that their votes be counted for better voter equality across the country?

Ms. Joanna Everitt: You have to be careful because, as I said, parties are independent organizations—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —but we refund them.

Ms. Joanna Everitt: You can change the funding component of it and the rebate in the elections component of it. I do think that if you are making incremental changes as opposed to drastic changes to the electoral system, those incremental changes will not affect the representational questions that I've been raising today but that the solutions I've suggested, the rebate tinkering, could have a positive effect and definitely in combination. Actually, I would do the rebate even without changing the balloting structure. If you do anything, and walked away from here and went away saying, let's do something to increase representation, that would do it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Lovely. We're going to have a vote on that sometime soon in Parliament.

Ms. Joanna Everitt: You could do it easily. You wouldn't have to have a referendum on it because it's legislation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to Ms. Sahota, please.

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

I'm going to just follow up on that line of questioning.

We've been talking a lot about female representation and minority representation in our Parliament, and how we can increase that. Oftentimes presenters have said that the electoral system would be one way, and it would be key. I definitely think that it wouldn't harm it. If anything it would maybe inch it up a little bit better, and that's what we're seeing.

However, when you look at the countries that we're comparing ourselves to, those with ideal systems and the same parliamentary style.... New Zealand is doing better but it is still 39th on the list. I would expect it to jump up a lot higher than that.

Since you've probably done a comparative study of a lot of countries, what are those other things that we need to do in addition to perhaps making these changes? In our women's caucus we discuss this quite a lot. Also, in another committee I sit on, procedure and House affairs, we've been talking about how to change standing orders and do other things to make Parliament more inclusive. I know from my experience and that of other colleagues that there is often resistance to modernizing a lot of things because there is always some argument for continuing to do what we do in the way we do it.

There has been a lot of talk about shortening our workweek, but politicians are worried about doing that because there would be a public backlash. However, our parliaments, federal and provincial, sit for more days than almost any other parliament around the world. We travel great distances to work, leaving our families behind, and for people like me with young children, the decision to run is a really difficult one to make. All parties, I'm sure, have worked hard to try to recruit women at times.

I wasn't really recruited. I tried to make the decision myself. I ran in a riding that may have been unsafe; there was an incumbent from another party. Those are choices that I had made. All my opponents in the nomination and in the general election were male, but somehow I made it through, and I want a lot more women to make it through.

We don't want to just inch up a couple of percentages and not deal with all of these other issues that are big factors. I know that the United Nations has listed six ways in which female participation can be increased and none of them include the electoral system. They included equal education for women, quotas for females, legislative reform to increase the focus on issues that affect women and children, and so on and so on, but electoral reform didn't necessarily come up.

What are those other things that countries are doing?

● (1420)

Ms. Joanna Everitt: One thing I would note is that we don't often see countries changing electoral systems. When we do, we see big jumps. To go back to New Zealand, we did see a big jump from before it had the MMP system to after.

However, I would point to the fact that parties still play a very important role and that parties are still choosing candidates. The single-member districts that are a component of that MMP system still make it a challenge, in many cases, for the number of women or Maori—the aboriginal population in New Zealand—to increase, but increases have occurred over time.

You need to look at the institution and the institutional constraints that are currently there. You are right about the various factors that have made it difficult for women, in particular, to get involved in politics. Those are things that have been talked about a lot and I think need to be discussed. You pointed exactly to what the challenges are: a large country with long distances of travel far away from families. Do you move your family to Ottawa? Then where is your representation in your home community? These are all very difficult things that are more specific to Canada than to Britain, Germany, or other countries, which might fit into one province, although we still see those challenges at the provincial level. People in New Brunswick complain all the time about how far they have to travel from their constituency in the North Shore to get down to Fredericton. When you compare that to someone coming from the Northwest Territories down to Ottawa, those are big differences. That does have an impact.

We could look at quotas. I don't think it's really part of what our culture is. We could look at other things that could be taking place. You have to be aware of what the culture is prepared to accept. I come back to what is realistic, what is doable. If we are not going to do a significant overhaul of our electoral system, think about the incentives that are there to encourage parties to nominate more women and other under-represented groups. If you just look at the parties themselves and how well they do, you see that different parties have different incentives. The New Democratic Party actually has regulations about when they can hold their nomination meetings. It can be done only after they have a certain diversity of candidates running for nomination. They do that. They've taken that as a stance themselves.

The others haven't done that, but when the Liberals have a leader who has said, “We want to have more women” and the parties have responded, change has occurred. Internally, parties can do things to make change. In my mind, the real roadblock has tended to be parties.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Sometimes there is also the criticism that women may get in, but they don't get into the higher-level power positions. Even with the cabinet change, maybe the portfolios that women have are not as good, but making the choice that the Prime Minister made for a gender-balanced cabinet changed things overnight for the cabinet. It was a quick change, and it is gender-neutral now. Maybe it is not the Canadian way, or the way we have done things before, but everything that we are looking at here is not the way we've done things before. Changes definitely need to be made in certain areas.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to Mr. Nater, please.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you to both of our witnesses for testifying today. It has been a fascinating discussion thus far. I want to follow up with a few questions.

I am going to start with some comments from you, Dean Everitt. My colleague down the way, Mr. Cullen, made a bit of a tongue-in-cheek comment about the entire Atlantic region voting Liberal, and this being, therefore, the unanimous wish of the region, which of course was a little tongue-in-cheek.

I want to follow up in that vein just a bit.

There was a commitment in the Liberal platform that 2015 would be the last election under first past the post. Coming from the same tongue-in-cheek comment that Mr. Cullen made, do you believe that issue was top of mind for New Brunswick voters or Atlantic voters?

● (1425)

Ms. Joanna Everitt: No, I don't think it was.

There are so many factors that go into voter choices. One of the things I do, beyond studying gender, is study voting in elections and voting behaviour. I was on election study teams surveying voters after the 2004 and 2006 elections, and after the 2014 election here in New Brunswick.

That's not what people think about. Health care, education, jobs, economy—these things are much more important. One of the challenges of our system is that so many things get put into a platform that we can't pick and choose and say, “This is what made people vote this way.”

Mr. John Nater: Absolutely.

To follow up on that, still today, despite this committee having met for 39 meetings now, the public isn't engaged. About 3% of the population is following what this committee is doing. What would you recommend to improve this process, to improve the engagement with Canadians, to improve the legitimacy of this process going forward? If we're going to be making recommendations, how can we ensure that we have the legitimacy of Canadians behind us on this process of what we're doing here today?

Ms. Joanna Everitt: That's a really good question. I think the challenge is that Canadians have so many things they're dealing with on a daily basis that this is not something that's top of mind or front and centre. The same thing happens during election campaigns. You're all politicians; you know that people aren't often paying attention the first week, the second week, the third week. It's kind of in the last week that they say, “Oh, I have to make a decision. I need to make up my mind now.” That's when they start focusing and paying attention. To my mind, they have so many different balls in the air.

I'm a perfect example. I knew I had to come to this talk. When did I do my presentation for it? Yesterday. I sat down then and thought about what I'd say.

I don't know that there's anything you can do. That's just the complexity of our lives these days. I think going around and having these sorts of hearings, allowing those who are interested in engaging to learn more, to have their say, is a very important component of that. You can walk away saying, okay, maybe only 3% are engaged, but we offered the opportunity. We gave people the chance to give their feedback to us. We heard a range of different points of view. We feel comfortable making comments and decisions based on that.

Mr. John Nater: Absolutely.

You only wrote your presentation yesterday, but I thought that was only for CPSA papers. That was always my process, to finish off my CPSA paper the night before, so I appreciate that.

I want to follow up with regard to the language issues in New Brunswick. Ms. Ouellette, you mentioned the dividing line in terms of French speakers versus English speakers. We're pleased to be in the only officially bilingual province. It does present its uniqueness.

I want to get comments from both witnesses on how we can ensure that in our consultations, as well as our recommendations, we respect minority language communities. In my other life back on the Hill, I'm on the official languages committee, so it's something I have a special interest in. How do we ensure, in whatever changes or recommendations we do recommend, that we respect minority language communities not only here in New Brunswick but across Canada, for example, the English-language minority in Quebec, Franco-Manitobans, Franco-Ontarians?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lise Ouellette: That's an excellent question.

It's not always obvious. We need to conduct a fairly detailed analysis. I mentioned the example in which, following a vote on an innocuous issue, the province was split in two between francophones and anglophones. It can happen very easily.

In Nova Scotia, the decision was made to use the electoral quotient. It's a very objective measure. However, the electoral quotient makes it nearly impossible for Acadians to elect a representative to the Legislative Assembly.

We need to be aware of how the changes affect minorities.

Within the Commission on Legislative Democracy, mixed member proportional representation required us to divide the province to establish proportional regions. It was an extremely difficult task, and yet we're very familiar with our province. In this case, so many language issues arose, and we didn't anticipate them at first. It was very difficult.

We need to be very aware of this. We must always ask questions. There's no magic formula, but awareness is important. It's not always easy, even when we're aware of the issues at the start.

The Chair: You need to leave at 2:30 p.m., correct?

You wanted to answer Ms. Sahota's question about the representation of women. Can you speak to us about that for a minute?

● (1430)

Ms. Lise Ouellette: I agree with Ms. Everitt. It's one of the issues that inspired the most passion in the commission. It was even the most important issue. In the end, after many discussions, our approach was to tie the funding of political parties to the proportion of women among the candidates for election.

I remember we wanted to talk about the women elected. I didn't find anything about that in the report yesterday evening. The issue is promoted through the funding of parties. The parties are the most important institution when it comes to selecting representatives. They're the frontline in the electoral process. If we miss this step, everything else will suffer.

These issues will remain very significant. Women also need access to the most important positions in the government.

The Chair: In your report, did you propose that funding be tied to the proportion of women elected or women candidates?

Ms. Lise Ouellette: It was the number of women candidates. That said, if you decide that it should be tied to the number of women elected, I don't think—

The Chair: No, I misunderstood. Sorry.

Thank you, Ms. Ouellette.

[*English*]

Ms. May, it's your turn.

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

Thank you to both witnesses. It's been a fascinating session. I apologize for having to be away for a part of it.

Certainly, the work of the commission in New Brunswick, as you know.... We also heard from David McLaughlin.

I wanted to ask you a question Madame Ouellette.

[*Translation*]

In your view, what happened to the recommendations?

I understand there are elections and there are policy issues.

[*English*]

What advice can you give us so that we can grab the political opportunity that's in front of us?

We know that every time any Canadian group of citizens or member of Parliament has studied our voting system—the 2004 Law Commission, citizens' assemblies in Ontario and in B.C., and of course your own work, among many others—there has never been a group that's studied first past the post and said to keep it. The first parliamentary committee hearings were in 1921. We've had people study what's wrong with first past the post, and yet we still have it.

This opportunity could pass us by again. If you've already answered this while I was away, I apologize. Specifically to you and to Professor Everitt, what do you think we should do as members of Parliament?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lise Ouellette: Mr. Nater and Ms. Everitt provided part of the answer to your question.

Democracy is such a fascinating subject. We also tried to generate enthusiasm. To be honest, we were unsuccessful. We still managed to spark greater interest among a core group of the population, but that group remains small. There are now people who are passionate about the subject and convinced of the need to change the electoral system and the relevance of doing so. That said, I don't think the subject will inspire general enthusiasm. If we wait for a grassroots movement in favour of changing the electoral system, we may wait for centuries. It's as clear as that.

At some point, the governments must acknowledge the situation and the general analysis we're conducting. Almost everyone who studies our electoral system will recommend a change. It's inevitable, since the number of votes don't correspond to the number of seats. It's basic. It's undemocratic.

The system has still worked and Canada has performed well, as has each of our provinces.

That said, we can't wait for public enthusiasm. It won't happen. The population has so many other priorities.

For the future of the country, we need a leadership that recognizes the need for change and the risks of leaving the system in place.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: As you say, it's not necessarily a top-of-mind issue, but the room here is filling up with people on an unusually beautiful sunny Friday in October in Fredericton. People are willing to come indoors.

Is it like this every time? It's Matt's riding, so it has to be a great place.

I love Fredericton. Wherever we go across the country, people show up. They are concerned. It is said, "Well, these are the people who happen to be really engaged." But there are people engaged, who care about this issue, across Canada. I, myself, think we have an obligation as MPs.

I did ask you also, Professor, for your advice to us as members of Parliament, given this mandate.

● (1435)

Ms. Joanna Everitt: You're dealing with an institution. The electoral system is a political institution, and political institutions are notoriously hard to change. Take a look at our Constitution, our structure of Parliament, our Senate, and all kinds of things that are very hard to change.

If you really want to make change, you do it incrementally because people will accept that. That's not necessarily going to deal with what you want, but it might be the way to get it done. No one is going to get too upset with small, incremental change. It is not going to shake up things too much but it will, I hope, move us in the right direction.

Is that what you should be doing? I don't know. But if you want to get it done, in Canada, that's probably the route to go. It's not very positive.

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

I appreciate that.

The Chair: You still have 30 seconds.

Ms. Elizabeth May: In terms of electing more women, of course, your primary focus was diversity. I know that other colleagues have asked you about the diversity of other groups. In terms of getting more women to run, my sense, having been a woman in politics now for....

I've been a woman all my life, but I have only been in politics for 10 years, and I have to say, I hate it. I love Parliament, but I hate politics. The thing I hate about politics is the incentives that I believe are created by first past the post for increasing hyper-partisan nastiness. Do you see that as being one of the reasons women don't run? I don't want to put words in your mouth.

Ms. Joanna Everitt: Yes, I think it is. One of the things I've always looked at is the degree to which politics is a very masculine activity. It's frequently framed in competitive sporting-type analogies. Even in the structure of the House of Commons itself, as we always say in our introductory politics classes, the opposition and the government are two sword-lengths apart from one another. It's all of that. It's built into the structure and nature.

Can it be changed? Yes.

Can it be changed quickly? Probably not.

Will it be changed as more women and others get involved in political life? Yes.

I think you just have to take a look at the change that has taken place in the years that I've been researching politics. It may not feel like a lot, but I bet if you went back to the seventies, you would notice things were quite a bit different.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Aldag, please.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Great. Thanks to both of our witnesses.

I have to say that having worked with your local member of Parliament, Mr. DeCourcey, for the past year and having heard how fantastic Fredericton is, it's a delight to be here today and to have so many people in the audience joining us.

Madame Ouellette, do you still have time—

Ms. Lise Ouellette: I don't, but I will take it.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay. Mr. Nater was talking about legitimacy of process and was able to put the question to Professor Everitt. I don't think you had a chance to weigh in.

You spoke about your concerns with a referendum. Before you have to go, I would like to hear if you have additional thoughts related to the legitimacy of this process.

Ms. Lise Ouellette: I'm not sure I got your question correctly.

Mr. John Aldag: Concerning the process we're undertaking to look at electoral reform, the Conservatives made a very compelling case that Canadians should be able to weigh in through a referendum. There are concerns. You've expressed many of the reasons that shouldn't be.

Outside of a referendum, what other thoughts would you offer if your commission looked at things like legitimacy of process? How do we say this a good thing to do without a referendum?

Feel free to answer in French. We have wonderful interpreters.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lise Ouellette: That's a very difficult question. At one time, I was open to referenda in some cases, with a few cautious considerations. However, now I must admit that I find referenda very risky. I don't think it's a tool for change in a case like this. In fact, it's too dangerous.

In my view, the change process must emanate from political leadership, meaning from political parties, Parliament and legislative assemblies. The change may be slower than it would be if we had significant public support, but that support won't come. We must resign ourselves to a change process.

I keep coming back to the objectives. I don't think preferential voting would solve all the problems. Is it a step toward other changes?

If there's no form of proportionality, I think Canada will continue to face significant risks. This concerns me. We need to see whether there's a way to move toward a form of proportionality, which would be mixed, of course, and prudent. I think we should take this route. There will be no public enthusiasm and also there will probably never be consensus among the parties because everyone wants to be in power. As soon as there is proportionality, this tendency is reduced.

I think the only way to do it is through political leadership.

● (1440)

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Great, thank you. I appreciate your comments.

Professor Everitt, I want to go back to some of the great insight you provided, things like the incentives and the rebates. You began talking about it with Ms. Sahota's questioning, but on quotas, you indicated it was really not part of what our culture is.

The experience I had with quotas was working in the federal public service for over three decades. About a decade ago it was identified that our federal workforce was simply not representative of Canadians. We had done okay linguistically over the years, but women were still grossly under-represented in non-traditional occupations such as trades. Visible minorities and aboriginal employees were not represented in the composition of the Canadian population. A decision was made and, in somewhat crass terms, the way to drive it down was that senior executives weren't going to get their bonuses unless they reflected the Canadian population within the workforce of the various departments in a very short time frame.

I was at a middle management level, and I struggled with it initially, and I had employees saying we were not getting the best person. I quickly rationalized in my mind that there were great systemic barriers in place in society that were preventing qualified people, truly qualified people and in many cases the best-qualified people, from achieving those jobs. We implemented very aggressive quotas to get our workforce up, and within a matter of a year or two we were representing the Canadian population.

There was push-back within the federal workforce, and there was some pain involved with it, but once people got into the workforce, there were persons with disabilities, women in non-traditional jobs, under-represented ethnic groups, and all of a sudden everybody said, “Wow, you're right. There's a talented pool of Canadians out there that we haven't seen reflected.”

I just want to, not necessarily challenge you, but just see if there is not some way of incorporating as part of our Canadian culture that it is inclusivity for all. Could it actually work in this system where we not only do the carrot but go a bit harder with the stick?

Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. Joanna Everitt: Sure. I think it was Mr. Cullen who was talking about some of the other countries that are ahead of us in representation. They are there because of quotas, so quotas work. I'm not saying quotas don't work, and I'm not saying that paying attention to proportions is not important to do. I think, though, that there is likely to be a big reaction if you use the term “quota”. “Targets” is an easier term. People can sort of buy that term. It doesn't mean there is a cut-off, but it's something people will be more willing to accept.

I agree. It floors me that we don't have more women in leadership roles. Given the history of women's involvement in post-secondary education, you'd expect to have people come through who would get into politics with all the different sorts of skills and qualifications that women have these days. Something is keeping them back, and there are systemic barriers there. There are systemic barriers in politics, in universities, and in business. They are there.

What we need to do is maybe not use the term “quota”, and not set clear our total quotas, but put the spotlight on those differences and say there is a problem here. Parties and cabinet designers, prime ministers and leaders, should be focusing on these imbalances and asking themselves if they really have to be there.

Are there not qualified people? There are qualified people around, and it's not like you're not getting the best person for the job. It just means you're looking at a broader range of people.

● (1445)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. MacGregor now.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Professor Everitt, this question was more designed for Madam Ouellette, but I'd still like to hear your perspective on it.

Yesterday in Prince Edward Island we heard testimony from Leonard Russell, who also chaired a commission in Prince Edward Island, and he gave some very interesting testimony. He was talking about the vested interests at play with both the Liberals and the Conservatives and how, once his recommendation for MMP came out and both parties suddenly figured out that this could mean they would lose power, he saw direct evidence of both parties actively campaigning against the MMP system.

In New Brunswick's history, after the 2006 election, the new Liberal government refused to go ahead with a reform or a referendum, and they stated that the need for proportional representation had not yet been demonstrated. Just thinking of a theme of vested interests and a political party being in power because of our current system, why do you think the government made that kind of statement?

Ms. Joanna Everitt: Do you mean because they got fewer votes than the Conservatives?

I think there is really something to be said for the fact that parties have a vested interest. We do see the most frequent calls for electoral reform coming from those parties that have been, somehow or other, hurt by the first-past-the-post system, whether you have a disproportionate majority and someone's not getting the number of seats, or you have smaller parties that are getting the seat representation that they probably should have with the proportion of votes that they get, or you have a party that could have been the government but the other party, with fewer votes, actually gets more seats.

Those are the instances in which you see the greatest call for electoral reform.

Often, then, when parties get into office, I think they begin to think that, “Well, maybe we can actually use this to our advantage”, and so, it sort of drops off the radar.

It really does take political leadership, I think.

It does take the willingness to engage in these discussions and move forward on it, in a sense that there is a fairness that may come from the change in the electoral system, whether it's changing the preferential balloting component of it or it's making a much more significant change, such as to having a mixed member system or a PR system. You have to have a willingness to take that chance and have the confidence that you as a party will do well under whatever system, because it's only fair.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Have you been a resident in the province for a long time?

Ms. Joanna Everitt: I have for 19 years.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm curious. What was it like living in New Brunswick from 1987 to 1991?

Ms. Joanna Everitt: I wasn't here at that point in time but—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I guess not, but you could have taken a long bus ride.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Joanna Everitt: I think it would have been a very interesting situation. It's hard to have voices when you don't have seats in the legislative assemblies.

I think one of the real challenges that we face, and it was mentioned, is the fact that Atlantic Canada supported all Liberals—they sent all Liberals to Ottawa—but that means that there are no voices sitting around the caucus table for the Conservatives or the NDP.

One of the points I wanted to make earlier in the day is that the diversity of voices at different tables is really important. It's not just about numeric representation—having *x* number of women or *x* number of minorities or whatever—it's about having people with different experiences sharing and exchanging their ideas and asking questions that are not likely to be asked by people who all have the same sort of background and experience.

That's why we have regional representation. That's why it's important to have people coming from all different parts of the country making these decisions, in the same way it's equally important to have people coming from all different walks of life.

So, for me, it's not just about having more women or more minorities; it's about having diversity within the various caucuses, diversity around the tables.

How do you get that? You do when you have a more diverse representative body.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I agree. Our caucus is made up of 44 MPs, 18 of whom are women, and it does make a very real difference.

I'll just carry on with what Ms. May was talking about, our current system.

This was my first election. I'm a rookie member of Parliament. When you're competing for a seat, there's absolutely no incentive to be co-operative with another party. You are going all-out for that one seat, and, yes, there's the two-sword-length difference.

I'd like just some quick thoughts from you on how, if we were to change to a more proportional system, that might encourage some collaboration. Would you see that making a real difference in how our politics are played out and in maybe making question period a little calmer?

● (1450)

Ms. Joanna Everitt: The one thing that comes from a proportional representation system is that you're less likely to have majority governments, and that's its major criticism.

Single-member plurality systems create majority governments, and most people will say, “Oh, majority governments are good governments.” But we've had minority governments, frequently, that have been good governments and have managed quite effectively. Sometimes those minority governments actually work better because they have to work with the other parties. They have to get others onside to support their legislation.

I think that in a system that is less likely to produce majorities and more likely to produce parties that don't quite get 50% and have to, then, work with other parties, you're less likely to attack them and be really negative to them because the next day after the election you may want to make a pact with them and work with them and get their support.

Electoral systems have all kinds of unintended consequences and can be very positive or very negative. You just have to be aware of all the options that are there.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Good afternoon. Thank you for being with us.

It's a pleasure to be in New Brunswick. The last time I was here was with my wife, 23 years ago, for our honeymoon. We spent a week visiting this magnificent province. My wife got me to try lobster for the first time on that trip. I have three children, and two or three months ago, my eldest stopped being afraid of the creature and started eating it. Of course that means less for us since we now have to share it. In short, it's delightful to be here again. I've promised myself that I'm going to bring my family back for a visit so I can show my children your wonderful corner of the country.

Ms. Everitt, I'd like to tell you that your analysis of the situation as it relates to women, or at least your interpretation of it, is the best I've seen so far. You noted that, regardless of the electoral system, it is, above all, the tools we put in place that will help increase the number of women in politics. I fully agree with you.

We've heard from a number of experts that the electoral system has no real impact on the number of elected representatives who are women and that the first priority should be to put tools in place to bring that number up. For example, in a list-based system, we could require parties to nominate more female candidates. But we could also do that within the current system. If I have a bit more time, we can perhaps come back to that. You could comment further, but since I wholeheartedly agree with everything you're saying, asking you more questions just to have you repeat what you've already said would be pointless.

I was, however, taken aback several times when Ms. Ouellette was speaking. Allow me to explain. People often assume that my party, the Conservative Party, is calling for a referendum because it wants to keep the status quo. To my mind, that's completely untrue. I think people have the wrong impression. I will agree that, within the party, as within other parties, there are people who are in favour of keeping the status quo. In fact, the main reason is that they are worried about local representation. I'm in the camp that tends to favour the current system until I am presented with evidence that another system could preserve, and obviously not weaken, local representation. I am adamant about that. Unfortunately, political parties all have an interest in one model over another. And, in that sense, I think the public should have a say on such a fundamental issue.

We've already seen the Prime Minister come out in favour of a preferential system. Yet, 95% of experts have told us that such a system wouldn't necessarily be appropriate.

The smaller parties are in favour of a proportional system, and the more traditional parties prefer sticking with the status quo. Given how fundamentally important the choice of an electoral system is, I believe it's up to Canadians to decide.

I have a background in education. I'm a former teacher and school principal, both at the elementary and high-school levels. When I hear someone use the term “anti-democratic”, or say that a referendum should focus on less complex issues, that it puts democracy at significant risk, or that it is practically impossible to educate the public on these issues, a proverb comes to mind. It's one we would often use when talking to teachers and other members of the school system who wanted to see changes made swiftly: if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.

On Monday, Professor Rémy Trudel told the committee that a referendum was perhaps the most powerful educational tool available, because, even if just 50% of Canadians voted across the country, that would still be 15 million people, versus the 3% of the public who actually care about the issue.

I was almost upset, and I would have liked the opportunity to address Ms. Ouellette directly. It may not necessarily reflect what everyone thinks or wants, but can it really be called anti-democratic? Would it really be so detrimental to ask Canadians what they thought of the electoral system?

Some are convinced that the chances of losing the referendum are greater than the chances of winning it. But many people come to the hearings and say they want this change. Yesterday, I did a survey on my Facebook page, and I have more than 15,000 friends. This could be used against our party, but I'll tell you that 60% of the people who commented told me they wanted to see our electoral system changed, and 80% of them said they wanted a proportional system chosen. What's more, 80% of all those who commented said they wanted to have a referendum.

● (1455)

Those people, who responded to a survey on a Conservative MP's Facebook page, are very smart, in my opinion. They said they wanted a change because they didn't think our system was perfect. A proportional system seemed to them to be a better option, but they'd like to know more. The experts have told us that the public seems to view the proportional system as the best option, at first glance, even though it may not be ideal in all respects. Regardless, 80% of people said they wanted a referendum.

I'd like to hear your view on that. I realize I covered a lot.

[*English*]

Ms. Joanna Everitt: The key thing with referendums is that they do provide very important opportunities for voters to learn, to educate, to find more information about things, and to participate in a system in terms of the choices that are made.

I am torn about whether we should be using them or not. We elect our representatives to make these decisions, often on our behalf, and I've never been a strong proponent of participatory democracy. I think it's easy for voters to be swayed in one direction or another by their public leaders, or by particular groups, or to become misinformed and catch on to some small component of a discussion in the referendum.

I'm pretty sure I'm not answering your question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Ms. Everitt—

The Chair: Mr. Rayes, you're already at seven and a half minutes.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, but I'd just like to answer Ms. Everitt.

Ms. Everitt, you have no reason to be uncomfortable. I think you partly answered the question. We can discuss it further. That said, thank you for your comments.

[*English*]

Ms. Joanna Everitt: Okay.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Romanado, you have the floor.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for their presentations. I'd also like to thank the members of the public here today. It's always a pleasure to be here.

[*English*]

I am delighted to be back in Freddy Beach. I have a soft spot for Fredericton. As a military mom with a son currently serving at CFB Gagetown, it's a real pleasure for me to be back here. I'm delighted to be here with your member of Parliament, my colleague, Matt DeCourcey, who is watching over my son to make sure he doesn't get in any trouble. Thank you to my friends in Fredericton for keeping an eye on our brave men and women serving at CFB Gagetown.

Across Canada, people have been telling us this committee's work is one of the most important things we're going to do while we're in Parliament. I'm delighted to be one of the two women from the Liberal Party on the committee, and with Elizabeth May, we're delighted to bring that voice to the table. You can be guaranteed that all of us are looking at increasing the representation of women, visible minorities, and our indigenous population in the House of Commons.

Yesterday, I asked a question to one of our witnesses and it was suggested I ask you this because you are the expert. We're looking to find out the reasons women decide not to seek the nomination. I'm not sure if there's any research out there. Do we know who has ever been asked or contemplated running and then decided not to? I'm not sure any research exists that can identify some of those factors or barriers to the decision to seek the nomination. Do you have any information on that?

● (1500)

Ms. Joanna Everitt: I would point you to some work that is currently being done by a colleague of mine, Angela Wagner. She is a post-doctoral student at McGill University and she may have been in touch with some, but maybe not, because I think she is actually not looking at the people who have been elected, but specifically at those who have chosen not to run.

What has been done suggests that the real barrier for women in politics is the nomination. Women are less likely to put themselves forward, to self-select to becoming a candidate and say, yes, this is something I want to do. Men are more likely to put themselves forward and that, I think, is a socialized cultural norm that is still within our society.

When women are approached by a nomination committee that is going out to seek candidates who might be interested in running for the nomination, they are likely to consider it, sometimes taking a little bit longer than the men to consider it but they are likely to consider it.

When you have nominating search committees that are more heterogenous, more diverse—more women, more minorities, people from different class backgrounds, and different employment fields—they then have a more diverse group of networks and can identify individuals who might not usually be top of mind as potential candidates but would still be very good candidates.

The argument has been made that part of it is that self-selection in. Men are more likely to self-select in than women, and that—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm going to stop you just because I have another question for you and I'm running out of time, but you've made the exact point I'm looking for. Thank you.

It looks like Ruby and I are the anomalies in that we didn't wait for someone to come to us—

Ms. Joanna Everitt: Not everyone, but it's more the norm.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: The current average age of members of Parliament is 51 years old.

On the flip side, how do we recruit the next generation, Generation Y, to run for office?

I'm just going to throw it out there. In terms of recruiting the younger generation to work in the workforce, we know that they're motivated by different things. They're motivated more by a work-life balance, they're motivated not by money but by having that flexibility, and so on. When you have a job that requires you, if you happen to live in B.C., to have 12 hours of travel back and forth, you're going to be away from your family and your friends for long periods of time, and you're going to be living under a microscope, how do we motivate and recruit that next generation? Because we're having the problem with women, we're having that with minorities, but we're going to have that same problem with our younger generation.

Ms. Joanna Everitt: I think the real challenge is that the younger generation is not as actively engaged in party politics as previous generations. Many point to the fact that they're involved in other types of activities, other types of groups and organizations, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're involved in parties, which is where you often recruit your candidates from.

The real thing that parties need to do is get more young people involved in their parties and then you'll have a larger pool of potential young candidates. That is the big roadblock to getting more younger people elected to politics. Because if they don't see the relevance of the decisions that are being made in politics to their own lives they're less likely to want to get engaged.

I see that among my students and they don't understand why decisions that are made in Ottawa or Fredericton are relevant to them, and that is a real challenge.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Before the chair bangs his gavel I just want to say happy Thanksgiving to everyone this weekend.

Thank you.

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

And thank you, Professor Everitt, for being here. We had a good, lively discussion and there is a lot of food for thought in those deliberations, so thank you for making yourself available.

We're going to break for about 10 minutes and then we'll come back with our next panel.

● (1505)

Ms. Joanna Everitt: Can I just say that if anyone has any questions that I wasn't able to answer I'm happy to have that conversation afterwards or via email or other forms of communication.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you.

● (1505)

(Pause)

● (1515)

The Chair: We'll resume now, please.

I welcome our second panel: Mr. J.P. Lewis, associate professor at the Department of History and Politics at the University of New Brunswick Saint John; and Leonid Elbert. Both are appearing as individuals.

I don't know if you were here for the first panel, but just to review, each panellist has five minutes to present. That will be followed by a round of questioning in which each member has five minutes to engage the witnesses.

Without further ado, I will ask Professor Lewis to kick off the second installment of today's meeting.

● (1520)

Mr. J.P. Lewis (Assistant Professor, Department of History and Politics, University of New Brunswick Saint John, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to New Brunswick.

Update on the Jays game: they're up 2-0, last I checked.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Having reviewed presentations to the committee from the beginning of the summer, and taking stock that you have heard plenty of empirically supported arguments for and against certain electoral systems and approaches to electoral reform, I thought it would be helpful to focus on one of the committee's four principles that I have done research on, and that's engagement—more specifically, the role of Elections Canada in civic education policy as related to engagement.

My two main points are that in light of impending electoral reform, Elections Canada should have a role in promoting engagement, and that this role should be emboldened by collaboration with non-governmental agencies. My review of testimony to the committee revealed that both these points have been topics addressed by many of the committee witnesses.

Departing Elections Canada Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand discussed the role of Elections Canada in introducing a new electoral system to the Canadian public. Mayrand noted that, “An extensive public education campaign would be needed to ensure that Canadians understand the new system....”

Australian Electoral Commissioner Tom Rogers recounted the Australian Electoral Commission's successful civic education campaign based on principles of comprehensiveness and inclusiveness.

Political scientists Henry Milner and Jonathan Rose both raised the importance of civic education for elections. Professor Milner noted that while education policy is a provincial matter, he would like to see a greater effort in civic education at both the provincial and federal levels of government. Professor Rose reminded the committee of Ontario's experience with electoral reform and the $6 million devoted to educating the voters during the province's 2007 electoral reform referendum.

Representatives from civic participation and education non-governmental agencies were also supportive of more national efforts in civic education policy. Maryantonett Flumian, from the Institute on Governance, argued that Elections Canada “should be institutionally positioned to play a leadership role” in civic education strategy.

Jane Hilderman from Samara noted, “...there are very few resources for nationwide efforts in Canada in civic education, nor is it clear who among government departments or agencies should be responsible for delivering on this goal.”

Today I'll talk about clarifying that role and focus on civic education and elections, with special attention to two points: the role of electoral management bodies, such as Elections Canada, in civic education; and the place of Elections Canada in the civic education policy network in Canada. I will support both points with evidence from research I've published.

My first point concerns the role of electoral management bodies such as Elections Canada in civic education. I argue that based on policy precedent at the provincial level and general institutional support across Canada, there's a case to be made for a civic education role for electoral management bodies, going beyond the responsibility of simply providing answers on “how to vote” and suggesting answers to the question of “Why vote?”

You may remember that in 2014 the federal Conservative government introduced legislation, Bill C-23, that raised questions on the role of electoral management bodies and what type of information they should provide voters. While most Canadians expect electoral management bodies such as Elections Canada or their provincial equivalent to provide information on “how to vote”, in recent years, due to dramatic declining voter turnout, electoral management bodies have expanded their mandates and roles to provide education on the question of “Why vote?”

One of the benefits of a federal state such as Canada is that it provides examples of policies found in the so-called “policy laboratories” at the provincial level of government. Examining the description of CEO duties in provincial elections acts reveals that seven of the 10 provinces have specific mention of an educational, outreach, or awareness role of the CEO. Based on the research I completed for the article, I argue that, yes, electoral management bodies should be engaged in both “how to vote” and “Why vote?” campaigns. My position is based on three central claims: one, the modesty of the current programs; two, the affordability of the current programs; and three, the consistency in policy path followed by electoral management bodies across the country.

While considering the role of electoral management bodies in Canada in civic education, it should be clearly noted that the majority of civic education policies and programs undertaken by electoral management bodies are often in partnership with other policy actors. Groups such as CIVIX, Samara, and Apathy is Boring have all been prominent in spreading the message of combatting voter apathy.

This brings me to my second point and the case for why Elections Canada can take a leading role in the Canadian civic education policy network. For another article I was a co-author of, we found that out of a policy community of 53 civic education policy actors on questions of trust, influence, and reliance, Elections Canada was the highest ranked institution. The group of policy actors included the Library of Parliament, the federal Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Canadian Heritage, all provincial departments of heritage and culture and all provincial departments of education, all provincial elections agencies, and 10 prominent non-governmental organizations.

To return to comments by previous witnesses to this committee, I would like to draw attention to my colleague from the University of Toronto, Peter Loewen's, point that, “...the functioning of Canadian democracy has not been sufficiently appreciated.” I agree with Professor Loewen, and I believe Elections Canada should continue to play a part in addressing this appreciation gap regardless of the electoral system selected, playing a leading national policy role in answering the questions of “how to vote” and “Why vote?”

Thank you.

● (1525)

The Chair: We'll go now to Mr. Elbert.

Mr. Leonid Elbert (As an Individual): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I thank you for the opportunity to be here today to provide my input on the subject of electoral reform.

My name is Leonid Elbert, and I am here as an individual and as an author of the proposal for a made-in-Canada proportional voting system, the local transferable vote.

If you wonder about my credentials to design a voting system, my answer is I am a guy who is good with numbers. I also happened to be a concerned citizen whose interest in electoral reform dates back to early 2000. I took the trouble to study different electoral systems, to do the math to check what the results would have been if any of those systems had been used, and to come up with a voting model that I believe is the best option for Canada.

Let me explain what makes it the best option. When it comes to voting reform, the two most seriously suggested alternatives are the mixed member proportional, the MMP, and the single transferable vote, the STV. The MMP supplements existing first-past-the-post voting with original seats to make overall results proportional. It is the easiest alternative to implement, practically a quick fix, and as such, it is very popular. However, just as any quick fix, it comes with many drawbacks. Problems start with a question: how exactly shall we choose the candidates to fill those original seats? They don't stop there. With the overall seat distribution determined by the original ballot, the MMP places greater emphasis on voting for a political party rather than for a local candidate. MMP is also prone to quite frequent clean sweeps or wrong winner situations when a party wins so many local seats that there aren't enough original seats to offset the distortion. The latter could even be noticed in the report released by the Law Commission in 2004.

And that brings us to another major alternative, the STV, a voting system that delivers proportional results without compromising personal accountability. Under STV, individual candidates matter more than their party affiliation and preferential voting allows everyone to vote his conscience without splitting the vote, but STV uses multi-member constituencies. And that is not something most Canadians are comfortable with.

I'm not even talking about the north with the spacious ridings. Even here in New Brunswick, many would not be comfortable with a province only having two or three local constituencies, even if they elect three to five MPs each.

My proposal, the local transferable vote, combines the best of the two worlds. It allows us to retain local constituencies, to have as many of them as we would under a typical mixed member system. On top of that, a local transferable vote also delivers all the advantages the STV has to offer: preferential voting; 100% local nominations; and equal opportunities for all candidates, including the independents.

All the technical details are outlined in a brief that I submitted to the committee on September 7, 2016. This is my proposal, which I offer for your consideration. I strongly encourage you to think outside the MMP-STV dilemma and to choose a system that encompasses the advantages of both. That system again is the local transferable vote, a voting system designed in Canada for Canada.

Thank you.

● (1530)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Elbert. I'm sure there'll be many questions to probe your system.

We'll start the round of questioning with Mr. DeCourcey for five minutes, please.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you, both Professor Lewis and Mr. Elbert, everyone who's joined us since the first panel, and all those who have stayed. I have plenty of questions I want to address to Professor Lewis about voter and citizen engagement.

Mr. Elbert, for the benefit of people here in the room, can you explain what your system would look like within the provincial boundaries of New Brunswick, what would the voter do going to the ballot, and what would the results look like?

Mr. Leonid Elbert: The province of New Brunswick has 10 seats right now, and it would be six local constituencies and four regional seats. What would happen is the ballot would list, first of all, the candidates for the local region. Let's say we're in Fredericton, so here are the candidates for Fredericton, and here are all the other candidates who are running in New Brunswick. Then you just rank them in order of preference. It doesn't matter if it is local or regional, just your first choice, number one, your second choice, number two, your third choice, number three.

Then, obviously, they'll do the counting, first of all questioning if there is anyone who won 50% or more in his home constituency. That guy is elected.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Or gal.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Leonid Elbert: Or gal, obviously. That person is elected. Then there will be original counting, just as they do in STV. They determine how many votes one would need to get elected, and then figure out if there was anyone else who had as many. Then, if nobody has that many, the one with the lowest votes is eliminated, and his ballots go to his second choices.

Then, similarly, we check again. If anyone won a quota, if there was a surplus, then we take just the last batch, just the batch that caused the surplus, and we transfer it in accordance with the second choices. Again, that's when we have to use weighted transfers, but that's the only situation, and we only use the last batch.

There are three conditions under which one gets elected. The first is winning of 50% in his or her home constituency. The second condition is to win the STV quota in New Brunswick, which would be 9.1% or so of the New Brunswick vote. The third condition would be the last MP from your local constituency to remain in the count. Basically, let's say there are three people running. If two have already been eliminated, there is one left from that particular constituency, and we elect him because there has to be at least one from every constituency elected.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you. I hope other colleagues will take up the line of questioning to explore that system in further depth.

Professor Lewis, you mentioned the intervention that we had from Maryantonett Flumian, back in July, probably, and I was reminded by Ms. May that she talked about our electoral system as part of larger ecosystem that encompasses our parliamentary tradition and the way that operates located within a larger political culture, and that change to the electoral system is one part of a larger movement to better engage citizens.

I highlighted it in my first line of questioning with Professor Everitt, but western democracies are seeing a decline in voter turnout regardless of electoral system. Can you perhaps, for our benefit and for the benefit of people in the room, talk about what results we can yield from electoral system change and what else we have to consider? This might be changes to the way the civil service works, changes to the way oversight and arm's-length bodies operate, procedure in Parliament, or our political culture in general. What other effective changes do we have to realize to see a larger diversity of voices and greater citizen engagement?

● (1535)

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Especially when we focus on the role of education policy and look closer—obviously it's a constitutional responsibility for the provinces—we see it's a really mixed bag across the country. I did research on Ontario, for example, when it instituted a mandatory civics course. The answer to your question should have been that everyone should take civics, like a policy answer. When Ontario instituted the course there were problems with the policy implementation and with the staffing in schools, where you had teachers and they couldn't figure out what they should teach, so they gave them civics.

I think part of that ecosystem you're talking about is about knowledge and awareness. I've been involved in research related to civics and the possibility of young people becoming more active or engaged if we focus on civic education at the high school level. Henry Milner and I published a paper. We could track, through an actual experiment, whether people who had taken that grade 10 civics course voted more. There was a bit of an increase.

I would parlay this to Professor Everitt's answer to one of these questions about engagement. I can't remember if she mentioned it or not, but for people who are disengaged, there is this phrase you may have heard from other witnesses, the idea of being tuned out. It's not even that they're engaged, don't like what they see, and are rejecting it. They aren't even there. They're not even assessing the strengths or weaknesses of a system.

One of the ways we can address what is quite an abstract and pretty major challenge in terms of engagement is through opportunities in education policy, and there are a lot of actors out there. As I mentioned, I used the term “modest” on purpose because even looking at electoral agencies across the country, you see most don't even have a budget line for voter education, so you can't really even track it. The one I did find was from a few years ago, where B. C. had maybe $15,000 out of a $15-million budget.

The Chair: We're going to have to go now to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you. I appreciate your both being here.

I'll start with Mr. Elbert. It's certainly encouraging to see we have someone like you, who is not representing any specific group. You've obviously, as a citizen, taken enough of an interest that you designed this system. I'm sure you would have spent countless hours doing that and putting together a paper for us. It's great to see a citizen who is so engaged, and we really appreciate your taking that time.

I want to ask you a little about your system. I've had a chance to look at the paper you sent to us. There was a guy in Edmonton who said his system was perfect. Having looked at it, I would disagree. I don't think his system was perfect. I don't think there is such a thing as a perfect system. I would assume you probably agree. I'm curious, assuming you do agree with me, there are probably some drawbacks you would see to your system. Could you tell us about some of the challenges or drawbacks that your system might have?

It doesn't mean it's not a good system. Everything has its challenges. What would you see as being the challenges or trade-offs that you'd have to make with your system?

● (1540)

Mr. Leonid Elbert: If you looked at the brief, you would have obviously looked at the would-be result. The Green Party would be under-represented. It would not go anywhere outside of B.C. The reason is that, when you have, let's say, 14 MPs elected in a region, there is not much they can do with 2% or 3%. Unlike other systems —

Mr. Blake Richards: To be fair to you on that one, I think a lot of the models we're talking about would present that same challenge for the Green Party. When there are thresholds involved, the Green Party would tend to be disfavoured by a lot of these changes, I would think. To be fair, that's not an unusual challenge with the system.

Mr. Leonid Elbert: Unlike other systems, those votes would go to other parties, to the second-choice parties. That explains the extra seats for the Liberals and the NDP. You can see that they're slightly overrepresented there.

Another challenge would be the number of candidates on the ballot. Let's say, we have Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I suggested to have nine local constituencies and five regional seats instead of eight and six. With nine people from the same party, many would just go 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. For others, you would have to explain to them not to just put number one, not to just put an X, but to go all the way down, because if you only specify one preference and it doesn't win enough votes, your ballot is exhausted. Obviously, that will require—

Mr. Blake Richards: Your vote would allow that, though. Your system would allow that. If someone wanted to vote for just one person, is that acceptable? It's not ideal, obviously, but is it acceptable?

Mr. Leonid Elbert: It is acceptable, yes.

In Australia, they actually tried to force people to vote for all the people that were running locally for the house of commons and for at least nine out of 10 on the senate ballot. That created a very complex system where political parties.... They got permission to refine the preferences. They introduced above-the-line voting, below-the-line voting, and in the end, the system came to an absurd...when small parties decided to unite their efforts, and if I'm not mistaken, the Australian Sports Party or the Motoring Enthusiast Party won a seat with 0.05% of the vote, or something like that.

Obviously, we should not go that far.

If someone believes that he only supports one independent, and he believes that all others are not trustworthy for some reason, he should be able to mark just one person.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have one other question I'd like to ask. There isn't a lot of time left.

I'm a firm believer that any changes need to be put before the Canadian people. The people need to have the final say on this.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are. If your system was put before the Canadian people, do you think it would win the support of the Canadian people in a referendum, and why or why not?

Mr. Leonid Elbert: My proposal addresses the concern in Ontario and P.E.I., where people were given an option where they would vote for a political party without being able to distinguish who exactly they were voting for. It would also address the concern in B. C., where people were concerned that they would get huge electoral constituencies; for example, the northern part of Vancouver Island plus a huge chunk of the mainland would become one constituency. That was quite a concern. My system addresses both of those concerns.

If you run a referendum, at least 57% would support it in B.C., and I believe it would win.

Mr. Blake Richards: You would be comfortable with a referendum? You think that would be an acceptable course of action?

Mr. Leonid Elbert: Actually, my brief includes the argument for the referendum. No matter if it wins or loses, first of all, it's a de facto precedent that changes like that require a referendum.

There is another situation. Let's say the government changes, and I don't care what party forms the government in 2019. Let's say they mention during the campaign that they are opposed. The logic that is being used right now would give them the opportunity to say, “Okay. You guys knew that we were opposed to that. You voted for us, so don't complain now.” They could just arbitrarily redefine the voting system as they pleased using this case as a precedent, so a referendum better be there.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen, go ahead.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests.

I want to talk about that last point, Mr. Elbert. I suppose if we choose a system in which an overwhelming majority government making unilateral decisions is avoided.... The scenario that you're worried about, that policy lurch that we see so often in Canada when a party comes in and wipes out all the policies of the previous government, is a problem we're trying to fix with the suggestion of more proportional systems.

I guess all this breaks down and connects to your comments, as well, Mr. Lewis, about trade-offs. What system advantages what? Other systems have different things they advantage.

The value lens I'm trying to look through right now is the notion of voter equality. This is something we heard from Prince Edward Island yesterday. Regardless of where you vote, or who you vote for, your votes should be treated with the same respect, as opposed to what we have right now where some votes count but more than half of them don't count toward electing anybody.

Mr. Lewis, I don't think I caught it in your testimony, but you talked about the role and the importance of education. Your work has been put forward to this committee as one of the arguments for considering lowering the voting age, which is something that we're also being charged with. A great advantage is that, at 16 or 17, young people are traditionally in school still and part of the civics would be a real lesson, not a theoretical lesson, about how politics, Parliament, and democracy work.

Have you had any thoughts toward that, not just the issue of whether the age should be lowered, but whether there is in fact an advantage to having young people learn about the parties, platforms, and leaders, and then go out and meaningfully participate in electing a future government?

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Thank you for the question.

I've definitely thought about that and I think I'd support—I believe Henry Milner has made this argument before; he's written a lot about it—the socialization aspect to it.

If you're at home and you were in Ontario to take that grade 10 civics course, when you turn 16, you get to go vote with your parent, parents, or guardian.

I've been teaching now for almost 10 years on university campuses. It's interesting to see those students who initially take a Canadian poli-sci course—and they weren't interested in politics, but then they are—and then they want to vote. If they're from away, then they have to figure out all the—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: All the barriers that start coming forward...?

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Yes.

Universities and electoral agencies are getting much better. They have satellite polling booths on campuses, but it's still a barrier. Even though I think the international research is somewhat mixed out there, I think the socialization argument that Milner's made before is quite convincing. You even see it now without the lower age. You hear about parents taking their children to vote with them, just to walk down to the polling booth. Young people in that age group, and I can't remember the 2015 numbers off the top of my head but the 2011 number, I think, for 18 to 24 was something like 38%.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's right.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: The most exposure I have to that age group is university students. We normally assume that those who are more educated are going to vote more. But even at that point they're at a stage in their life where maybe making that step into a political act is complicated by everything else going on.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm just recalling. I've lived in a number of Central American countries. They would have two ballot boxes with the same ballots but different coloured paper for under 18 and over 18. Families would go and vote, and from whatever age you could hold a pencil you would vote in the youth election, with the same candidates, the same parties. On election night they would release the results first of what young people in the country had said, and it had an incredible predictability rate for the next election. They didn't vote the same as their parents, but they predicted the next election.

There's some insinuation that it would just be one more vote for that family, for the parents. I've turned my mind very much to this. Rather than being influenced, I think those young people would be influential. If they're in class, and as part of their class they are studying the parties, meeting the candidates, going through the platforms, they're bringing that home and perhaps challenging the voting patterns of their parents or guardians when they say what they learned today about party X's policy on the environment, which they care about, or rights on such-and-such.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Yes. Being around people that age, I hear much less about how they all vote the same way in their family and more about one uncle they can't even talk to about politics. I think there is divergence there.

● (1550)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes. You've gone to high school. If parents were influencing their children on everything, I don't think they'd be wearing all the things they're wearing—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —or piercing the things they are piercing. But that's probably another committee's topic rather than ours.

This is perhaps my last question. Part of the referendum question has been an assumption that we can educate people about STV, MMP, dual-member, all of the different options set out there. That precondition to knowledge is very important in making an informed vote. P.E.I. struggles with this, and I think is struggling with it right now, where misinformation is very easy and explanation is very difficult.

Do we have any evidence on the education process of voters in bringing up their knowledge of a voting system? Can we feel confident that there is such an education program we can put out into the public broadly, and what it might cost to bring the electorate up to a place where they're making an informed choice over systems that most people find complex to understand?

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I can't think of any research off the top of my head that speaks to the misinformation, but I can speak to research I've seen presented about the success of citizens' assemblies, where you'd have the most heightened information and awareness. I'm sure most of the committee is familiar with the citizens' assemblies that took place in B.C. and Ontario.

I've heard Ken Carty talk about B.C. and the success of its citizens' assembly, and especially Jonathan Rose discuss the misinformation that was out there in Ontario. I was living in Ontario during that campaign. It was definitely lost at that point, in terms of trying to keep up this parallel information with the referendum question going out, so that there wasn't misinformation and the systems were being explained equally.

The Chair: We'll have to go to Ms. May now.

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

Thanks to both witnesses. I'm going to echo my friend Blake's comments about your diligence, Mr. Elbert, in coming up with yet another voting system. I plan to study it, as we will all the systems that have been put before us.

But I'm very tempted right now to go right to Professor Lewis and ask you a bit more about Elections Canada, as such a trusted agency. You're the first witness, I believe, to put that evidence before us, even compared to the Library of Parliament. I think this is important information for us.

When Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand appeared before us, he noted that he hoped this committee would make recommendations for the role that Elections Canada had before Bill C-23, and what specific steps they should be able to engage in. I wonder if you want to expand on, ideally, how you see Elections Canada interacting for civic engagement with Canadians in a non-partisan and trusted fashion.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I think the amendments that we were made to Bill C-23 gave it some clarity, but there is still some ambiguity around what the role of the Chief Electoral Officer should be, so you could strengthen language in that way. The research was showing that it wasn't just Elections Canada having to do it on its own. Sixty-four per cent of the civic education policy groups shared information or data with another organization within that policy community; 50% did joint research, with one NGO or government agency working together; and 20% shared personnel. It's a strong community there. I'm sure you maybe heard from some of the NGOs that it's about resources and things like that.

I think maybe it's just a matter of emboldening and clarifying to whoever the next CEO is that they can play that role. Then it comes back to this big question—and I mentioned it briefly and maybe it was during my fast-talking—of how versus why. That's where the debate is.

It's very normal with regard to the how. That's directions to where you vote, how to make an X, and things like that. It's more contentious around the issue of why one should vote. We see evidence of that. I've also done a survey of what you would find on election agencies' websites. You find tools for educators and things like that. That would kind of encourage voting.

I think if there is a new electoral system, those questions become a lot closer, because not only do you have to explain.... This is actually an interesting experiment right now, for people who haven't read about Mr. Elbert's new electoral system, to watch people trying to follow along a new system as we're sitting here.

I think the committee really needs to take into consideration that this will have to be explained to the Canadian public, and it will also have to be justified and given legitimacy.

● (1555)

Ms. Elizabeth May: As you were talking, I was thinking about a book I wrote a couple of years ago called *Losing Confidence*. It was about the crisis in Canadian democracy. In doing my research, I found that it wasn't a generalized phenomenon that youth were voting less everywhere. The most pronounced areas where youth were voting a lot less than the older generations were in first-past-the-post countries. Youth in Scandinavia—at least the research I was finding when I was writing that book, which was in 2008, indicated—were voting at the same levels as their elders. They also had a tremendous level of political and civic literacy, since they read on average several different newspapers every day.

I've been struck through the course of this hearing—so I'm going to name something that I'm concerned about and just ask for your comments—that we're not getting any media coverage, for the most part. We're not getting covered as we go across the country listening to Canadians. This is the end of the third week of very intensive hearings. I think a good part of civic literacy and political literacy is having an active fifth estate that's actually covering issues of democracy.

Do you have any comments on that as an aspect of what Maryantonett Flumian called the ecosystem of democracy? I think there's a role for media. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I think it's easy even for all of us who are engaged in political culture to fall into the horse race side of things. You might follow politics very closely, but you aren't as much concerned with the institutions or how policies are made and how it's functioning.

Even following the American election, I've listened or watched hours of it and sometimes I can't even think of what policies they're discussing anymore.

Ms. Elizabeth May: There's a policy, I understand, about Miss Universe. I think that's core.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I'd imagine it could be difficult.

We can encourage the media, but I think that's why we have these institutions like a non-partisan electoral agency, which we've had since 1993. I can provide these papers to the committee. There's been a real growth in NGOs working on civics. I didn't even mention Historica-Dominion, looking at the more historical aspects of it. I think about the great work that Samara has done. I was thinking during Mr. Cullen's comments that we can't neglect to raise a point about the student vote program in Canada, which sees lots of numbers. Obviously there is something being lost there, even with all of those efforts.

I hear it every semester that I teach. I'll say something that I just assume 18-year-old Canadians know, and a lot of them say they didn't take it or maybe they took it in grade 9 history, and then by the time they're in university it's been five years since they talked about the fact that the Senate is appointed. This also goes back to the question of voting at 16. I'm not blaming secondary school teachers—my dad was a teacher—but something is getting lost.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

My initial questions are for you, Mr. Elbert. Thank you so much for presenting here today. I definitely respect all the witnesses who have come before this committee with unique ideas. It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of effort. I can't imagine how many years you probably spent perfecting this.

I'm having a little difficulty understanding what the difference is between MMP and this system in terms of the outcome. I know that in this system, you're saying you don't have to vote particularly one vote in one part of the ballot and then the other in the other part, but essentially people would, right? They would vote for their local member of Parliament, and rank them, and they would vote for the regional.

Do you think there would be a lot of people who wouldn't rank their local member at some point, and they would just be ranking the regional members?

● (1600)

Mr. Leonid Elbert: To make it even easier, let me just call it STV, single transferable vote, with local designations. They have different candidates. Some of them are from your local area, and they are marked as such. There is a guarantee that at least one of them gets elected. That will make it much easier to understand.

The way things will work is that with mixed member proportional, you vote for your local candidate, who's elected the same way as they are now. Then you will vote regionally, either for a party or for one of the regional candidates. If your local candidate doesn't win, and the party to which the candidate belongs is under-represented, they will use the regional MPs to offset the distortion, to compensate, to make the results proportional. That's mixed member proportional.

The STV, or the local transferable vote that I propose, is one vote, but you rank candidates by preference.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Are the local candidates duplicated in the regional category? Are they in both?

Mr. Leonid Elbert: Each candidate is listed only once on the ballot. The local candidates are marked as being local candidates. Actually, when I submitted the brief and also when I gave the speaking notes to the administration, it included a graphic presentation of how the ballot would look.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, I'm looking at that right now. I'm just trying to imagine it in my head. For New Brunswick, you've said you would have six local seats and four regional seats. What if, since there are fewer regional seats, one of the local members of Parliament who is selected ends up ranking really low? Let's say they were the 20th choice in the province. You'd have to choose a local representative, but you only have the four regional seats, and they ranked much, much higher.

Do you see what I'm saying? Let's say you have somebody who ranked in the 10th spot or the eighth spot, but they don't get a seat because they weren't listed in the regional section.

Mr. Leonid Elbert: Well, the way it works is that all the candidates are listed on a ballot.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I meant the local section, sorry.

Mr. Leonid Elbert: You can see that they are grouped by their party affiliations. The local ones are at the top in the highlighted area. You have a choice. You rank them by your order of preference. You rank them the way you want, but obviously some would choose a local one. Some would choose a regional one.

The situation is such that in order to get elected, one has to meet a certain quota, either 50% locally or to have, as in New Brunswick, 9.1% regionally. Let's say we had five candidates in a region and four of them got eliminated because they didn't score. There fifth one left is elected by default. Then again, that fifth one was the highest-ranking. He may be away from the 50%. He may have had 30% locally, and may be still a few percentages away from the original quota, but he is the most supported one there.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You wouldn't vote a second time around and eliminate some candidates to get to that threshold.

Mr. Leonid Elbert: No. There will be no runoff election. But the way the preferential vote counts, it's practically an instant runoff.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

New Brunswick has 10 seats. On your ballot you have about 36 choices and you show up to 18 ranked people. We've had experts say that for the average person to go out and learn about that many candidates, about seven choices is all they're able to really be informed about. I ran in this election, and I don't think I could accurately rank 18 people—before they were my colleagues, let's say—and also know a lot about what they were all about. I wouldn't be able to do it, and I'm into politics. I follow politics very closely.

I don't know; 18 just seems to be a lot.

Mr. Leonid Elbert: The reason I ranked 18 was just to show how the ranking can go. You don't have to rank everybody from the same party. You don't have to go consecutively, one, two, three, four, five. You don't have to rank the local one as your first choice, and so forth.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: How would you do this in Ontario? Ontario has 121 seats.

Mr. Leonid Elbert: There are a variety of descriptions. We'll have about a dozen different regions ranging from six seats all the way up north to as many as 14 or 15 seats in Toronto. Again, there will be, obviously, probably eight or nine local candidates in each such urban region.

As I mentioned to Mr. Richards, this also depends on education. We have to explain to people not to stop with just one, but to rank them. Obviously, there will be those who will just go with their favourite party, and go one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and not go any further. But again, with the 14-member region, to get elected a party needs roughly 6.7% of the vote. Even that will be enough.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you, to both our witnesses, for your testimony. It's been informative and very interesting as well.

Mr. Elbert, I'm going to start with a very quick question for you.

I appreciate your providing us with a sample of a potential ballot. I think that's useful. I was somewhat intrigued that it's a machine-readable ballot. We've actually heard some conflicting testimony about the benefits of online voting, electronic voting. I haven't heard a lot, at least from the time I've been on the committee, about an electronic readable ballot. It can still be audited. It can still be counted in a traditional way if there's a problem with the machine.

In Ontario they're currently piloting machine-readable ballots in by-elections. Beyond changing the voting system, electoral system, would this be a change you recommend regardless of the voting system, a machine-readable ballot?

Mr. Leonid Elbert: A machine-readable ballot, yes, I would recommend that.

We have that in New Brunswick. We had that for municipal elections. I moved to New Brunswick in 2005, so I don't know what kind of ballot they voted with in 2004. But in 2008 and 2012, they had machine-readable ballots. In the 2006 provincial election, there was a manual ballot. In 2010 they had the design for a machine-readable ballot, but it was still counted manually. In 2014 they had machine-readable ballots for the provincial election as well, even though I heard there were some issues with the software. I used to be a programmer, I know what it is.

It makes sense to adopt the machine-readable ballot. Unlike, let's say, text voting or online voting, a machine-readable ballot can be scrutinized. It's paper evidence. It's always there. If there is a glitch, it can be recounted. If, let's say, we were to have a situation like we had in 2014, where candidates were just, I think, nine votes apart, again, that could be recounted. That could be verified manually.

With the system I propose, when we have probably a dozen different preferences on a single ballot, a machine-readable ballot is a great help. That's why my submission also includes a sample of a machine-readable ballot.

Mr. John Nater: Very good. I do have to admit that these types of things actually give me nightmares. They remind me of the Scantron sheets from first-year university. I still get terrorized over that. But from a practical standpoint, I know exactly where you're coming from.

I want to go to Professor Lewis for a moment.

You brought up the concept of citizens' assemblies, and of course Professor Rose has talked a lot about that. We know that not a lot of people are paying attention to this right now. Not a lot of people are paying attention to this process.

Would you recommend a type of citizens' assembly to add legitimacy to this process, taking some of the deliberation, some of the power, outside the hands of self-interested politicians and giving a group of citizens an opportunity to deliberate, to evaluate, to participate in a deliberative fashion? It would be more than simply consultation. I think Professor Rose made a very good point when he appeared before the committee. There's a difference between consultation and deliberation. I wanted to hear whether you had some thoughts on that.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I think, especially with the evidence we have, that a citizens' assembly for the people involved in that citizens' assembly would be a good experience. They would be engaged and informed about whatever electoral system they decided to put forward. I would still be concerned about the information gap, regardless of whether it came from a committee or a vote in Parliament or a citizens' assembly, and about addressing the role of information, engagement, and education. I'm not sure it would make a difference.

Going back to Mr. DeCourcey's point about the ecosystem and all these different parts, we might be able to change some. I'm thinking about online voting. I'll defer to my colleague, Nicole Goodman, who is the expert on it. Again, if you think about the notion of certain Canadians, whether they're young or old, being tuned out of politics, how you vote may not matter at all in whether they are compelled to become engaged.

Returning to civics education, in teaching Canadian politics you see over the semester that not everyone gets the bug, but when you see a science major who by the end thinks about switching his or her major to political science, that took 12 weeks of reading the textbook and going into detail. It wasn't a magic bullet in the sense of changing engagement patterns.

While I personally like the notion of a citizens' assembly, and the idea and the experiences I've heard about sound very positive, I don't know if it gets to the problem we've been talking about in terms of changing people's engagement and attention to this committee.

● (1610)

Mr. John Nater: I will just point out that when I taught first year political science at King's, one of my greatest achievements was a business student telling me that they were switching from business to political science as a major. That made me feel good, because not many people are going to be doing that. I appreciated that.

Do I have a bit of time left?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds for a quick answer.

Mr. John Nater: Very quickly, then, you mentioned that you echoed the comments of Professor Loewen about the function of our democracy not being entirely appreciated.

In 10 seconds or less, could you expand on that?

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I think maybe what the professor was getting at was that it can be difficult to evaluate institutions if you don't have the information to evaluate them. Maybe for Canadians who aren't following along, or who are and are feeling confused about picking between electoral systems, it could just be that information gap. That has an effect, getting back to the political ecosystem and the political culture.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

Professor Lewis, when you were responding to Mr. DeCourcey's line of questioning, you were cut off at the end. You had been talking about budgets and were just on a point about B.C. I'm a B.C. MP. You were just starting to get into what the budget was in B.C. for the referendum.

Did you have any thoughts on the budget question related to engagement by an organization such as Elections Canada? It's not something they've been doing. It's the how versus the why. If we were to look at expanding the mandate and moving more into civic engagement, either directly or perhaps in partnership with some other organizations, like Apathy is Boring, what kind of budget would be required? If you've looked at other organizations, what kind of money is actually spent on that kind of engagement?

Mr. J.P. Lewis: The exact number.... This is from the Elections B. C. annual report from 2012-13. The budget line was voter education, and they spent $15,643, and their entire budget was $18.3 million.

Mr. John Aldag: Wow, that doesn't seem like a very high priority —

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Well, I think the point is more—

Mr. John Aldag: —or they were very efficient.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: The point is more that Elections Canada can play.... I don't know what the budget figure would be, but it's just like civics education in the schools, which I know is a provincial responsibility, but it's a real mishmash out there.

If the CEO can be a champion, if Elections Canada can be a champion, even on a modest budget, just getting that mandate.... We know that there are institutions out there like Apathy is Boring, like CIVIX, like Samara, that are doing good research and are implementing good programs. We know that the partnerships are already there and that this community already exists, so I think it's just clarification around that.

I don't know these numbers off the top of my head. You could look at other countries, maybe Australia, to find what number they put behind their programs.

Mr. John Aldag: I have a couple of points on what you've said. There was a woman who joined us in Montreal. She was a witness, part of our panel, from Apathy is Boring. I spoke with her after about funding sources, and they didn't seem to have a secure source of funding. It's very much chasing funding all the time, which many NGOs end up doing. I imagine, with some of the other organizations you've mentioned, that's probably the case as well.

● (1615)

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I've talked a lot about the tuned-out aspect, if we're focusing on young voters. We might laugh at photos of Puff Daddy being involved in voter turnout.... I'm dating myself.

Mr. John Aldag: Some of us will nod knowingly.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: He goes by Diddy, too, I think. I don't know what he's called right now.

Anyway, sometimes you need these more hip groups like Apathy is Boring. They don't do it anymore, I don't think, but when MuchMusic was more of a television station, I think Chrétien was interviewed. I don't know if it was by Erica Ehm. It may sometimes be pandering, but I think it can make a difference.

Mr. John Aldag: The other point I was going to make is that we've talked to some other countries that have different voting systems, some that changed different systems from election to election, municipal to federal, and those kinds of things. In a couple of cases we talked about budgets, and it didn't seem like any of them had really assigned a lot of money to the why piece of it as opposed to the how. It made me wonder if it's just assumed that, somehow organically, voters will learn the why piece of it.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I know. Again, when I was looking through previous testimony, I know that Nelson Wiseman from the University of Toronto said the parties and media play a role to educate. I'm sure you're finding, as you're travelling the country and in Ottawa, that some people supporting a system might not be able simply to explain to you how it works and what the strengths and weaknesses are. They'll probably pick up on what strengths are, if they like it, and the weaknesses, if they don't. Again, maybe some non-governmental agencies are falling on the strengths and not giving a balanced approach.

Definitely, if you have Elections Canada in the leading role, and then other outside groups partner with them, you'd think you would capture that independent spirit.

Mr. John Aldag: I appreciate your thoughts on this. You had some good insight and thoughts on youth engagement as well, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Lewis, I also want to follow up on what Mr. DeCourcey was talking about earlier, the falling rate of participation among so-called western democracies. There is one country, though, that regularly bucks the trend, and that is Australia, which regularly gets low- to mid-nineties in turnout because they have mandatory voting.

Yesterday in Charlottetown we heard witness testimony from a citizen of Australia, Ms. Anna Keenan. She's now living in Canada. Her perspective on mandatory voting was illuminating for us, because her explanation of Australian political culture was that mandatory voting is not really a subject in itself. Everyone just sees that as a regular duty. You just show up at the polls and you do your thing. I lived in Australia in 2013 when they were having their federal election. I can remember talking to local Australians, members of my wife's family, and it's just not really a big issue. You just show up at the poll and do your thing.

One interesting thing that Ms. Keenan mentioned to us was that it forced political parties in Australia to step out of their comfort zones. Here in Canada, it's all about polling the votes. If you look at individual ridings, parties have their strongholds in different areas of the riding. They don't really have to reach beyond that.

I'm just wondering about your views on mandatory voting. I'd like to hear your feedback on that.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I think that if you know enough, it almost becomes self-mandatory. That is, if you fill those information gaps, if you deal with the knowledge levels...because we know that people with higher levels of education are voting more often. I guess I may be agnostic about mandatory voting. I come back to this issue. Would mandatory voting address some of the problems, as Mr. DeCourcey said, in the ecosystem if people are, say, just voting to avoid a fine? There could be research out there on this. When jurisdictions introduce mandatory voting, does it appear that people are becoming more engaged and more knowledgeable? I don't know if there are Australian election studies to address that.

I think the policy answer could be for Elections Canada to play a greater role through resources that might address policy gaps at the provincial level, where you have provincial governments and departments of education that may be struggling with implementing civics programs at whatever grade level; and have an independent, non-partisan voice.

● (1620)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Moving on to something different, I wanted to look at the comments that Mr. Mayrand made about consensus. Look at the structure of this committee. This is a very special thing you see here. I hope the audience realizes that. Our traditional committees are 10 members, dominated by the governing party. Here, we've set something up that is relatively in proportion to what each party received in the election. When you look at Mr. Mayrand talking about consensus, what does that word mean to you as we are deliberating this issue?

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I guess it means comfort with the final decision and the route that gets you to that final decision. Maybe it means acceptance by those outside of the group that made the decision, and understanding. That bolsters the legitimacy of the decision that was made.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Quickly, because five minutes does go very quickly, I'll go to the subject of referendums and plebiscites. We heard interesting testimony yesterday in Charlottetown about their efforts. First, there was the question about a decade ago as to whether they would stick with first past the post or go to mixed member proportional. That was taken down. Now they're moving to a ballot, a plebiscite, where the choices are listed. What is your opinion of a "yes or no" type of question versus one that actually asks citizens to find out a little bit more about each system?

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I think there's value in any question that would compel citizens to seek out that information. It's just a matter of whether they will, whether the information is out there, and whether it's information that is balanced in terms of not just presenting it in a way that, as I said earlier, only highlights the strengths or the weaknesses.

When I'm trying to demonstrate to my students the relationship that Canadians have with our institutions, I always mention the success that Stephen Harper had in arguing for prorogation in 2008, and the fact that he won the argument that you need elections to change governments.

Anyone who understands responsible government knows that you can change governments without an election, but it was a very successful political argument he made, and the idea was roundly defeated. I always think about that. Whether it's electoral reform, the Senate, or the House, Canadians have a certain relationship with their institutions. Part of it, I think, is the small c conservative. The status quo is, a lot of times, picked rather than changed.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rayes, over to you.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Good afternoon.

I have a few questions, and I'd like you to answer using a scale of one to 10, where one means you completely disagree and 10 means you completely agree. I'm going to try to do it quickly. I don't necessarily want any comments; I think we've pretty much covered the topic already.

On a scale of one to 10, what would you rate your support for a national civic education program for schools, including proper funding?

[*English*]

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I guess I'm not giving you a number because I respect the responsibilities laid out in the Constitution. Maybe I'll take a five down the middle because I think the federal government does play a role in other provincial jurisdictions, and it could play a role in this as well. Maybe I'll say five.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: What about you, Mr. Elbert?

Mr. Leonid Elbert: I would say 10. During my last year of school, I took part in a program for two hours a week. I learned about the voting system and the formulas used to determine the party that would form the government and the party that would form the opposition. Of course, I would like every student to have that same opportunity.

● (1625)

Mr. Alain Rayes: I am really looking for just a number between one and 10, where one means you completely disagree, 10 means you completely agree, and five means you're split. I would ask that you not say any more than that, as I have a number of questions.

Mr. Leonid Elbert: My answer is 10.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Great.

What about mandatory voting?

[*English*]

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Five.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Leonid Elbert: Zero.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Should we put stringent measures in place to ensure political parties allow women and minorities to take their rightful place within their ranks, without necessarily changing the electoral system?

[*English*]

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Ten.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Leonid Elbert: Zero, because they should do so freely, without being pressured.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Zero. That says it all.

What do you think of the idea of lowering the voting age to 16?

[*English*]

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Eight.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Leonid Elbert: I support it.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

If the committee couldn't reach a consensus on a model to replace the current system, on a scale of one to 10, would you agree with holding a referendum so that Canadians could decide? Remember, I am referring specifically to a situation in which the committee was unable to arrive at a consensus.

[*English*]

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Five.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Leonid Elbert: I would say yes.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

For my next question, you'll be able to round out your response, which I'm sure you'll appreciate.

Whether or not people want a new electoral system, the real issue for them is the contrast between local representation and proportional representation, which allocates seats in proportion to the share of the national vote.

All of the proportional systems that have been proposed reduce the number of seats to free up a certain number to achieve proportionality. That's what divides those who want to keep the status quo and those who want a change. It's not that those who prefer the status quo don't see the importance of proportional seat allocation; it's just that they don't support a weaker local presence in the ridings. Take me, as an example. I often say that my riding already has 40 municipalities, and I wouldn't want it to be any larger given how much I care about local representation.

What if we were to keep the 338 existing seats across the country but add some to achieve proportionality? I'm not talking about adding 200 or 300 seats as per the ideal model that has been proposed. Rather, I'm talking about adding some 40 or 50 seats to have better allocation, to help the smaller parties, to rebalance the shares, and to ensure representation is more proportional. Might that be a worthwhile compromise?

[*English*]

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Do I have to say a number again?

Voices: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: No. You can if you like, but you don't have to.

[*English*]

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I would say 10, but there are other reasons that I think it would be better for the House if there were more seats, in terms of party dynamics and things like that, once you get into the working of the House of Commons. However, my number would be 10 in terms of keeping the 338 and adding more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

I'm asking an important question because it has never been put to the witnesses.

We always consider the models proposed to us. Everyone wants to lower the number of seats because they don't think the public would accept having more added. But as I see it, it's the only model that would preserve local representation while achieving better proportional representation.

Mr. Elbert, you can go first. Then, Mr. Lewis, you can go ahead if you have something to add.

Mr. Leonid Elbert: A lot of effort has been made to preserve local representation in the system I'm proposing. Even with regional seats, those members would have a strong link to the local community.

I think 338 seats is enough, especially since some MPs don't get a chance as it is to have their private members' bills appear in the order of precedence on the Order Paper. Normally, the order of precedence contains 100 or so bills. If 50 seats, for example, were added, those members would simply sit in the House without having an opportunity to see their bills put to a vote. What would that change?

Mr. Alain Rayes: I'm going to respond, Mr. Elbert, if you don't mind.

When we talk about local representation, it really has nothing at all to do with private members' bills. I would say that, generally speaking, no member of the public even knows that exists. Local representation is much more visible in the work we do in our ridings, our presence at events alongside our constituents; it's that closeness that allows us to hear what people are saying and represent them faithfully in the decision-making process.

That said, thank you kindly for your remarks.

I believe Mr. Lewis had something to add. Would you allow him to do so, Mr. Chair?

● (1630)

The Chair: Did you have something to add?

Mr. Alain Rayes: No, not me. I thought Mr. Lewis did.

The Chair: Please keep it brief, Mr. Lewis.

[*English*]

Mr. J.P. Lewis: You know, a few of you have mentioned that no one is paying attention to the committee, so you could probably add 200 seats and no one would notice.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: That's an idea.

Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: It's never easy to be the last person to ask questions because my colleagues ask a lot of...and I think, “Oh, they got it.”

First off, thank you so much for being here today. To the members of the audience who have been with us since 1:30, thank you.

[*Translation*]

I'd also like to thank all those who joined us along the way. I want to thank the members of the public for coming out in such force.

[*English*]

As I said earlier, it is a pleasure for me to be here in what is affectionately called Freddy Beach with my colleague Matt DeCourcey, who is probably one of the hardest working MPs on the Hill. I'm delighted to be here, and no, he didn't pay me for that.

We've talked a lot about education. In a previous life, I taught at McGill and miss the whiteboards and want to stand up and talk to students, though I'm stuck here in a seat at the moment.

We know that education is a provincial matter. We've talked a little bit about organizations that have a vested interest in certain outcomes of elections and that are advocating for certain electoral reforms. It's frustrating because the teacher in me always wants to make sure that, for whatever we put out there, we show the good, the bad, and the ugly, so that we're actually teaching Canadians that if we do *x*, it can equal *y* as well.

Obviously there's something missing from Elections Canada's role or the method in which they're communicating, because all of these other things keep popping up.

I'm turning to you, Mr. Lewis. Whenever folks are looking at getting information, we turn to this. We go to the Internet. We go to Facebook. We say to our friends, “Oh, I'm thinking about buying a new car. What do you think about X?” We don't trust the car maker. We want to talk to our friends. “What do you think about the Green Party? What do you think about the Liberals? What do you think about this?” We want to hear from our friends. We don't want to hear from the Liberals because they have a vested interest, and we don't want to hear about it from the Greens because they have a vested interest. How do we make sure...?

You said Elections Canada should have a role, but Elections Canada's core business is not education. I'm actually quite surprised that they haven't gone to the colleges or the universities and said, “We'll provide you with the content. Can you deliver? You provide the container,” because that's what colleges and universities do. That's their core business.

Is there something we can be doing differently to make sure that the information that's getting to Canadians is accurate information that shows all sides and that we are leveraging our partners? We've talked about Apathy is Boring and we've talked about Samara, which are fantastic organizations. But we also need to look at our colleges and universities. I know that provincial jurisdiction overlooks high schools and so on, but what about our colleges and universities? We have granting agencies like SSHRC that are doing great research that we could be looking at. Talk to me a little bit about that.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: I think, especially at the college and university levels, it's up to the instructor to incorporate certain resources into their curriculum, so you can't—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm going to stop you because I should have been more clear.

I'm not talking about the instruction at those university and college-level courses. I'm talking about going to them and asking, “Can you deliver this content to the community at large so that Canadians who are not in university or in college can go and get accurate information.” I'm just using them as a conduit, but not necessarily to their normal customers.

Mr. J.P. Lewis: Yes. I mean, you mentioned SSHRC, and there are different grants at universities. It would have to be selected through the mechanisms they use, but there would be opportunity there.

I want to pick up on where you started to go with the question. I don't think I said the exact number before, but in this survey of all the policy actors in the civic education community, 77% put Elections Canada as the most trusted. It's not that Elections Canada hasn't made efforts. Jean-Pierre Kingsley I think in 2004 sent out postcards to people coming of voting age. I think when we saw the debate around Bill C-23, there was that ambiguous nature of what the Elections Canada role should be.

I would return to the clarification. We don't know a budget number, but there would have to be more resources. In terms of colleges and universities playing a role in the community, right now it's up to the individual faculty member. There are opportunities, and you can play that role as part of your day-to-day work, but again that's up to the individual faculty member. I think if there were more resources out there coming from an agency like Elections Canada, from the federal government, then that might help.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much for sharing your insights, Professor Lewis.

Mr. Elbert, thank you for all the work you put into designing a system that we can consider.

We'll move on now to the afternoon open-mike segment. We have another one this evening. I'll just explain for those who are in the audience how we function in the open-mike section. Each person has two minutes to deliver their comments. This has worked well everywhere. We have two mikes at the front. We'll make sure that both mikes are occupied all the time, so while one person is speaking, the other person can gather their thoughts in preparation for taking the active mike.

I will call Mr. John Gagnon first, and then Ms. Helen Chenell.

Mr. Gagnon, go ahead. You have two minutes, please. There will be a signal to indicate that you have 20 seconds left, which might help.

Mr. John Gagnon (Member of the Executive Council, New Brunswick Federation of Labour): Good day. I'm John Gagnon representing the New Brunswick Federation of Labour. I'm going to speak on proportional representation.

We believe that a thorough consultation of Canadians is necessary. This consultation could take many forms, town hall meetings, the forum we have today, and similar or different forums. Improving our representation and accountability to our government is paramount to Canadians.

As for the costs, we believe Elections Canada should be consulted. In saying that, we believe that the infrastructure required by Elections Canada to run the elections should remain the same. We are talking about costs and that aspect.

The majority of Canada's peer nations have had some form of proportional voting the last few decades. Some of them include New Zealand, Australia, Scotland, and Wales, and they have similar histories and cultures to Canada, so it's not new. It's out there. Our primary goal is to make sure every vote counts and to ensure that no party gets the majority of the seats without getting the majority of the votes. We believe that's only fair.

Under our current system, some parties may be able to win all the seats in a particular region, even though they don't even come close to a majority of the votes to garner that. With the proportional representation system, if you get 30% of the vote, well, you get 30% of the seats, which makes sense to us. Votes would more accurately reflect the views of the voters if you had that system.

It would mean that regions will no longer appear to support one party. Just take a look at Atlantic Canada. The perception is that it's Liberal and everybody supports the Liberals. It's not the reality. They didn't get all the votes. I'm not saying this to be derogatory; it's just for argument's sake. It could be the Conservatives somewhere else.

One thing that's great about proportional representation is that we can include an aspect within it where you can still elect your MP. This would be great in that, in addition, you not only elect the local representative but you choose the party that best reflects your views under the system. I think that's lacking in the old system.

That's it?

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gagnon. You were talking about mixed member proportional at the end, basically. That's what you were saying, that we can have both.

Mr. John Gagnon: Yes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to have to go to Ms. Chenell now.

Ms. Chenell, go ahead for two minutes, please.

Ms. Helen Chenell (As an Individual): Thank you.

First of all, I would like to thank this committee for coming, for their tireless efforts, and for the time they've taken away from their families and homes to travel across the country and hold these meetings. It's definitely a perfect example of a co-operative government. I do appreciate it, and I want you to know that, as a citizen, I trust you to go back and make a decision.

I don't see any need for a referendum. With only 3% of the population, you're telling me, being engaged, how could we ever have a vote? Take your information. You've heard lots of it, obviously, if this is any example. I trust you to come up with a decision.

I'm here for a selfish reason. I believe the first-past-the-post electoral system to be mathematically incorrect and morally wrong. I never want to hear again, as I'm going door-to-door, someone say, “My vote doesn't count”, “Nothing ever changes”, and “My party never wins”, or as in the last election, which was very disheartening, that people voted out of fear—fear!

Everywhere in today's society we're offered choices. Grocery stores have food from all over the world. Clothing comes in every style, shape, and colour. There are more channels on our TVs than we could ever watch. Yet why, when we elect governments, do we send a message to voters that, unless you vote for the winning candidate, your ideals, your goals, and your dreams for this country don't count and they won't be seen?

The current electoral system needs to change from excluding people to including people, so that we might not have the term “small parties”, but just “parties”.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Kersey.

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

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced, “My predecessor wanted you to know Canada for its resources. I want you to know Canadians for our resourcefulness”. Canadians want a more resourceful government. They want discussions around industrial, climate, and innovation strategies from their government, to move us beyond a country with disproportional dependence on resources.

We don't see that. We see a Parliament where government continually rejects private members' bills and ideas from other parties because they may score political points ahead of the next election.

Eight out of the 10 top countries on the 2015 UN global innovation index, including the innovation powerhouses of Sweden, Finland, and Switzerland, have electoral systems based on proportional representation. Canada ranked 16th on this same index. These top innovative countries govern with coalition-based majorities and adopt significantly more private members' bills from their coalition partners. These countries have what the political scientist Arend Lijphart calls consensual forms of democracy versus our confrontational form.

If we continue to have governments with single-minded policies from their PMOs and cabinets, we wind up with an “all our eggs in one basket” economy. We can see where that has gotten us. Diverse ideas equal diverse economies equal resilient economies.

I ask you to seriously consider our Prime Minister's statement, be resourceful, and move our electoral system into the modern age with of all the other innovative countries.

Thank you for this opportunity.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Norfolk, go ahead. The floor is yours.

Mr. James Norfolk (As an Individual): You have a copy of my minutes already. I'll just make a quick summary.

First of all, I am an unabashed supporter of the first-past-the-post system. It's simple, it's straightforward, and there's a clear winner every time. I do not approve of multiple counts. One, there is no guarantee that 50% is mandatory for legitimacy. A close election is good for democracy. If maybe a couple of hundred votes separate the winner from the third party, hey, with a little bit of work, number three can be number one. Change can happen.

With regard to parties being excluded because they're small, well, Ms. May is proof of that. She has successfully been elected, yet her party does not come in first, second, or third elsewhere in the country. I give you Fred Rose, a communist who won consistently in the 1940s. If Igor Gouzenko had kept his mouth shut, he'd still be there. I give you the Social Credit, a powerhouse in the west for 40 years, and yet, east of Saskatchewan, “Who...?” The Bloc Québécois and the Reform were nothing in 1990, yet look what they did to Canadian politics. Change can happen.

As far as multiple counting is concerned, to quote Mark Twain, there are lies, there are damned lies, and then there are statistics. Figures never lie. Liars...and the corollary of that is that numbers can be made to tell you anything you want.

I do have a question. I read last month in *The Globe and Mail* an article by Gordon Gibson, a well-known B.C. Liberal. He was questioning whether this change was even constitutional. I don't know if the court has weighed in on this, but maybe it should.

I just got started, so if you have any questions, my phone number is on the page. Feel free to call me.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Harquail, go ahead.

Mr. Maurice Harquail (As an Individual): *Monsieur le président*, honourable members, first of all, congratulations on your being elected and having the opportunity to visit the picture province of New Brunswick, with all the beautiful colours.

Parler, to talk, *parle*, parliament, to express yourself in a democracy is so important.

I ran in four federal elections and I had the honour and privilege of serving with Pierre Trudeau, whose son is now our Prime Minister.

I wanted to just come and say that I've been active for 20 years in our federally incorporated former parliamentarian association. We meet twice a year. We have an executive director. We speak at high schools and universities. We do speak about how there's 900 potential members and we have about 500 who are active. You may want to use that organization to get the message out on all the points that were made here today.

As to Ms. May about Elections Canada, I was asked two years ago to speak at the Wu Conference Centre on elections just before the election. We had a panel with the director for Elections New Brunswick, youth, women, and all that. Halfway through my address, I asked the students if they had ever heard of the Honourable Milton Gregg, who was a war hero, recipient of the Victoria Cross. He was minster of veterans affairs. He was a colleague in the House of Commons, who brought in legislation for veterans. He did all these great things. Not a hand went up, nobody in that classroom put their hand up, and I said, “By the way, my main point is that he was president of the University of New Brunswick.”

It just gives you an example of the importance of history. We talked about communication. You can utilize the former parliamentarians association. I've always wondered over the years how it is that it hasn't really been in the curriculum that we talk to young people in kindergarten and grade 1. I mean we're paying the bucks. We're spending the money. Why over the years have we not brought it into the curriculum to teach our history and to teach the matter of how important it is to participate?

I just want to say I support the Australian idea of mandatory voting. When I wasn't in Parliament, I was in liability dispute resolution. When you deal with liability, you're talking about negligence. For people not to participate is a form of negligence. We have to find a way to focus this, to bring it out that there will be a penalty. We have a society of rules. You have to do certain things to get your driver's licence. You're not allowed to drink and drive. There are all these things that are incorporated in legislation. Surely we can find a way to encourage people and parents to get out of this rut and away from the culture of the disconnect and get back into participating in this important process in society, in the best country in the world.

Thank you.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you also for your service to the country at an exciting time in political history, I must say.

Mr. Maurice Harquail: Yes. Four elections and, yes, great guys like Don Jamieson and Allan MacEachen, any one of them were as capable as the prime minister. There was a dozen of them. If the prime minister was out of town, any one of them could have handled that job.

The Chair: Yes, and thank you for your suggestion of getting the former parliamentarians involved. That's an excellent idea, and it's been noted for certain.

Go ahead, Mr. Patrick Lynch.

Mr. Patrick Lynch (As an Individual): I want to thank the committee for offering me the chance to present today.

I just want to say this. Most arguments in favour of proportional representation do not hold up when tested against the rules of logic. Take, for example, the idea that proportional representation leads to more compromise, and that such compromise is beneficial. That's nothing more than a paper fantasy, something that doesn't exist in the real world. I ask you, are watered-down decisions derived to mollify competing political factions somehow better than insightful, appropriate, and decisive decisions? Does appeasement for the purpose of maintaining a fragile hold on power somehow strengthen the nation or does it imperil the nation? You might want to look at Italy and some other countries like that.

It's naive to assume that multiple party representation in elected assemblies will lead to an elevated spirit of working together. Never forget that political parties, by their very nature, are all about expanding their influence and gaining advantage by electing more members. To that end, stirring up problems rather than being co-operative is the means to the end.

Another major problem with proportional voting is that it permits extremist parties to gain a foothold in the nation's affairs. Why go through all the tough work of building a national party, building up constituency organizations, etc., when you can latch on to some heated or controversial issue, run a slate of candidates, get some votes, and then at the end be awarded seats in the assembly? Is that the way we really want to choose who governs us?

Over the course of 150 years of our history, our electoral system has been a model of excellence. Compared to the often chaotic and unstable governments of other nations, we have been well served by both majority and minority governments. People are suspicious, and rightfully so, as to why the government wants to change our voting system. On the one hand, they talk about improving democracy, yet in the same breath they deny us the opportunity to have our voices heard through a referendum.

Changing a 150-year tradition of voting is not something that should be done by a committee or passed by the majority government of the day. Our traditional voting system is an innate and fundamental right. If it is ever changed, it should be only by referendum. The people must have their voice.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Leblanc.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roch Leblanc (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. My name is Roch Leblanc, and I live in the Beauséjour riding. I'm a father of two and a national representative at Unifor Canada.

For the past two years, I have been on Unifor's membership mobilization and political action team. My has included providing education, supporting social and community causes, coordinating political campaigns, strengthening solidarity among members, and encouraging them to become active at every level.

We see Unifor as much more than a union. We are a social leader, whose political involvement incorporates all of the elements I mentioned.

Leading up to the 2015 federal election, I knocked on a lot of doors with candidates from all over the Atlantic region. A comment I often heard from people was that they weren't going to vote because their vote didn't mean anything or wouldn't make a difference.

That illustrates this idea that people have: if they don't vote for the winning candidate in their riding, it effectively silences their voice in Parliament and the views they want their representative to express. And, considering the election results in Atlantic Canada, all of those people were right.

Of the 32 seats in Atlantic Canada, 32 went to Liberal candidates. That was the outcome under a first-past-the-post system.

Democracy in Canada is in need of a proportional voting system. Had such a system been in place at the time of the 2015 election, the very same votes would have resulted in a different allocation of Atlantic Canada's 32 seats. The Liberals, with 58.7% of votes, would have received 19 seats. The Conservatives, with 19% of votes, would have received six seats. The NDP, with 18% of votes, would have also received six seats. The Green Party, on its end, would have received one seat.

Proportional voting has numerous iterations. I am hopeful that the solution the committee proposes will be based on one of them.

I came all this way today because I believe the issue of electoral reform currently before Parliament is the most critical issue facing Canadian democracy at this time. I can tell you that our members are ready for this change, and we hope you will see it through.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leblanc.

[*English*]

We'll hear now from Ms. Connell.

Ms. Margaret Connell (As an Individual): Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity to be here to speak. We don't get this opportunity very often. It's very much appreciated, and all your hard work is as well, of course.

I'm a teacher by trade and by nature. The fundamental job that I've had for most of my life is taking things that are very complex and complicated, with all the chaff around them, and then distilling it down, getting rid of the chaff, and getting at a core idea.

I have three points to mention today. They're brief.

The first one is on the topic of whether or not we need proportional representation. When I take away the chaff of all that there is to say and learn about that topic, I think to myself, “What is any election anyway?” To my mind, any election is simply a manifestation of a core question: what do the people want? That is what an election is. It's a question. Majority governments that are in place with less than 40% of the people's vote don't answer that question. It's that simple. If an election is the question of “what do the people want?”, then we must see that reflected in the results—so “yes” to proportional representation.

I should have said earlier that I'm speaking on behalf of the Fredericton chapter of the Council of Canadians. So far, from what we can understand, I think we're in favour of a mixed member scheme for proportional representation. That could change, depending on what we find out next.

The second point is on the subject of a referendum. I think there's a massive gap between the ideology of a referendum and the reality of it. The ideology is that you should let the people decide. That is, after all, the democratic way, and that sounds right to my ears. The reality is that people have to make that decision based on some kind of knowledge, and by and large, they don't have it.

We, as the Council of—am I done already?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Margaret Connell: My gosh.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: It's okay. You're down to five seconds—

Ms. Margaret Connell: Can I just finish my sentence?

The Chair: Of course you can. This isn't a dictatorship at this committee, you know.

Ms. Margaret Connell: Thank you. My goodness, I can't imagine what I was like in a classroom.

The idea that we would have a referendum, and people who don't know what they're voting for would get up there and make a decision, makes no sense.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll hear from Ms. Sansom.

● (1700)

Ms. Brenda Sansom (As an Individual): I didn't have anything to say until I met Elizabeth May and she told me I had to speak, so now I have something to say.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Brenda Sansom: Actually, when I was six I met John Diefenbaker, and today I met Elizabeth, and last year I did the twist with Chubby Checker, so I'm having a really good life

I have had the privilege of serving on municipal council for the City of Fredericton and being a deputy mayor for nine years. For six of those, I was the only female on council, so when I hear talk about how we can have better representation by women, I'm definitely in favour of it.

However, I'm also a teacher, and I firmly believe there is absolutely no way Elections Canada or this government or any school system has the ability to sufficiently inform a public about something as complicated as the proportional vote so that they could make an informed decision.

As a consequence, after listening to everyone today, I believe that we elect leaders to make decisions, the easy ones and the hard ones. If I were to be asked whether I think we should have a referendum, I, Monsieur Alain, would say, zero. I really believe that we need to be educated about it, but the difficult decision needs to be made by the government and I don't think there's a process in place that could sufficiently inform our public. I think you only have to look at Brexit, and look at the referendum we just had in Colombia.

I'll talk to Pat Lynch afterwards, by the way.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Kirby.

Mr. J.P. Kirby (As an Individual): Thank you and good afternoon.

My name is J.P. Kirby, and I run election-atlas.ca. I support electoral reform as I believe that first past the post is not compatible with the multi-party reality of this country. With that in mind, I believe that any reform of the system should revolve around four basic concepts: that the results should be proportional; regional representation should be ensured; there should not be separate classes or tiers of MPs; and the ballot and process should remain as simple as possible.

I have submitted a proposal that I believe meets all four of these criteria: an open-list, multi-vote, PR system. Most of the country outside northern or remote areas will be divided into multi-member districts. Each party could nominate up to a full slate of candidates and each voter would have as many votes on the ballot as members could be elected. The party results would be totalled up and seats distributed based on a standard PR formula with the individual vote totals for each candidate determining which members are elected.

This puts control completely in the hands of the voters. For instance, voters who like a local candidate, but not his or her party, can split their ballot as many ways as they wish. There will not be any need for a pre-ranked list, like in multi-member systems. The simplicity of marking an X on the ballot will remain in place, unlike in STV.

My calculations have determined that, depending on the formula used, the seat total for each of the major parties in the last federal election could have fallen within three percentage points of their popular vote total. Unfortunately, I don't have enough time to discuss it further here, but I have submitted a brief that explains this proposal in more detail, which you can read on the committee website.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Indeed, it will be translated and posted. It's already there? Great.

We'll hear from Stephanie Coburn.

Ms. Stephanie Coburn (As an Individual): First of all, thank you for coming to the best-kept secret in the country. I think we have the most beautiful province in the country, and hardly anybody knows about it. Now that you've seen it in its glory, you can all come back sometime.

The first thing I want to say is that I am a citizen. I am not a stakeholder, nor am I a client of the government. I'm a citizen and I get to vote and I would like my vote to count. To me, counting would mean that if a party gets 39% of the vote, they get 39% of the seats. If they only get 39% of the seats, they wouldn't be a majority government.

I don't have any empirical evidence to prove that a coalition government would be more effective and produce better legislation. I just have a feeling, being a person who seeks co-operation instead of confrontation and really doesn't like the political partisanship that gets in the way of intelligent discussion and good decision-making, that the better the intention of the people around the table is toward coming to common decisions and approaching something intelligently rather than with partisanship, then the better the decision-making we'd have at the end of it all.

That's what we're looking for. We're looking for really intelligent people to be thoughtfully thinking about the entire country. You're the government of the entire country. You have regional interests, but you're supposed to be looking at the health of the entire polis here in Canada. Partisanship really gets in the way of that, I find.

I have been a candidate four times, twice provincially and twice federally. The most dispiriting thing that happens is when I go to a door and somebody says, “Why would I vote? My vote doesn't count.”

Thank you very much.

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Okay, Mr. Willman, go ahead.

Mr. Mat Willman (As an Individual): I'll make this very short.

It's often said that the Liberal government got 40% of the vote. That's not true; they got 27%. Why? It's because they got 27% of 68% of the votes. Not 100% of Canadians voted; 68% did. That's not a majority. That's not even close to 40%.

If we don't institute compulsory voting alongside proportional representation, we will still end up with a minority of the electorate working the machinery of government. If we implement compulsory voting, then we will have made sure that the government has heard from 100% of the voters, because that is what an election is, a public opinion poll.

We cannot have a complete view of how Canadians really feel if we leave out over one-third of voters. If, under compulsory voting, 40% of voters voted Liberal, then 40% of Canadians who voted wanted Liberal ideas. Combined with proportional representation, it would equal 40% of the seats and 40% of the power.

However, the ballot must also have the ability for voters to mark “none of the above” so even apathetic voters can still have a voice. If we had 100 people in a room and 27 claimed they could make all the decisions and claimed it was democratic, there would be a riot. What, then, makes us think that 27% of voters giving 100% of the power to a party is democratic either? It's not, and it's dangerous.

In regard to whether there should be a referendum, to quote Margaret Thatcher, “No. No. No.” It's clear and simple.

Second, to quickly promote my preference for an electoral system, it would be mixed member proportional, because we would keep our regional—

Can I finish my sentence?

The Chair: Of course, yes.

Mr. Mat Willman: We would keep our regional member of Parliament, but it would not affect the proportionality of the votes, so it is the best of both worlds.

The Chair: Is MMP what you were...?

Mr. Mat Willman: Yes, MMP.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there a George Maicher? No?

Okay. Renée Davis is next.

Ms. Renée Davis (As an Individual): First of all, thank you all for being here, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I'd like to echo what a lot of people said earlier. I hope this is our last.... Well, we've seen our last first-past-the-post election. I think it led to, as many people have said, feelings of lost votes, disengagement, and a lot of strategic voting, none of which, I think, are very healthy for our country.

I'm not fully sure what I would recommend as the best system of proportional representation. I think the committee will make a wise decision. I'm trying to become as informed as I can.

I'm also very open to the idea of making voting mandatory. I think there is a lot of merit in that. I think it will increase engagement. I also think it would be very worthwhile to reduce the voting age. That would add to more engagement, which is really essential. I would like to see our government become more representative and more co-operative.

I thank you again.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Robbins.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Wendy Robbins (As an Individual): Thank you all for being here.

[*English*]

I teach Canadian literature. I'm one of the founders of gender and women's studies here at UNB Fredericton. I'm very pleased to have Matt as my MP and Joanna Everitt as my colleague. I thought I would just say a few words.

If you want to see more of Joanna, she's actually one of three stars in a film that was locally made. You'll remember the name if you think of “democracy” but put in an “m” instead of the “d”. The film is called *Menocracy*.

You can see where I'm going. I told you I teach gender and women's studies.

Menocracy.ca will get you to her website. Gretchen Kelbaugh is formerly from Fredericton and is now from Quispamsis. The film was made before the last election, so it's as if Stephen Harper is our prime minister and as if we've only had 19 majority governments, of which he says only four were true majorities. From what our colleagues said, that's in doubt now, too, in my mind.

I'm undecided as to which system to choose. I certainly have a preference, not for the how but definitely for the who. It's absolutely imperative, because it's 2016 and counting, that we have more representation of all of the under-represented groups. The largest group is women. I think it's amazing; I didn't expect to see, in my lifetime, a black American president or a gender-balanced Canadian federal cabinet. My students are in awe of all of the changes that are happening. We're of course watching the debate on Sunday night too, hoping for an American woman president.

There is a lot of research. I have the dubious distinction of being the last director of research at the former Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. There's oodles of research going back to the 1990s, and much more that's current, including from the *Harvard Business Review*. Anywhere you look, one of the *Harvard Business Review* short summaries says, “How do you make a team smarter? Add more women.” You probably know that one. It's true in so many ways. It's a question of diversity, different perspectives. People see different things, pick up on different things, find the loopholes in different things.

I mean, you are an absolute model of how it works, with all the different perspectives here. I just hope we can bring that kind of attitude to our Parliament and have people feel that they're all part of an all-star team when they get there and that they're not just representing a particular region or party.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Wright.

Mr. Hamish Wright (As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Hamish. I've worked with Student Vote for four years. I've represented New Brunswick at national debating championships three times, where I've argued about proportional representation. I'm originally Australian and I'm 18 years old, so as a young Australian person, I consider myself an eminently qualified witness, for the amount of time it's come up.

My first point is about a referendum. If we are going to change the fundamental way we elect members of Parliament, then the citizens of this country must decide how that takes place.

Before I go into my point, I'm a paid employee of the New Brunswick NDP, but I speak for myself, as a private citizen, as you might well tell.

I believe that we must have a referendum. Why is that? I've heard some elitist arguments here today about how people are uninformed and can't make that decision. Let me tell you something. You are all here because citizens of this country elected you, and if you concede to the argument that Canadian citizens are uninformed about the way they vote, then you have no mandate. I don't think that's true. I think you all have a mandate. I think Matt DeCourcey got a clear mandate from the people of Fredericton. I think you have a mandate to decide things.

What I say is that a referendum is not doomed to fail. A referendum has been confirmed twice in New Zealand, in 1994 and 2011. It passed in B.C. Unfortunately, due to an arbitrary threshold, it didn't work. So if we're going to change the way we vote, it must be approved, in principle, by the citizens of this country.

To quote Frank Underwood, I don't like the way the table is set, so let's flip over the table. What do I mean by this? We're concentrating on a House that isn't broken. First past the post elects people. It shows a clear mandate switch between the Conservatives and the Liberals, for example, in the last election. It allows for effective decision-making.

What is broken in democracy in Canada? It's one word: Senate.

The Senate is broken. We do not elect senators. The Senate can veto any democratically elected law by the House of Commons. I have a consensus solution for you. We can have proportional representation. We can have effective decision-making. Why not make the Senate the proportional body that represents the provinces and represents the points of view of the citizens of this country?

There's a reason why the Liberals can afford to get rid of Atlantic Canada's Supreme Court seat. There's a reason why they can afford to ignore Atlantic Canada. That's because the provinces are inadequately represented in our federal government, and that's why we must have an elected Senate.

Thank you.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sheppard, go ahead.

Ms. Margo Sheppard (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and panellists.

My name is Margo Sheppard. In 2015, I had a life-sized Stephen Harper dummy in my living room, for a month. Right there.

Why? It was as part of a Leadnow.ca campaign to defeat the Harper Conservatives. The dummy came with me to various public events. It was loaned to me by PSAC, the union, which has a Moncton office.

I mention this because it is an example of the extremes to which a normally well-adjusted and sane person will go to get rid of the first-past-the-post system. Not only was the dummy a symbol of an oppressive government, it was also a symbol of a broken electoral system—and it really creeped out my kids and pets.

In seriousness, I want the system to change, to become more representative of the will of the people and to become fairer. In my book, that's mixed member proportional representation.

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, promised no more first past the post. Please make good on this promise. No more dummies.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Howe.

Mr. Joel Howe (As an Individual): Thank you.

I just want to urge all of you to reject proportional representation. PR has many shortcomings, but with my limited time to speak, I want to focus on how it amplifies fringe political viewpoints and discourages moderation.

Under PR there is no need to try to broaden your party's message in order to appeal to enough voters to form a majority government, because everyone knows that it's just going to be a coalition government anyway. The problem is that then you have duly elected MPs receiving taxpayer dollars to promote extreme fringe viewpoints that might only be shared by 5% or 6% of the population.

Televised debates would feature moderate politicians, like yourselves, sharing the stage with, for example, anti-immigrant or anti-French party leaders, granting their messages legitimacy and some measure of equivalency. We're already seeing far-right parties polling in first place in many European countries that have adopted PR. These are parties that not long ago had only a handful of seats, but all it took was an economic downturn and a refugee crisis and now these fringe parties could be leading coalition governments.

PR proponents will argue that we need to trust the voters to trust democracy, but that's a false dichotomy. If it were true, we wouldn't lock the Charter of Rights and Freedoms up behind a constitutional amending formula. If we really trusted democracy, then minority rights in this country would be subject to whims of 50% plus one, but because we understand that even democracy is not perfect, we organize our Constitution in such a way that we ensure that our better nature prevails against the occasional fleeting passions of the public. We should absolutely do the same thing with something as important as our electoral system.

With ranked ballot, for example, you allow for many parties, but they must each jockey to be voters' second or third choice. This means they cannot simply pander to their existing limited base if they want to get elected. This is the incentive toward moderation that a 5% or 10% threshold under PR can't hope to provide.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

We'll go now to Mr. Andrew Maclean.

Mr. Andrew Maclean (As an Individual): Hi, there.

I feel I need to speak to this committee in favour of proportional representation, because I feel that our current system is doing a poor job of giving a voice to voters.

I have voted in every single provincial and federal election since I've been of age to cast a ballot, and not once have I voted for a candidate who won. This could mean that I'm just a bad luck charm, but it also means that the values that I voted for are not being represented, and I'm in good company. Some 17 million Canadians cast their ballots in the last federal election, but nine million, like me, voted for candidates who did not win. That means that more votes didn't count, than counted.

At election time you meet a lot of people, especially young people, who will tell you that they aren't voting. They say, “What's the point? My vote probably won't count anyway.” Well, statistically speaking, they're not wrong. If you check the news around the world, we see the effects of members of the voting public who are lashing out because they feel they're not being listened to. People have given up on a system that they feel has excluded them, on institutions they see as unresponsive, and on politicians they think care little about their voice.

It would be smug to think that we in Canada are uniquely immune to this rage. Our voting system is feeding this cynicism, this disengagement, and this frustration that leads to this rage, and makes no attempt whatsoever to create fair results. It gives us distorted majorities in which a party regularly takes control of whole provinces, and indeed the country, against the will of the majority of voters.

In most of the world, by definition, a government taking control of a country against the will of the majority is an illegal and fraudulent *coup d'état*. Here in Canada, it's sanctioned and publicly funded.

The 12 of you on this committee are uniquely poised to make changes that can truly allow all Canadians to feel they have a stake in our collective future, to allow all Canadians to know that they and their values are represented. I call on you to be decisive, to act boldly, and to implement changes to ensure that the voice of every Canadian is heard. You can choose a system that will serve and represent Canadians fairly and equally while better engaging them in the political process, and that system is mixed member proportional.

I call on you to support proportional representation, an electoral system that's fair, representative, and engaging, because Canadian democracy and those who live under it deserve nothing less.

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, Mr. Richardson, please.

Mr. Jonathan Richardson (As an Individual): Hi, everyone. Thank you for letting me speak today.

I am before you today to speak in favour of proportional representation, simply because it is proportional and because I like evidence-based decision-making.

In the last election, the party that is in power now got 39% of the vote and ended up with 55% of the seats. These kinds of distortions feed cynicism and disengagement, and create frustrated voters.

Outside of politics, I manage a women's addiction and rehabilitation centre. Before I came here today, I went up to the women and asked, “Who here votes?” Only one woman out of the entire bunch voted, and the reason the remainder of them don't vote is that they don't believe their vote counts.

Our system is alienating people. The voter turnout is falling and it has been for decades. In 2008, it hit an all-time low at 58% of voters. In 2015, we reached 68%, and we thought that was a big cause for celebration. Guess what? With five more points, we would still not even reach the threshold of the eighties.

Proportional-representation-based systems help generate better voter turnout across the world. Of course reforming the voting system will not fix everything. No single reform is going to fix all our democratic ills, but implementing proportional representation will provide the tools for a fair, representative, and engaging electoral system that citizens can use to improve our country and all our lives.

I call on you to seize this moment and give citizens the tools of a voting system based on mixed member proportional representation.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for all your well-reasoned comments.

[*English*]

Thank you for all those thoughtful comments, some of them imbued with a bit of levity, which I think is never a bad thing.

Mr. John Gagnon: On a point of privilege, you made reference to mixed proportional representation when I was talking about—

The Chair: Was I wrong?

Mr. John Gagnon: Yes. My presentation was not on mixed; it was on proportional representation. What I was referring to was the open list—

The Chair: Oh, the open list.

Mr. John Gagnon: —which is consistent with proportional representation. I want to make sure that you're clear on that, and to clarify that.

The Chair: Okay, but you didn't want to have some kind of attachment to local ridings.

Mr. John Gagnon: No. There's nothing wrong with mixed proportional representation, but our preference is true proportional representation.

The Chair: True proportional representation. Okay.

Mr. John Gagnon: I don't have a problem with the other one either.

The Chair: Thanks for clarifying that. I appreciate it.

Thank you for all your thoughtful comments and for sharing your experiences of the electoral system and our democracy.

We're going to break now. We're running a bit late, which is fine, but we'll break until about 6:30 and we'll resume then.

Thank you again.

● (1720)

(Pause)

● (1830)

The Chair: This opens the third segment of our day of hearings in Fredericton.

[*Translation*]

This is our last panel of witnesses for the day. Joining us now, as individuals, are James Wilson; Paul Howe, a professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of New Brunswick; and John Filliter. Also with us this evening is the president of the Fédération des jeunes francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick, Sue Duguay.

Thank you all for making yourselves available to meet with us and to share your views on the issue of electoral reform.

I'm not sure whether you were here this afternoon, but I will again point out that each witness has five minutes. Following the presentations, we'll have a round of questions, during which, members will each have five minutes to engage with you.

[*English*]

For those of you who are in the audience, interpretation is available.

Without further ado, we will start with Mr. James Wilson, please, for five minutes.

Mr. James Wilson (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and a thank you to the committee, as well, for allowing me to speak to you this evening.

I would like to spend my allotted time outlining the features of the single member proportional vote system specifically, and to discuss more generally the merits of a Parliament using weighted votes.

What is single-member proportional vote? Simply put, it is a method for making first past the post a proportional system, with minimal changes.

This idea is predicated on the idea that using first past the post is essentially sound and that the minor issues that have developed can be fixed without changing to a new system.

Single-member proportional vote would retain all of the elements of first past the post. Voters would still have a single vote to cast at election time. Each riding would still send a single MP to Parliament. The party with the greatest number of seats would still be expected to form the government.

It is only when it comes time to vote on legislation that MPs would notice a difference. That is because, rather than each MP having a single equal vote to cast, each MP would have a vote that is stronger or weaker, based on how much of the popular vote that party received.

For instance, a party that received more seats than the popular vote indicated they deserve would have MPs with weaker individual votes. Likewise, a party that received fewer seats than the popular vote indicated they deserve would have MPs with stronger individual votes to compensate, the end result being that the total votes for each party would closely mirror its popular vote total. In this way, Parliament would add an aspect of proportionality when it comes to the passing of legislation.

This is, admittedly, a very modest reform, but from this small change we gain a host of benefits. I would like to point out three of them.

First, since this reform does not change how elections are carried out, Elections Canada likely will not need two years to prepare, as it has stated it would if the electoral system were changed. This would allow time for a referendum, if that is this committee's desire. If the committee wanted to recommend that Parliament start using weighted votes immediately on a trial basis, it could do so as the popular vote for the 2015 election is a known factor.

Second, while the electoral system is kept simple and easy to use, almost all votes cast during an election will have an effect on the results. If you vote for a candidate you want, or conversely, against a candidate you don't, your vote will end up affecting how much legislative power the parties have in Parliament, regardless of whether your specific candidate wins. This will, in turn, go a long way toward reducing strategic voting.

Third, single member proportional vote retains first past the post's tendency to produce majority governments, which allows stable administration. But these majority governments no longer have 100% of the power to pass legislation in Parliament. This is important, as the event that most triggers complaints over our electoral system is a governing party with a false majority, which is most of them, being able to unilaterally pass controversial legislation.

Professor Jon Breslaw has already spoken to this committee on a similar reform idea. Both ideas aim to use weighted vote to bring the power possessed by parties in Parliament more in line with how much popular support those parties actually have. They differ primarily in the extent to which weighted votes would be used.

My proposal limits the use of weighed votes to legislation while exempting the Speech from the Throne and the budget votes in order to allow stable majority governments to form. Professor Breslaw's idea uses weighted votes for all votes.

After Professor Breslaw's presentation, we compared notes, and I would like to address some of the concerns raised about Professor Breslaw's idea that are also applicable to my system.

A question Professor Breslaw received was, if weighted voting is such a good system, why has no Parliament adopted it?

I imagine such a question has been raised in opposition to every electoral system at one point or another, so I guess my system is in good company. Since first past the post is the only system that we have used at the federal level, I could raise the same point about all the other systems this committee has been tasked with examining.

● (1835)

It is also not true that there are no deliberative bodies that have used weighted voting. The Council of the European Union uses a combination of unanimous decision-making and weighted voting based on population. It should also be noted that stockholders in companies have votes weighted by the number of stocks they own.

I believe the reason we have not seen more weighted voting systems stems from certain historical circumstances. Several pre-1918 countries in Europe, notably Sweden and the Kingdom of Prussia, used systems that weighted votes cast in an election based on wealth. To such countries, the idea of having weighted votes in Parliament would not have seemed a solution to democratic deficiencies even if they were based on popular vote totals. The idea was tainted within their political cultures, and indeed, both countries opted to adopt proportional systems.

There was also a concern raised that retaining first past the post in any form does not fit within this committee's mandate. A couple of weeks ago, I had the chance to talk to the Minister of Democratic Institutions at the consultation meeting in Moncton. I asked her whether, if first past the post were made proportional, it would be an acceptable alternative. She replied that such a system would be worth considering.

In conclusion, I feel that a single-member proportional vote, or some other form of weighted voting for Parliament has the potential to improve Canadian democracy with the least number of changes. This in turn would be consistent with Canada's long-held preference for evolution over revolution.

This concludes my prepared remarks. Let me thank the committee again for allowing me to present my idea.

● (1840)

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

We'll go to Mr. Howe now.

Prof. Paul Howe (Professor, Department of Political Science, University of New Brunswick, As an Individual): Thank you for the invitation to speak this evening.

I'd like to start by briefly addressing issues pertaining to the electoral system itself. Like many others, I am critical of the current first-past-the-post system, for several basic reasons. These include concerns about disproportionality between votes and seats, concerns about the way the system distorts and exaggerates regional differences in the country, and its relatively poor record in providing fair representation for all groups in society, including women and minority groups. Moving to a system based on proportional representation would effectively address these issues. In my view, the best alternative for Canada, from among the various PR systems in use around the world, is the mixed member proportional system.

In thinking about the merits of different electoral systems, I would also add some skepticism about a supposed virtue of our current FPTP system, the notion that it is easily understood and used by voters compared to other systems. This idea is undermined by recent developments that have seen citizens and citizen groups engaging in various schemes to try to make their votes more effective under the first-past-the-post system. These include the so-called “vote-swapping” schemes, as well as the extensive polling carried out during the 2015 federal election campaign by the advocacy group Leadnow, which was designed to help voters cast a strategic ballot in a number of close ridings.

First past the post is a simple system only in the superficial sense that ticking off a single name on the ballot is a straightforward procedure. For citizens trying to figure out how to use the ballot to make their vote carry some weight, voting under first past the post can actually be an onerous and complex procedure.

I'd also like to offer my views on the question of how electoral reform should come about. Some believe we must hold a national referendum on the issue. While I agree that this is what we would do in the ideal world, in the real world there is reason to be wary of handing the decision over to a referendum vote. For a variety of reasons, we have arrived at a stage where many Canadians pay little attention to political issues, and it would be difficult to draw them into a meaningful public debate on the many issues surrounding electoral reform.

One sign of this problem is the low levels of knowledge about politics found in surveys of the general Canadian population. In a poll carried out for Elections Canada just after the 2015 federal election, for example, 30% of respondents could not name the premier of their own province. For respondents under age 35, the number was 44%. Believe it or not, this survey, like most surveys, actually overrepresents the more engaged sections of the population.

I would also point out that the results from this 2015 poll reflected significant deterioration over time. In a similar nationwide survey in 1984, only 10% of respondents were unable to name the premier of their province, and for those under age 35, it was just 15%. There has been a steady erosion that we have seen over time.

This is just one small piece of evidence. There is a fair bit of research to back up the idea that there has been an erosion over time in attention to political affairs on the part of the average Canadian. Given this reality, it would be very challenging to reach the electorate at large on the issue of electoral reform, even with an intensive and extended information campaign designed to educate Canadians.

If a referendum were to be held, what would happen? If it's a stand-alone referendum, voter turnout would be low. In the stand-alone P.E.I. referendum in 2005, the turnout was 33%. In the U.K. referendum on a new electoral system in May 2011, which actually coincided with local elections and regional assembly elections, the turnout was 42%. I believe that in a stand-alone Canadian referendum, we would see a turnout below 50%, probably well below 50%, and that's a participation rate that could well raise questions about the democratic legitimacy of the whole exercise.

If, instead, a referendum were held in conjunction with a federal election, more would participate, of course, but many of those voting would be individuals without a well-formed opinion on electoral reform or much knowledge about alternative electoral systems, in other words, the kind of people who would likely stay home in a stand-alone referendum. This, too, is a less than ideal scenario for lending democratic legitimacy to the outcome.

For all these reasons, I believe that a referendum to move forward on this file is neither necessary nor advisable. Instead of a referendum, it would be legitimate to change the electoral system based on debate and deliberation led by political representatives from across the political spectrum, with substantial input both from experts and interested citizens in different venues.

Furthermore, I would suggest that such a process has been unfolding in Canada for quite some time now, not just since the special committee began its work in early 2016, but for roughly the past 15 years. Much of that debate has been happening at the provincial level, in the form of appointed commissions, citizens' assemblies, legislative deliberations, public hearings, etc. This should not be seen as a separate process from what is now taking place at the federal level.

● (1845)

The arguments for and against electoral reform are largely one and the same at the two levels, as are the models under consideration, and the consistent result, in my reading of this extensive 15-year public deliberation, has been significant support for various forms of proportional representation.

Finally, what I'd like to comment on briefly are two other matters before the committee: mandatory voting and Internet voting. Each of these ideas has some appeal as a way to increase voter turnout, but they also raise some important concerns, which I believe have probably been outlined in prior testimony.

My main point on this topic would simply be this: there are many other ideas about ways to encourage voter participation that are not being considered by the committee, ones that also might be quite effective—would be quite effective, I believe—and could avoid some of the problems of mandatory voting and Internet voting. While I would certainly support initiatives to encourage voter participation, this is a subject that deserves more extensive investigation to identify the most viable and effective reform proposals.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Howe.

We'll go to Mr. John Filliter.

Mr. John Filliter (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members.

I understand that I should slow down for the sake of the translators. I had it timed to five minutes, but—

The Chair: I wouldn't let the time limit.... We can all be a little bit flexible to spare the interpreters having to run after your words too quickly.

Mr. John Filliter: Okay.

When I began investigating this issue, I looked at the original electoral arrangement set forth in the Constitution Act, 1867. Section 40 deals with division of the original member provinces into electoral districts. You would hardly recognize most of them now, needless to say. Section 41 keeps the existing provincial election laws in place, including qualifications and disqualifications of voters and candidates, and proceedings at elections. The right to vote has now been extended well beyond the original 21-year-old male British subject with some property.

Both of those sections begin with “Until the Parliament of Canada otherwise provides”, so the Fathers of Confederation obviously contemplated that these initial provisions would evolve as decided by Parliament.

Parliament, as you know, consists of the Queen, the Senate, and the House of Commons, of which only one is elected.

Fast-forward to part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, better known as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The first democratic right listed in the charter is that of every Canadian citizen "to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons". Subsection 15(1) of the charter provides that "[e]very individual...has the right to the...equal benefit of the law without discrimination". This implies that the votes of all Canadians should carry equal weight, subject to section 51A, the amendment to the 1867 act that guarantees all provinces at least as many MPs as senators.

I don't believe in change for the sake of change, so I did some research on how the existing system, first past the post, has worked. For the first 53 years after Confederation, we had essentially two-party elections, and the system worked fairly well, except in 1896, when Wilfrid Laurier defeated Charles Tupper despite earning 1.2% less of the vote than Tupper. That amounted to 11,134 fewer votes. That was the first of our system's "stolen" elections that passed power to the second-place party.

Since 1921, Canada has had multi-party elections featuring at least three substantial parties. During this 95-year period, we elected 18 majority governments and 11 minorities. Of the 18 majorities, only four were true majorities. Fourteen times first past the post has produced false majorities, where a party that won fewer than half the votes was awarded a majority of the seats. That's one-third of all of our 42 general elections held to date. And there have been four more system-stolen elections since 1921.

As well, first past the post tends to distort regional results. The most glaring example was the 1993 election, when the Bloc Québécois became the official opposition, winning 54 seats with 13.5% of the popular vote. Reform was next with 52 seats but 18.72% of the vote, and the Progressive Conservatives won only two seats but garnered 15.99% of the vote. Go figure.

In my view, an electoral system should translate the votes cast across the country into seats that reflect the share of votes that each party received. A system that repeatedly puts second-place parties into power, regularly converts a minority of votes into a majority of seats, and seriously distorts regional results is fatally flawed and should be replaced.

First past the post is one of the majoritarian, winner-take-all systems with single member ridings, which are designed to produce or have historically produced a majority.

Is there another type of system, which would respect and reflect our votes? Yes. Proportional representation systems allocate seats to the parties based on their shares of the popular vote. There are also mixed systems, which combine features of the other two.

● (1850)

I strongly urge this honourable committee to recommend some form of proportional representation to the House so we voters can enjoy real democracy in the only elected component of Parliament.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Filliter.

Madame Duguay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sue Duguay (President, Fédération des jeunes francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, everyone. I would like to thank you for inviting us and for making it possible for the voice of New Brunswick's francophone youth to be heard on an issue that is so important for our country's future democracy.

My name is Sue Duguay and I am the president of the Fédération des jeunes francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick, the FJFNB.

The FJFNB is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to represent the interests of Acadian and French-speaking youth in the province of New Brunswick. It was founded in 1971, so we are celebrating our 45th anniversary this year. The Fédération operates according to a model designed by young people for young people. We look to a future in which Acadian and French-speaking youth can play a proud role in society in our own language and culture.

This year, the FJFNB has about 8,700 members. In fact, they are all students from the 22 francophone high schools in the province of New Brunswick.

As a socially committed young person and, since last May, the president of the FJFNB, I want to speak to you about a matter dear to our members, a voting age of 16.

At the outset, I want to tell you that I am fully aware that the matter of the voting age is not directly part of the committee's mandate. However, as you will be able to see in our presentation, bringing the voting age down to 16 is an effective way of enhancing the five great principles in your committee's mandate: effectiveness and legitimacy; engagement; accessibility and inclusiveness; integrity; and local representation. I therefore hope that our presentation will be instrumental in convincing your committee to review the voting age.

The FJFNB's 2014 annual general meeting gave us the mandate of working to lower the voting age to 16. The proposal to us from the province's young people was to press for a reduction in the voting age to 16 and for mandatory training on the electoral process in high school.

Our work to that end began in 2014. We have worked tirelessly to bring this proposal before the public. Our research convinces us that lowering the voting age to 16 would be beneficial for the Canadian electoral system.

Voting is a habit. Studies tend to demonstrate that once people vote, they will be inclined to continue to do so all their lives. Because of this, 16-year-olds, still in the school system and mostly living at home, would be in a situation that would encourage them to vote, especially for the first time.

In addition, as you have perhaps noticed, our members' proposal asks not only for a reduction in the voting age, but also for the addition of mandatory civic education courses to the school curriculum. These courses are extremely important in creating generations of voters with a full understanding of the electoral system. It is therefore important that the federal government, with its provincial counterparts, provide adequate civic education in the classroom.

To ensure that young people are properly educated, your committee could take the additional step of returning the mandate for education about the electoral system to the Chief Electoral Officer.

With a course in the schools and some enrichment during the election period, it is not unimaginable that lowering the voting age could help to combat the low turnout rate at elections, which is a reality in every province of Canada.

For those participating in the electoral system for the first time at 18, a large number of obstacles arise. For the most part, they no longer live at home. Often, they are enrolled in post-secondary education programs outside their constituencies. As you know, when you cannot physically get to the constituency of your official residence, you have to take special steps in order to vote. So that is an obstacle for that first-time vote.

In addition, those who study these matters agree that voting is a social act, that is, it is influenced by one's young peers. Here again, if they are no longer at home, no longer potentially in a school where education is more immediate, a new obstacle must be overcome.

Young people are interested, or at least want to be interested, in politics. We see it every day. I remind you that it was our members, the young francophones of this province, who formally asked us to work towards lowering the voting age to 16. They are interested in politics; however, since they cannot participate in the electoral process before they are 18, most of them feel disenchanted with a system that nevertheless affects them directly. Elected officials make decisions that influence and will continue to influence young people all through their lives, yet they have no voice.

● (1855)

A number of countries have already addressed the issue and some have lowered the voting age so that 16- and 17-year-olds can participate in the electoral process as voters. We may think of Austria, Brazil, or a number of other places. This change in mentality and in legislation has resulted in very positive outcomes.

Federally, we know that one bill, Bill C-213, introduced by New Democrat MP Don Davies, is currently on the Order Paper awaiting second reading. We hope that the government will allow this private member's bill to continue along its path.

In addition, let us not forget that, at 16, young people have the right to work, to drive, even to enlist in the army, but not to vote. I therefore feel that the voting age must reflect those other standards.

In closing, I feel that the idea of voting starting at 16 and of promoting mandatory civic education courses in schools would be a useful solution that could also contribute to improving the democratic process in Canada.

Thank you for your time and attention. Of course, I am available to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duguay.

We now move to the questions from committee members.

We will start with you, Mr. DeCourcey. You have five minutes.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you once more, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to everyone here in Fredericton this evening for another round table, and to those who came for the first part of the session. My thanks also to all the witnesses.

Ms. Duguay, we have received some good testimony from your counterparts in other provinces. We will have to consider the idea of lowering the voting age.

[*English*]

Mr. Filliter, thanks so much for your intervention. Thank you both, Professor Howe and Mr. Wilson.

Paul, I'd like to start with you. I want to address the idea of strategic voting for a moment. If my memory serves me correctly, it was Laura Stephenson from Western University who suggested that maybe 3% of the population vote strategically, in the way that we would consider strategic voting under the current system.

Do you have any idea, evidence, or gut feeling on what the numbers are around how prevalent strategic voting is under the single-member plurality system?

Mr. Paul Howe: That's a good question, and I can't point to specific studies that put a precise number on it. I will have to look up Laura Stephenson's study.

One thing I would say is we can talk about short-term effects, where you encounter a particular electoral context and ask who you should vote for. There's also the question of longer-term effects. It seems as if certain parties, the ones we know, are the ones that realistically have a chance of winning. Therefore, allegiances might start, over time, to erode for the smaller parties that seem to never get much representation and never have a chance of making it to the big ring or gaining power.

I don't know Laura's study. When I hear 3%, that does sound low to me. I would think more people are affected by this issue, this problem. As I say, I would probably draw that distinction between short-term and longer-term influences as well.

● (1900)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: In André Blais' testimony to us, he cited the idea of strategic voting the way we understand it now to not necessarily disappear, but to exemplify itself in a different way under a proportional system. That was reiterated by Peter Loewen. I know you would be well attuned to their work.

Can you talk to us about what the strategy could conceivably be for voters when they walk into a ballot booth in a mixed member proportional system?

Mr. Paul Howe: The logic, to my mind, without being too strategic, would be, on the one hand, choosing the person you like best on the left-hand side of the ballot to represent you for your local riding and voting freely with your heart for that person, and on the same side, on the right-hand side of the ballot, choosing the party that you like best, and again, without strong strategic considerations. Unless we're starting to talk, yes, about maybe larger strategic considerations around government formation and so on that people start to think about, and what representation different parties will have....

I haven't seen their testimony. I think I did look briefly at their briefs, but I would say that, for the most part, my sense would be that under MMP, strategic voting would not be as much a front and centre consideration in most voters' minds.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: In her testimony earlier this evening, Professor Everitt brought up the notion of incremental change being the way that things are achieved in Canada.

What's your take on the notion of incrementalism as a way to introduce modernization to the electoral system, to our style of governance, and to our political culture, which are all part of an ecosystem where this conversation is situated?

Mr. Paul Howe: Coming back to the idea of MMP, I would be comfortable with the idea that you might develop a system where you would have more seats on the first-past-the-post side and fewer that would represent your top-up seats. Depending on the size of the regions you create, that will also have an impact on how proportional the results end up being.

If it's done nationwide for the so-called topping up, you can get very proportional results, but if you use smaller regions, then the proportionality will be somewhat less, and effectively, the smaller parties that get only 4% or 5% of the vote may not get any representation within that region.

I am comfortable with the idea that as part of incrementalism we might have these explicit or implicit thresholds where parties would have to get a decent amount of the vote, let's say 8%, 9%, or 10%, before they start to see representation as a way of bringing in significant proportionality, but also leading to a situation where we would likely not see a huge proliferation of new parties. We also do still have a significant chance of potential majority governments at some point in the future. That could occur if a party can get that kind of support.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Could you give me a bit more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Mr. Wilson, in your conversations with people about the idea of weighted voting, has this psychological barrier emerged of the notion that, yes, you elect your local representative, but they go to Parliament and their vote could potentially be worth considerably less than a colleague sitting beside them in the House of Commons?

Mr. James Wilson: Of the dozen or so people I've talked to, I've run into that comment once, and it was more along the lines of MPs being demotivated in doing their jobs by having unequal votes. That is the only thing along your line of thinking that I've run across.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Richards, please.

Mr. Blake Richards: We appreciate all of you being here today.

I have a few questions, and we'll get to what we can, I suppose.

Professor Howe, I'm going to follow up on the exchange you just had with Mr. DeCourcey in regard to mixed member proportional. The choice is to increase the number of ridings or to increase the size of ridings in order to be able to accommodate both aspects of the ballot.

I wonder what your thoughts are, and which of those you feel would be appropriate, and why.

● (1905)

Mr. Paul Howe: I could see a case being made for doing a bit of both. Let's say, for example, that two-thirds of the ridings were designated as first past the post. Then you could increase them somewhat, but not to the full extent that you would have to if you also increase the size of the House of Commons by, say, 10%. Then you might have 80% as the overall....

Mr. Blake Richards: One of my concerns with anything that looks at increasing the size of the ridings is that we already have some large ridings in this country. I think it's a challenge that's unique to Canada, or nearly unique to Canada. There might be a couple of other exceptions, but it is a challenge that I think we have to seriously consider when we're talking about increasing the size of a riding.

I'm curious about your thoughts on riding size. Let's set aside the territories and maybe some of our most northern ridings, but what would you say would be an acceptable geographic size for a riding if we are going to increase the size, at a maximum?

Mr. Paul Howe: The geographic size rather than the demographic size?

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, the geographic size.

Mr. Paul Howe: I don't know. Sorry, in what sense, like square miles, or...?

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, exactly, because what we have to consider is the area a member of Parliament has to cover. I think about the riding that I represent. It has shrunk considerably with the boundary redistribution. My old riding was significantly larger. I know there are other members—and Mr. Cullen is certainly an example on this committee—who have very large ridings, and it can be a real challenge to ensure that they're getting out to all the communities and making sure they're accessible to all the communities. I think it's important for voters to have that accessibility.

When we talk about increasing the size of ridings, that can take away from that. That's why I ask what the appropriate maximum size for a riding would be.

Mr. Paul Howe: Coming back to these calculations, you're talking about maybe increasing the size by about 20% demographically, in terms of the number of people represented, if you do the two measures I described. What that means in terms of geography, I guess, could be maybe about 20%.

I can't put a number on it any other way other than to say that relative to what we have now, it would be about 20% bigger, which I guess could present challenges for some.

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure. I guess that's what I'm trying to get at, that these are the things we have to think about. These are serious issues.

Mr. John Filliter: They're very important issues, for sure.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Thank you for that.

For my other question, I hate to do this, but I'm going to. I'm going to sort of pit two witnesses against each other, to some degree, although that's not really my intention.

Mr. Filliter, you talked about a section of, I believe, the Charter of Rights, but it's a section of the Constitution that you cited. It said something along the lines that all votes should carry equal weight. It had me thinking about Mr. Wilson's system where you're weighting the vote of members of Parliament. Would that potentially be unconstitutional as a result of that section?

● (1910)

Mr. John Filliter: I'm not a constitutional lawyer, but my point really is that, generally speaking, all votes should be equal under the Charter of Rights. The one exception to that is section 51A of the original BNA Act, which is the Constitution Act. It requires provinces like P.E.I. to have as many MPs as they have senators, and that throws their weight out of whack.

Apart from that, I think it's really important that all votes should carry equal weight. Some studies that have been done show the number of voters it took to elect a Liberal as being 37,000-odd, with the opposite extreme being Ms. May, with 605,000-plus votes. Obviously the votes are not carrying the same weight when you have that kind of disproportionality.

Mr. Blake Richards: Well, I think there would be an argument there, because every vote does count for the same amount. It just took more people spread out over more ridings. It's not certain that this would necessarily be.... I mean, there would be an argument to be made there, I think, but there's an argument on the other side of it as well.

In all fairness, though, Mr. Wilson, having asked that question, I should give you the opportunity to respond on that as well. On that point, would it be a concern under the Constitution, or have you sought an opinion on that? Have you any thoughts or have you done any work to try to determine whether that would be in fact constitutional?

Mr. James Wilson: I did look into this. The first few constitutional experts I contacted said they had no clue.

Eventually I did get Professor Yasmin Dawood, with the faculty of law at the University of Toronto, and she gave me a more robust answer. I'll read that now: “Much of the operation of Parliament is governed by constitutional conventions and my guess is that the one seat, one vote rule is one such convention. That being said, there are hints in the constitutional text on this rule. The preamble of the Constitution provides that the Constitution is similar in principle to that of the United Kingdom and the division of representation by region is also premised on the one seat, one vote rule. Conventions are not usually justiciable, but the Supreme Court's recent decision in the Senate reference makes it clear that a change to the Constitution architecture may amount to a constitutional amendment, which, depending on the nature and scope of the amendment, could be implemented by Parliament unilaterally, or under the 7/50 formula with substantial provincial consent, or under the unanimity principle, and it is my view that most likely if it is a constitutional amendment, it will be Parliament acting alone.”

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's an interesting thing, because in the Constitution, in the guarantee toward Prince Edward Island, for example, of four seats, it was never imagined that those four seats, those four votes, might ever be worth less. If you pull the four Liberals off of P.E.I. right now, under your weighted voting system, and the Liberals would be overrepresented, certainly in Atlantic Canada, then one would imagine their votes in Parliament would be 0.8% or 0.7% of a vote compared to Ms. May's vote, which would be a 2% or 3%—or 50%; I'm not sure how it would work out. As much as she and some might love that idea, I'm not sure Prince Edward Island necessarily would.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I follow with Matt's....

Actually, first I'll thank you all for being here.

There's an intuitive piece in it. I don't want to dive in, because we don't have a constitutional expert at the table. We have consulted as a committee with people who are constitutional experts about what it is we're trying to do. I feel reassured, as I think many members do, that looking at proportional systems, looking at different voting systems, we are well within the purview of what Parliament can and can't do as long as we don't trip that constitutional wire with the proportion toward Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and some others.

[*Translation*]

I would like to start with Ms. Duguay.

Thank you for coming.

I think that someone can become a member of any of the parties from the age of 14, whether it's the Liberal Party or any other. Is that in fact the case? I think it's the case with the Green Party.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Yes, it is.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It is also the case for the Conservatives and for us in the NDP. I don't know what the situation is with the Bloc Québécois.

By being a party member, a person can vote to choose a candidate to run for Parliament and also to vote for a leader. That person has the right to vote for a leader who potentially could become the prime minister, should the opportunity arise.

The Liberal Party's position is a contradiction because they oppose a voting age of 16. However, in our party, in our democratic family, we accept that someone who is 14 can make an adult decision.

Ms. Sue Duguay: I support what you are saying.

If young people have asked us to press for the voting age to be lowered to 16, it is precisely because they are aware that decisions are being made about them without their being allowed to choose those who represent them directly. Starting at 18, a person may vote on their own behalf, without the need for a representative, and therefore decide specifically which candidate is going to represent them.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Prince Edward Island and Scotland have both decided to lower the voting age for referendums. I imagine that it was because, in both cases, the referendum question had consequences for their future.

For issues such as climate change, for example, the decisions made today are clearly going to affect young people more than the elderly.

● (1915)

Ms. Sue Duguay: Exactly.

Like it or not, our population is aging. At least, that is the case in New Brunswick, if I may use it as an example again. In the school situation, for example, decisions are made that affect us directly in the classroom. However, they are decisions on which we do not necessarily have any input. However, they are going to influence our education and not only our future, but the future of generations to come. It is the same with other issues, like climate change.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Howe, there is an interesting thing we hear, an immediate and almost allergic reaction, when any voting system is proposed that contemplates more members of Parliament because, of course, Canadians hate politicians and don't want more of them.

I recall that when the Conservatives passed the motion in the House to add 30 MPs to this last election, they did it with some reluctance but did it in end, which was right, because the population grew certainly in the west, in Toronto, and in some other places. It was necessary. We do it every 10 years, basically. We add MPs to make voting equality a potential, so that one riding in Vancouver doesn't have 180,000 people while another riding in Manitoba has 60,000 or 40,000 or 20,000 people.

I don't remember hearing about it once during the campaign. It was supposed to be this terrible thing, and all the pundits wrote about the awfulness of more politicians: “Isn't this horrendous?” I don't know if any of my colleagues ever heard on the doorstep, “We hate you people because you voted in 30 more people, and there was a vote in Parliament to do it.”

I'm wondering whether we are a bit too timid and shy about the idea that we can achieve voter equality by adding 20 MPs. I don't think Canadians actually know how many MPs are in the House right now. I'd be curious, if we all took a little poll with our families, whether anyone could guess the right number back home, in schools, or in places of work.

Mr. Paul Howe: Curiously enough, I was involved in a survey that asked this question. My recollection is that about 2% or 3% of people could come up with the exact number.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: They don't know the number now, but what they do know is that they don't want any more.

Mr. Paul Howe: Yes. Many could not even get close to a ballpark figure.

Of course, when people talk about electoral systems and the values people have, they often say, “Oh, I want my local MP. I value my local MP.”

There are some contradictions, perhaps, in people's views on these matters.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, everyone. Thanks to all the witnesses and to the people of New Brunswick who are with us here this evening.

[*English*]

Thank you all for coming out. I really appreciate it.

With four witnesses here, I'm torn about where to direct my questions with the time I have.

I think I will start with you, Professor Howe. You shared a statistic with us about the erosion of civic literacy, as I would put it. You said that in 1984, 10% of respondents in Canada could not name their premier, and I'm not sure what year you said it was 30%.

Mr. Paul Howe: It was 2015.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That was 2015. Of those under 35, 44% could not name their premier.

Is there any academic research that suggests the reasons for this recent drastic decline in awareness of fundamental institutions? I'm 62, and 1984 seems like yesterday, whereas it will feel different to Mademoiselle Duguay. What are the theories as to why this is happening?

Mr. Paul Howe: I think we can point to the evolution of news media, such that it's become the case that we now have a tremendous diversity of options to the point where it's very easy to avoid learning about politics or hearing much about it if you don't want to. That proliferation is not just a factor of the Internet age. There are also more options in terms of television that have arisen over time with the emergence of cable and so on.

The media environment has definitely changed in such ways that, as I said, people can make their own choices about what they want to listen to. If they're not interested in the news and politics, they don't have to pay much attention at all.

In the meantime, I think there's also been something of a cultural shift away from the concept of any sense of a civic duty that one might have to stay apprised of what's going on. We often talk about that with respect to voter turnout, that the sense of civic duty to vote has decreased. That certainly is a factor in why some people aren't voting as much.

I think that same idea of civic duty applies as well to the idea of being an informed citizen. That used to be fairly strong and now it's much weaker. We have a much more individualistic culture in which people choose things they're interested in and do their own thing, if you like.

That's been a tough combination: the media environment has changed in a way with the proliferation of choices, and people themselves have changed in that they do the things they wish to do, the things they prefer. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, I would say, there are some who these days can become incredibly knowledgeable about politics, if they're interested in it, because there's such a huge number of places to learn about politics. A kind of polarization has taken place between those who really know a lot and really follow things and those who have really almost dropped out in many ways.

● (1920)

Ms. Elizabeth May: I've been concerned for years. I grew up in a generation in which I was very much attuned to the stories of my mother's experience in the Depression. She grew up in the United States with FDR and the New Deal. The notion of government doing good in our lives was part of the culture and the consciousness in which I grew up. Personally, I think the neo-liberalism of the Thatcher-Reagan era broke that link, and for a lot of people the mantra became, “big government is bad government.” The notion of government as an extension of ourselves in a democracy, I think, may have been severed by a shift.

I'm very concerned about how we can get that back. Changing our voting system is part of it, but we've been talking more around this table about democracy as being sort of an ecosystem of concepts and elements that we need to keep healthy. What you shared with us I find in many ways more alarming than declining voter turnout, because if you don't know who your premier is and you don't know who your MP is, you're obviously not thinking that those people are actually doing anything meaningful for you in your life. This is not a good person to quote around here, but wasn't it Trotsky who said you may not be interested in politics, but politics will get interested in you?

How do we engage people? I ask this to anybody here who has ideas. How do we use the opportunities we have around this table, as an electoral reform special committee of parliamentarians, to find mechanisms and tools to help the general project of democracy in Canada? Changing our voting system to PR, I think, is part of it. Lowering the voting age, as Mademoiselle Duguay suggests, I think, is another key piece.

Before I run out of time, could you throw out any ideas that any of you have?

I think I should start with you, Sue, because I haven't asked you anything yet for the record.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sue Duguay: Let me tell you how we see that.

As I explained in my presentation, we at the FJFNB operate according to a model designed by young people for young people. It does not matter whether someone is an adult, either younger or older, in order to stimulate their interest, they have to be able to feel involved. With social networks, it is easy to determine our interests, to decide what we want to do, to decide on subjects that we want to become informed about. So, you have to capture the attention of young people by showing them other things in which they can become involved.

In terms of democracy in Canada, it is perhaps time to realize that young people do not necessarily have a place in it. They have to fight more than an adult does to find one.

So our youth has to be involved in this movement. A lot of people like myself see the potential. We want to show that there are other young adults like ourselves who do not come out of their shells.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Is there time for anybody else to comment?

The Chair: Yes, sure, the three of you could just pipe in very briefly.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Could I hear from Mr. Filliter?

Mr. John Filliter: PR should really attract more people to voting if they realize that they have choices and that they're not just voting for their local MP, that they're voting for a party that may result in regional MPs. If open lists are employed, they can even be voting across parties, which really appeals to me. I like choice and I like the voters' votes to be respected.

The Chair: Professor Howe.

Mr. Paul Howe: I agree with your analysis of the evolution over time, and of how we've become disconnected from government to the point where we feel like the government is just this agency that does things but is not really our government. That discourse has been quite corrosive, and I agree that it probably began in the 1980s.

In the discourse that surrounds these kinds of things, it's important to say that this is a project for Canadians, with Canadians. That sort of collective sense that we are doing something together to make our country better is a discourse that draws people into democracy.

● (1925)

Mr. James Wilson: Let me just say that I agree with what has been said. I'll add that the cynicism that you see, especially online in Canada, and even in your neighbourhood, is almost poisonous. People will say, “Oh, the government's not here for me,” or “The government's just full of people who lie, cheat and steal,” and as they say it, it spreads and it gets worse.

I remember a few years back when Premier Gallant—yes, I know who the premier is—cut the salary of cabinet members. Although it was a very small act, even in my family it was looked on very positively as a politician doing something that was good for the country rather than something that was good for themselves. I think it's going to take a lot of small acts, because, as Mr. Cullen has noted, politicians are not seen very well. At this point, I think they're actually seen as worse than used car salesmen.

The Chair: Okay, on that note I think we'll go to another questioner.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Rayes.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Good evening.

My thanks to the four witnesses who have come to meet with us. I also join my colleagues in thanking the people in the audience who have come out.

This is our last day. At least it is for me. In the two weeks I have spent with the members of the committee, I have been able to visit a number of beautiful cities in Canada and I am very happy about that.

My questions go mainly to you, Ms. Duguay. This is not because the other witnesses are not interesting, but personally, my impression is that we have heard almost everything in these last three weeks, counting the sessions in Ottawa. I say that with all respect, I think we have really considered the matter from all angles.

Having said that, I am very interested in the opinion of young people. I feel that it is important. We talk a lot about women, but we have not talked a lot about young people. In addition, the various organizations that have come to meet with us have told us that we perhaps have not listened to them enough or that we have not moved enough in their direction. Most of the sessions took place in the afternoon while young people were at school. In order to get to know their opinions a little more, we should perhaps have held some meetings in universities, colleges, or CEGEPs in Quebec, or even in high schools. This is a constructive comment, and we should perhaps consider it for future consultations.

I would like to hear what you have to say about mandatory voting. Is it something that the people in your organization have discussed with any intensity?

Ms. Sue Duguay: It was one of the issues we discussed. We did not deal with it directly with a view to taking an official position. Our ideas on the matter remain quite general, at least for the moment. It is evolving all the time.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Let me take the opportunity to ask for your personal opinion, even if it's not the consensus in your organization. One of the nice surprises of being on this tour was hearing people speak favourably about mandatory voting. At the outset, I was not really in favour of it, but two of the arguments we have heard were very compelling.

The first argument is that mandatory voting would encourage politicians to pay more attention to the opinion of segments of society that do not vote right now, the poor and the young. It has been shown that poorer people are less likely to vote. If the vote is mandatory, with or without penalties, politicians would of necessity consider the opinion of those people, especially the young, because they would be voting.

The second argument was made yesterday or the day before, if I'm not mistaken. Someone told us that the Chief Electoral Officer had to invest a huge amount of energy into very expensive ad campaigns just to encourage people to vote. Instead, those resources could be used to deal with the electoral platforms of political parties or to introduce civic education and to raise awareness about social issues.

If the vote were mandatory, the Chief Electoral Officer and the political parties would not actually have to work so hard to encourage people to vote. Political parties could be working more on explaining their platforms to, and meeting with, the public, rather than making phone calls, and so on.

Do you think it would be useful to explore the issue?

Ms. Sue Duguay: Absolutely.

I will take off my president hat and answer as Sue Duguay.

I find the idea quite interesting. However, I think that, if voting becomes mandatory, it will have to be accessible as well. It's all very well to want everyone to vote, but it's not easy to do so for the most disadvantaged and the young people you talked about. As I mentioned, some are not in their home region for the vote.

If voting becomes mandatory, everyone must be able to have access to it.

● (1930)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Since you gave a very quick answer, I will be able to move to the next question.

To make voting accessible, especially for young people, could electronic voting be an interesting solution?

Many people are afraid of it. However, just yesterday, I wrote a cheque, then photographed it with my cellphone, and sent it off. I have carried out transactions. I bought tickets to go see my young niece perform in *La Voix Junior* at the Bell Centre in Montreal. I'm thinking that technology should really enable us to make voting more accessible to young people.

Ms. Sue Duguay: Absolutely. It's 2016. I am certain that it would be possible to do things properly and securely. As I mentioned, social networks are clearly reaching young people directly. It's a stereotype, true, but actually, those networks do a fairly good job of reaching the public at large these days. I'm sure that electronic voting could make things quite interesting.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Let me ask you a trick question.

You want to set up a mandatory civics course for all young people. You said so earlier. As a former elementary and secondary school teacher and principal, I know that everyone would like to have more gym, more music or more sex ed. However, when the time comes to set up the curriculum, choices need to be made.

As a student, which subjects would you like to see removed from the curriculum to make room for a civic education course?

Ms. Sue Duguay: We've been asked that question before. As students, we are aware of the challenge. We don't want to take anything out, because we need everything. That's good. However, we are missing some things, whereas others are a little repetitive. We can do without the repetition. When you cover the same topic for four years, you have a good grasp. We should have variety. We should learn how to neutrally interpret the content of electoral platforms in preparation for voting.

Educating students in a neutral way is part of the school systems' role. We must make sure that civic education is neutral. I'm sure it's possible to do so. This does not mean removing something, but rather adding and increasing young people's opportunities for action.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Could that be integrated horizontally in a number of subjects?

For instance, during election years, could the French course have theoretical material, particularly in comprehension tests?

Ms. Sue Duguay: It can be done that way, sort of indirectly, but that's absolutely not what young people are looking for. We want something practical.

For instance, we have heard a lot of talk about bullying, but the situation still needs to be improved. That's not what we want. For future generations of citizens to be educated and versed in this, tangible actions are needed so that the young people can really see what they have to do.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Ms. Duguay, right from the outset, you are my favourite young person. I say this with all due respect, without taking anything from all the other witnesses. It is refreshing to hear you.

Thank you.

Ms. Sue Duguay: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Thanks to all of our witnesses for spending their Friday night with us, and everybody in the audience for making us the hot ticket in town. We are, right?

We started on electoral reform in the summer and had a number of hearings in July and August. A lot of that time was spent hearing from experts on different systems and looking at strengths and weaknesses. We've been on the road for three weeks now hearing from Canadians about electoral reform. With a committee like this, what I enjoy is getting to kind of poke around at things. As I have poked around at proportional representation, PR, and at MMP in particular, I have been charged with perpetuating the lies and myths about it. So there you go.

I'd like to start with Professor Howe and actually take the first couple of minutes of my time to help dispel some of those myths and lies. You don't have to feel as though you're the last line of defence for PR or anything, but I really do want to get your take on some things.

I've done a number of town halls. I've heard people who, as we heard today at the open mike, feel that going to a proportional representation system is the best thing to do. I've heard others who have spoken very strongly about keeping the existing system. One of the things I've heard is that if we have coalition governments, in many cases they'll be either Conservative or Liberal, or maybe NDP, but in order to form a government they're going to have to rely on a smaller party. It could be the Greens or it could be others, but the sense is that those that have been the main parties will have to give up some of their voice, and have almost a compromise in policy, such that we'll end up with different kinds of policy decisions being made. Some people see that as a strength, and some see it as a weakness.

How do we frame this in a way, if we go in that direction, that will ensure Canadians that having a coalition government and a sort of compromise set of policies is not a bad thing for our country?

● (1935)

Mr. Paul Howe: I think you have heard from witnesses, people like Arend Lijphart, who have studied it pretty closely and have said that coalition governments in many places work very effectively and they can lead to governance that is as good as or better than what you have under first past the post.

It's also useful to point out that the larger political parties that have held power in our country have typically been, internally, coalitions of a sort. They bring together different viewpoints and factions. We can say that under first past the post, the large parties that we have probably have more of a coalition quality to them than do the larger parties under PR, because under PR, the smaller factions can more readily split away to form their own party and more fully express their factional view.

I suppose that might be part of the argument as well, as I say, that governing is always about working together with different groups in a coalition sort of format, whether that's the formal name or whether it's just more informal and tacit.

Mr. John Aldag: That's the kind of dialogue we're going to have to engage in as we move away from something that has been in place for 150 years. It's served us well. There is that whole sense of going to something new and having an element of the unknown. I think we're going to have to give really clear thought to the messages we give about why we may not have to worry about some of the things, and how these types of changes can work in a Canadian context. I thank you for that.

In your opening comments, you also talked about mandatory voting, and you indicated that there are better ways to increase participation, but you didn't give us what some of these might be.

I'm wondering if you have any, your top two or three, ideas for increasing voter participation without actually going to that final step of making it mandatory.

Mr. Paul Howe: Some of them have been mentioned. I think that lowering the voting age could actually have surprisingly strong effects. Countries that have done it have found that the turnout among those who are 16 or 17 can be 15% higher than it is for those who are 20 or 21, because of the factors mentioned. They are in an environment that's more conducive to their being encouraged to vote by school and parents. Then you can build a number of things around that, including educational initiatives.

Obviously, you would then be lowering the registration age to 16. Now you can have online registration. Even though we don't have online voting, you can register online. That, too, can be a civic learning exercise for young people in high school.

Of course, proportional representation is typically viewed as something that will improve voter turnout by a few percentage points. It is not a panacea, but it will likely have some positive effect. I do think that, more broadly, civics education is very important. Obviously, with some of my remarks, I think that's a significant issue that we have to look at. Those are some things.

Just coming back to some of the earlier questioning, I think that if you are contemplating the idea of mandatory voting, another possibility is to do that in conjunction with lowering the voting age. It's the simple idea of saying, "You have to vote your first time only." The first time you are eligible to vote, you have to vote. After that, it's up to you. That might be a little more palatable as an option, rather than imposing it on everybody. You at least have to try it once, and then, hopefully, you become a habitual voter.

Mr. John Aldag: That's very interesting. Would you see that kind of mandatory piece apply to, say, new Canadians as well? Once you get your right to vote in the country, the first one could be mandatory.

● (1940)

Mr. Paul Howe: I think that would be a reasonable thing to do. I don't think it would be seen as an imposition. It would be seen as a welcoming embrace of sorts.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aldag.

Mr. MacGregor, go ahead.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Professor Howe, I'll start with you. You have previously written about the elimination of the per-vote subsidy to federal political parties. Of course, we have also had changes: for every day over 37 days, the campaign budgets of parties are increased.

How do you think those changes have affected equality or inequality in our political system?

Mr. Paul Howe: When writing about the elimination of the per-vote subsidies, I argued against it. I felt that it was better to have a balanced system of individual donations and per-vote subsidies. The per-vote subsidies are a much more egalitarian method. Every single Canadian is able to provide for the party they wish through their vote, whereas, when you look at the system of individual donations —you can look at the numbers through Elections Canada data—you find that, although we've moved to a system where the maximum has gone down considerably to what seems like a rather low level, wealthier Canadians are definitely more likely to give the maximum or near the maximum. The total amount of money they are giving is substantially more than what those at the lower end of the economic spectrum are giving.

It's quite unequal. It's not as bad as it can be in jurisdictions like the United States, where there are few effective upper limits, but it is still highly unequal. Having a more level playing field on that front would be a much better situation.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: In your introductory comments, you mentioned that you were wary of a referendum because of the little attention being paid by Canadians and because the participation rate would give any legitimacy some question.

There has been discussion about how we can bridge the divide between those who don't want a referendum and those who do. We have seen examples from Prince Edward Island where they have reformatted their plebiscite question. Instead of being a yes or no question, it lists different systems for people to pick, so they have a list of systems. It forces citizens to figure out what those systems entail.

It has also been suggested that we try out a new voting system, with a sunset clause, and have a referendum after that so that people can at least make an informed choice.

Do you have any opinions on those two systems?

Mr. Paul Howe: It seems to me that, if you are going to look for a compromise, the second option seems like a reasonable one to go for. There is the question of how many elections people would need to try it. I think it would have to be a minimum of two. One is simply not enough. Ideally, it would be three elections, but of course that's pushing it down the road quite a bit, so it's going to be a tough discussion to decide if that's actually reasonable. I would say, yes, a referendum after the fact is a better idea.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay.

Mr. Filliter, I was really glad to hear in your introductory statement about researching the Constitution. I think it's been very well established in our hearings that Parliament is well within its right to change the voting system. The main reference is in the Canada Elections Act, in section 313 for anyone who's interested. It just states that the returning officer "shall declare elected the candidate who obtained the largest number of votes", and that's it. Of course, Parliament was able to change the number of ridings unilaterally. We went from 308 to 338.

Yesterday in Prince Edward Island, there was a comment about how first past the post has not served Islanders well; it has served the parties well. Just looking at New Brunswick politics, does that kind of statement resonate with you? Can you give us a little bit of feedback on what it's been like here provincially, from your perspective?

Mr. John Filliter: Well, I'm a transplanted Nova Scotian, but I know a little bit about New Brunswick.

If you look at the current results, where the Liberals swept the 10 seats with 51.5% of the popular vote, under the system that I proposed...and it's just my preference. I figure that the committee is in the best position to tailor-make a system for Canada. I suggested that we aim for, say, as close to 50% as possible of the top-up seats. In New Brunswick I was suggesting five and five. The Liberals would be entitled to the first five as local candidates elected, and the other five would be split, I believe three to the Conservatives and two to the NDP.

I think proportional representation is really and strongly to the advantage of the provinces too, not just to the country, because it's desirable that they have representation on both sides of the House. When you look at what appear to be monolithic provinces, Alberta, for instance, used to elect straight Conservatives, but there was still a 25% Liberal vote and a strong NDP vote. If they included representatives of both parties, I think it would be a much healthier democracy.

● (1945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Finally, Ms. Romanado, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: My thanks to the witnesses and the people who are here this evening.

[*English*]

Thank you so much for your presence. It's great to see a full house on a Friday night. It's great to be back in “Freddy Beach”. I'm looking forward to going to Boyce Farmers Market tomorrow with your member of Parliament. I'm not sure what I'll find, but I'm sure it will be fun.

I'll start with you, Mr. Wilson. You talked a little bit about the weighted vote, and I know we talked about it here at the table. One concern that pops up is committee work. The way it works in the House of Commons is that members are named to committees. That's where we study legislation. That's where we do studies on issues at hand. Often, like our committee is doing right now, we have to travel to talk to Canadians, and so on and so forth.

My worry is that if, for instance, Elizabeth May had a vote that was worth five points and I had a vote that was worth 0.2, I'd be going everywhere. They'd be sending me out; it wouldn't matter. But if I had a vote that was worth two or three, I would never be able to sit on a committee, because I would always be required to be in the House for every vote.

In terms of the application of that, we'd have to see what we could do, because when it comes time to vote in the House, we have to make sure that the numbers are there. That's the job of the whip. I'm sure he would be happy to hear me bring this up, because it would make a nightmare for him. But we will look at that implication.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Duguay, I am very pleased that you are here. In my career, I have worked in higher education. So the engagement of young people is a priority for me.

My oldest son was 16 when he was recruited into the Canadian Armed Forces, but he had no right to vote. He could serve his country but he could not vote. Lowering the voting age is not in our mandate, but it is a way to encourage our young people to be engaged.

Right now, the average age of MPs in the House of Commons is 51. This means that we will need other MPs at some point. It is not enough to encourage young people to vote. Our hope is that young people will run for office.

In the last election, we had the youngest candidate in the history of federal elections. Ms. May knows her. I'm talking about Casandra Poitras, who turned 18 on the day of the vote. She ran for office and it was a real pleasure to see a young woman walk the talk.

So I'm interested in your idea of lowering the voting age to 16 while focusing on education. We will certainly look at that.

[*English*]

I think I'm the last speaker here, so for the rest of the committee, I want to throw this out to everyone on the panel.

We've heard a lot about tactics. We've heard about a lot of things we could be doing. We've heard a lot about the actual electoral system. We'll be deliberating on this, but after 39 meetings, I'm starting to think that there's not going to be one thing that will fix all of our boo-boos. We have a lot of things to fix in our electoral system, and I think we're going to have to put a basket of goodies, different things, in place to deal with some of these issues, such as voter participation, women, minorities, accessibility for those with disabilities, online voting, and even the counts.

Do you have any words of wisdom for us as we go into deliberations? We have one more trip to do, and that will be in a week, to Iqaluit. We'll have visited every province and territory across this great land. Do you have any words of advice for us as we go into deliberations to hopefully come to a consensus and table that report on December 1?

● (1950)

Mr. John Filliter: I have one terrible one that I put in my brief. I butchered the words of JFK by saying, ask not what the electoral system can do for your party, but ask what it can do for your country.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

Mr. Wilson.

Mr. James Wilson: That kind of put me on the spot. I think you're right that a basket of things will need to be recommended. For instance, my own system does not directly address the issue of getting more women involved in politics. That being said, first past the post itself has shown that women can become more and more involved. It is something I feel the parties need to look at more, but anything that can help out along the way, I'm in favour of.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Professor Howe.

Mr. Paul Howe: The electoral system is the big issue, obviously, and there is room for certain compromises. When we start to talk about systems that move us towards proportionality, there is room to hedge that in various ways so that it's not the full-fledged proportional representation. There are ways to make it a little less so, to make it more palatable to those who are sort of opposed to that idea.

At the same time, a lot of these other ideas are a bit of a hodgepodge. Voter turnout is a fairly complex issue, and there are definitely some interesting ideas that have been bandied about. It's a tough one, and you don't want to be too hasty in moving ahead on that front.

Coming back to the lowering of the voting age, I do think that's one that has a lot of merit and should really be given serious thought.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

What do you think, Ms. Duguay?

Ms. Sue Duguay: As I said earlier, although we represent 8,700 young people, as ridiculous as this may seem, we sometimes have trouble encouraging young people to participate more. That is consistent with your comment. We need to do a lot of things to solve the problems. In my experience, that's how you can achieve something that will appeal to even more people.

Good luck. We very much appreciate the fact that you have asked us, young people, to share our views.

[*English*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Chair, may I have just one second?

For those of you in the audience with friends and family who are contemplating running for office, encourage them to do it. I ask that you give them the support they need, because a lot of times, when people are thinking about running for office, they'll turn to their family and friends. If they want to do this, encourage them to do this.

I'm just throwing that out there.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

My thanks to the witnesses.

[*English*]

Our evening is not quite over. We now have public input.

I'll explain how our open-mike session works. We have two mikes, and I'll call two people up to the mikes at once. Each person on this list will have two minutes to give us their point of view on electoral reform. While one person is speaking, the next speaker will be waiting at the other mike, basically getting ready to make their comments.

I'll call Mr. John Gagnon and Ms. Andrea Moody to the mikes, please.

Mr. Gagnon, go ahead for two minutes, please.

Mr. John Gagnon: I won't take much time. These are a few points I couldn't make this morning because my time ran out.

To me, it's fundamentally unfair and undemocratic when a party receives 50% of the vote and has 100% control in Parliament. There's something wrong with that scenario. Throughout the morning we heard a lot of people talk about not enough women in Parliament, not enough visible minorities in Parliament. We heard about the youth. We heard about low voter turnouts.

The countries that have proportional representation, which we spoke about this morning, have higher voter turnouts than our system currently has. The countries that have proportional representation have more women and more visible minorities in their governments.

We had all these preoccupations this morning. I think we should go into a system that's more democratic, where if you get 50% of the votes—or 30% of the votes—you get 50% of the seats. When you have party after party forming government with less than 50% of the vote and getting 100% of the power, it makes me question the democratic process of this country.

Thank you.

● (1955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gagnon.

I'll invite Mr. Maurice Harquail back to the mike, please.

Go ahead, Ms. Moody.

Ms. Andrea Moody (As an Individual): First, I'd like to thank the committee members for their diligence and hard work these last few weeks. I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to you this evening.

I'm here today as a private citizen, as a young Canadian woman, and as a future social worker. I was really fortunate to be raised by politically engaged parents. Growing up, I had a lot of discussions and, to be fair, arguments about politics around the supper table with my family. That's a luxury I had that not everybody gets, so it's not something we can control. What we do have the power to change, though, is education and information dissemination.

I'm from Newfoundland and Labrador, actually, and I didn't have the opportunity to access civics education until I was in university. I really believe teaching young Canadians about our democracy is essential to engaging the youth vote. It can't wait until university—an institution, I want to add, that not everybody can afford to attend. I'm aware that it's not directly in the mandate of this committee to address civics education, but I do believe we have a responsibility to establish a national mandatory curriculum in our middle schools and in our high schools.

As important as that is, it won't solve the issue of disenchantment and disenfranchisement with our current system. When the time came for the federal election last fall, I heard from many of my social work classmates at St. Thomas the same sentiment I heard echoed by others here today, and that is, why vote when my vote doesn't really count, when I won't really make a difference? I think there's something fundamentally wrong with our system when a bunch of future social workers, people who are passionate about upholding human rights, whose professional code of ethics mandates them to fight to empower the marginalized and the oppressed whose voices go unheard, don't want to vote because they don't think their own voices matter or will be heard.

I believe some of the biggest problems with our democracy and government stem from an attachment to the way that things have always been done. We can't let that kind of fear and the complacency of "why fix what isn't broken" attitudes allow us to maintain a system that silences the votes, voices, and values of millions of Canadians with every election. We need to move to proportional representation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Maurice Harquail.

Mr. Maurice Harquail: Mr. Chairman, and honourable members of the House of Commons, it was mentioned many times today about respect for democracy, and you mentioned the attendance. I want to show respect for our member, because it also shows respect for our local member that we had this kind of support in attendance.

I'm on the second round from this afternoon. I mentioned that I was for mandatory voting. When I went to the House of Commons, my first vote as a rookie was to vote on capital punishment. That was my introduction. Then I voted on the ousting of Mr. Clark's government in 1979. We went into opposition for a brief period. He didn't call the House back until about this time in October. We sat for about 33 days, and then, bingo, we had a confidence vote. I voted the government out and had that experience. I voted on the repatriation of the Constitution in 1982, and then I served on the committee for the reform of the Senate in 1983-84. Today, on CPAC, they're talking about reforming the Senate again.

On the question of the referendum, I didn't get a chance to mention this this afternoon in my remarks. I feel that with 338 members of Parliament—and we're talking about basic economics and economies of scale—I don't think we need to have this kind of an approach where we're going to transfer that power and the rights that we give members in the House to go out and have referendums. We have protests today. We have all these issues that are not really accurate. The term is "fair". We want to be fair, but at the same time we want to be practical.

I think with 338 members of Parliament in the House of Commons, they should be able to come up with the recommendations you're going to bring forward. As the debate goes on in the House we should be able to achieve what we're looking for on this question of electoral reform.

Best wishes for your going home for Thanksgiving. Thanks for coming to New Brunswick, one of the founding provinces of Canada.

● (2000)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harquail.

We'll give the mike to Ms. Romana Sehic, now.

Ms. Romana Sehic (As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Romana Sehic. I live here in Fredericton. I've been voting since 1998, and I think it's time to do something about this process.

There are two principles that any new system should respect. One is our local connection to the MP. They are in about the same proportion to the seats of the House of Commons, and it's proportioned to the vote each party receives. The best way to make this happen is mixed member proportional representation: one ballot with two votes. With one vote we vote the local MP, and with the second vote we select the party. The MP could be with the party voted for.

The other is that the locally elected MP would be elected in exactly the same way as they are now, and they would function in the same way. We could elect up to two-thirds of MPs locally. The party list MP could have extra duties, such as committee or regional work. Mixed member proportional representation has been used in some other countries with very positive results.

It's quite simple. Mixed member proportional representation is the best solution, in my opinion. I repeat: one ballot, two votes, two principles, one local connection to the MP, and proportionality.

Thank you

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. David Amos, the floor is yours.

Mr. David Amos (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, I ran for public office five times against your party. That said, I ran against Mr. DeCourcey's boss right here in Fredericton in the election for the 39th Parliament.

I was not aware of this committee meeting in Fredericton today until I heard Mr. DeCourcey speaking on CBC this morning. I don't pretend to know something I don't, but I'm a quick study. I thought I had paid my dues to sit on the panel. I notified the clerks in a timely fashion, but I received no response. At least I get another minute and a half.

The previous speaker answered the $64,000 question: 338. I can name every premier in the country. Governor Maggie Hassan is my governor in New Hampshire. The people there who sit in the house get paid $100 a year plus per diem expenses. I think that's the way to run a government. There are lots of seats in the house for a very small state.

My understanding of this hearing is that you have to report to Mr. Trudeau by December 1, because he said during the election that if he were elected Prime Minister, the 42nd Parliament, which I also ran in, would be the last first-past-the-post election. You don't have much time, so my suggestion to the clerks today, which I published and sent to the Prime Minister of Iceland and his Attorney General, was to do what Iceland does. Just cut and paste their rules. They have no first past the post. They have a pending election.

A former friend of mine, Birgitta Jónsdóttir, founded a party there, for which there is no leader. It is the Pirate Party. It's high in the polls right now with no leader. That's interesting. I tweeted this. You folks said that you follow tweets, so you should have seen what I tweeted before I came here this evening.

That said, as a Canadian, I propose something else. Number one, my understanding of the Constitution and what I read about law.... There was a constitutional expert named Edgar Schmidt who sued the government. He was the man who was supposed to vet bills for Peter MacKay to make sure they were constitutionally correct. He did not argue the charter. He argued Mr. Diefenbaker's Bill of Rights.

In 2002 I read a document filed by a former deputy minister of finance, Kevin Lynch, who later became Mr. Harper's clerk of the Privy Council. Now he's on an independent board of the Chinese oil company that bought Nexen. As deputy minister of finance, he reported to the American Securities and Exchange Commission on behalf of the corporation known as Canada. It is a very interesting document that I saved and forwarded to you folks. It says that he was in a quandary about whether the charter was in effect.

● (2005)

The Chair: Could it be in relation to a particular voting system?

Mr. David Amos: According to Mr. Lynch, because of the failure of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords, he was in a quandary as to whether the charter was in effect. I know that the Supreme Court argues it on a daily basis. That charter, created by Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Chrétien, his attorney general at the time, gave me the right to run for public office and vote as a Canadian citizen. However, in the 1990s, Mr. Chrétien came out with a law, and because I am a permanent American resident, I can't vote. Yet the charter says I can.

The Chair: That's a—

Mr. David Amos: That said, that's been argued in court. In 2000, Mr. Chrétien came out with a law that said I couldn't vote. Right? He also took away my social insurance number.

The Chair: I don't know about the case—

Mr. David Amos: No, he did.

The Chair: But I don't know about the case.

Mr. David Amos: I did prove, after I argued with Elections Canada's lawyers in 2004.... You might have taken away my right to vote, but you can't stop me from running for public office, and I proved it five times.

The Chair: Given that you're an experienced candidate—

Mr. David Amos: Very experienced.

The Chair: —does that experience provide you with a particular insight on the voting systems we're looking at?

Mr. David Amos: In Mr. Trudeau's words, he has to come up with a plan and no more first past the post. My suggestion to you, in my contact today, is to cut and paste Iceland's rules.

The Chair: What kind of system does Iceland have?

Mr. David Amos: It's just what you need, just what Mr. Trudeau is ordering now. It's proportional elections.

The Chair: Is it MMP, or is it just...?

Mr. David Amos: I tweeted you the beginner's book for Iceland.

The Chair: Okay, we'll look at Iceland.

We're just checking on the kind of system they have, but I appreciate the input, especially from a candidate, from somebody who has run many times.

But we do have—

Mr. David Amos: I have two other points, because I don't think you can pull this off. I don't think it will happen.

The Chair: Well, I'm hoping we do.

Mr. David Amos: Here is my suggestion. You guys are going north.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David Amos: Look how parliamentarians are elected in the Northwest Territories. There is no party, and I like that.

The Chair: That's true. We were just up in Yellowknife, in fact, and we learned all about that. That's why it's good for us to be travelling the country.

But, sir, I—

Mr. David Amos: I have one more suggestion.

The Chair: One more.

Mr. David Amos: Mr. Harper changed the Canada Elections Act and I still couldn't vote.

The Chair: Yes, I was in the House when that happened.

Mr. David Amos: Anyway, that said, when you alter the Canada Elections Act, make it....

The biggest problem we have is, look at the vast majority of people who, like me, have never voted in their life. Apathy rules the day.

The Chair: Except that you've put us on to an idea about Iceland —

Mr. David Amos: Let me finish.

I suggest that you make voting mandatory, such as Australia does. Make it that if you don't vote, it costs you money, just like if you don't report to Statistics Canada.

The Chair: Well, we're talking about that. That is part of our mandate, to look at mandatory voting and online voting.

You already had your last suggestion.

● (2010)

Mr. David Amos: Put in the line, “none of the above”, and if “none of the above” wins—

The Chair: That's right, we've heard that, too.

Mr. David Amos: Well, I haven't.

The Chair: We've heard that in our testimony.

Mr. David Amos: You and I will be talking again, trust me on that one, by way of writing.

You answered my emails, Ma'am.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Now we'll hear from Julie Maitland.

Ms. Julie Maitland (As an Individual): I moved to Fredericton in 2009 and became a proud new-stock Canadian in November of last year, so I wasn't able to vote in the last election. It killed me to hear people say that they couldn't vote for who they actually wanted to vote for because this time around, they felt that they had to make sure they voted Harper out rather than voting someone in—no offence to my Conservative friends in the room.

Tonight my friend told me that last year she felt physically sick because she had to vote strategically. Strategic voting is soul-crushing. It's heartbreaking. It ends with a government that does not reflect the values or the will of the Canadian public.

I thought Mr. Trudeau was incredibly brave when he promised to make 2015 the last first-past-the-post election, and I applaud the decision to create this wonderfully multi-party committee. This gives me hope that this was not an empty promise and that the current government is willing to make a meaningful change to the system.

It's probably not a huge surprise for you to hear that I wholeheartedly support proportional representation. I'm not sure what form, as I'm not an expert, but I ask this committee to strive to enact a new electoral system that can achieve the highest level of proportionality in our next government.

Being from the U.K., though, I caution against a referendum. I can personally attest to how badly a referendum can get sidetracked from the actual question on the ballot and become about other problems. We've recently experienced a very painful Brexit referendum that became unbelievably vicious. Whole regions, cities, and families turned against each other. An MP was shot and killed in the street. What they were fighting over bore little resemblance to the actual question on the ballot paper. The U.K. doesn't have a history of plebiscites and referendums in the same way that Canada doesn't have a history of nationwide referendums, so when the opportunity arose, it became a lightning rod for all manner of unexpected grievances.

I sent a postcard to this committee—and I did receive a response, thank you—with the request that you be brave. Be brave enough to make the changes that lesser leaders have been afraid to make. I direct this message of encouragement and hope, especially to the committee members from the Liberal and Conservative parties, because your parties are the establishment, and the establishment always stands to lose the most power when we talk of changing the status quo. However, by being brave enough to allow true proportional representation in the government, you can show that this is bigger than your parties, that you're willing to collaborate with each other for the greater good.

In addition to having a cabinet that looks like Canada, we can have a government that represents the diversity of our values. To paraphrase the words of our Prime Minister: Why? Because it's 2016.

Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll hear from Daniel Hay.

Mr. Daniel Hay (As an Individual): The essence of an electoral system is to represent in government, by some approximation process, the will of the population. To be legitimate, such an approximation must, at the very least, strive to actually reflect the will of every citizen, and to be effective, it must be robust to distortion.

A fundamental problem with our current electoral system, first past the post, is that it does not really try to be representative in any meaningful sense, because it is oppositional by nature. The purpose of first past the post is to elect a winner, not a representative, in each riding, and that winner represents only those voters who supported them in the election. The remaining voters are left disempowered. If first past the post is ever representative, it is only by chance, not by design.

Just as rounding 50¢ to $1 over and over again leads one to precariously believe they have $1,000 in the bank rather than $500, electing representatives in a winner-take-all manner leaves us at great risk of having a non-representative, and therefore ineffective, government. This risk is empirically founded, given the preponderance of majority governments we've seen over the years elected without a majority of the popular vote.

Because of this inherent fragility and its infidelity to the essential purpose of elections, any oppositional system, including first past the post, is illegitimate. Given the existence of alternative proportional models that we know from evidence in other jurisdictions actually succeed in being representative, it is not just a risk to cling to our oppositional model but a wilful transgression against democracy.

Consequently, as a citizen who is deeply concerned with civics, I see it as being imperative that we reform our electoral system and that we institute a legitimate proportionally representative system in its place.

Thank you all very much.

● (2015)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Nicholas Decarie.

Mr. Nicholas Decarie (As an Individual): Thank you.

As a young person, I feel the need to speak in favour of proportional representation because our current system is doing an atrocious job of giving a voice to youth. I'm sure we all felt pretty good about ourselves with the last election, last year, when 58% of young people came out to vote, but let's be realistic: that's not going to happen again.

I'm a student, by the way.

In fact, 58% is a failing mark. It's a D.

Normally the turnout for youth voters is less than 40%. That's an F; it's a failure. If our electoral system, when we grade students, is a failure, we need to change it to something that's actually going to work and give young people a voice.

Many, particularly our parents, our grandparents, and the media, might call us apathetic or narcissistic and say that we're just not interested in voting. That's not true. We actually are very passionate about this. If you'd turn on a Facebook feed and maybe tune into an election, we have a lot to say, but we feel so alienated and isolated from the issues being discussed that we don't feel as though our voices are being heard. We feel that politicians don't care for what we have to say or what our interests are.

If proportional representation were implemented, we'd feel more that we have a voice, and that even in safe ridings where maybe youth views would not be as prevalent, we can at least make our voices heard. Just because we voted Harper out doesn't mean that we're going to show up to vote again the next time.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll hear now from Ms. Rhonda Connell.

Ms. Rhonda Connell (As an Individual): Thank you.

First I'd like to thank all the committee members for being here this evening and hearing our viewpoints.

I'm in favour of proportional representation in the form of a mixed member system.

I have voted many times and many times, except once, my vote was orphaned. My vote was not the most popular choice in my area, so it did not receive representation, but a true democracy represents all people, including minorities.

We have a great opportunity at this time in history to make important changes to our electoral system, so my message is very simple. I want my vote to be counted. I want my vote to be represented. I want my views and my values to be represented in Parliament, the governing body that makes laws and policies that affect my life.

We are all equal citizens and our votes should have equal value.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gail Campbell.

● (2020)

Ms. Gail Campbell (As an Individual): I applaud this committee for the way it's demonstrating that all parties can work together in a spirit of co-operation.

I'm a historian, the only historian among the academics who prepared background papers for the 2004 New Brunswick commission on electoral reform, and although I am strongly in favour of the institution of a system of proportional representation in Canada, my purpose here is also to provide some historical background.

First, I suspect that many New Brunswickers who attended here today aren't aware of the fact that until 1970, New Brunswick, provincially, had multiple-member ridings.

Do we need a referendum? People argue that we must have a referendum to make a change in our electoral system. Not so. There is no historical evidence for the argument that momentous changes in our electoral system require consulting the people through that medium.

Traditionally, momentous changes in our electoral system have been made without recourse to consultation of the electorate through a referendum. The secret ballot was introduced without a referendum. Manhood suffrage was introduced without a referendum. Women's suffrage was introduced without a referendum. First nations suffrage was introduced without a referendum. Lowering the voting age did not require a referendum. The introduction of a new system of enumeration of voters, which, by the way, resulted in a decline in voter turnout, did not require a referendum. Finally, and most recently in this province, the shift from multiple-member to single-member constituencies in New Brunswick, so controversial, was made without recourse to a referendum.

I hope the committee may make a recommendation that accommodates the need for everyone's vote to count, that the government may accept that recommendation, and may we at last get electoral reform.

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, we have Mr. Pugh.

Mr. Jason Pugh (As an Individual): I wasn't prepared to come here today at all. I didn't know you guys actually had the open mikes at these meetings. I've been watching them on CPAC and, Nathan, you actually private messaged me in response to a Facebook message I sent you a long time ago.

My name is Jason Pugh, and he said I should come by, so I checked Matt's newsletter and saw you do have this. I had an appointment up until seven o'clock and just ran down here.

I do watch more CPAC, which is probably detrimental to my mental well being. I work from home. When I was at the office, I'd sneak in question period in a little window, but I continued to work, of course.

I only want to say welcome to Fredericton. I'm glad you're all here —even our friends from the Conservative Party. I'm joking. I'm glad you get to see us in this nice, beautiful weather.

With regard to the referendum, 63% of the people voted for MPs running on electoral reform, so despite the Liberals getting a majority with 39%, the referendum was 63% voted for MPs running on electoral reform.

Nathan, you were talking to Mr. Dutil and the discussion was about evidence. He said it was simply a coincidence that in proportional representation countries there is more female representation, and he said that's not evidence, and you said evidence isn't evidence, which was pretty funny. That's one of the things that shows that we need it.

You can say to every Canadian—sorry, I'm nervous; I'm not used to talking in front of people. The most basic thing that makes the most sense is that 30% means 30%. There's no argument you can make that says it makes sense to go against that. It's just the bottom line. Mixed member proportional representation is what I've been hearing from everyone here. I've not been to every meeting you guys have had across the country, but I'm sure that's the majority of what you're hearing, so I think it is this committee's duty to go to Mr. Trudeau and say the majority of people want mixed member proportional representation.

Thanks, and if you go to the market tomorrow, you have to get a samosa.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you for all of those thoughtful comments. As we close here, I just thought everyone might be interested in some statistics on our three-week cross-Canada tour, which is ending tonight. We have one more stop in Iqaluit in about 10 days, but essentially, this is the last night of three weeks of intense travel.

We did 15 days on the road. We visited 17 communities. The number of witnesses we heard from on the road, including tonight, was approximately 108. Before that, we heard from 58 witnesses in Ottawa. At the open-mike sessions, as of the end of the day yesterday, we had 549 people come up to the mike. As of yesterday at 3 p.m., we've received 376 briefs, of which 119 are now on the web in bilingual format and 257 await translation. We also have an electronic questionnaire, which is available on the website. The number of completed e-consultation questionnaires is close to 19,000.

Just as a point of information, you have until midnight tonight to complete the questionnaire and submit your comments. We made the decision that it would be Vancouver time, so that gives you a little extra time.

All in all, I think we've been pretty thorough in our work, and it will continue when we get back. We'll have more hearings there, and then we'll get down to the hard work of writing a report.

Mr. DeCourcey.

● (2025)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Mr. Chair, by way of wishing everyone here a happy Thanksgiving, I think we should highlight the tremendous work of the logistics team, our capable clerks, analysts, and interpretation and the tremendous work they've done to keep us moving throughout these three weeks. None of that is possible without this wonderful team who got us out of bed at an ungodly hour most mornings and kept us fed and working through until 9 or 9:30 some evenings.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: If I could add to that, I want to express the same sentiment, so I'll echo what Mr. DeCourcey said.

Also, having had the privilege of serving in the position that you're serving in, Mr. Chair, on special committees such as this, and one that has travelled across the country, next to our clerk, our analysts and our interpreters and technicians who all put in hard work, the person who has the greatest responsibility is you. You have to be in your chair and alert at all times. The rest of us are at least able to get up and go for a coffee, or things like that. Mr. Chair, you've done a great job as well, so we want to recognize you for that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Richards, but you all have the very difficult task of coming up with some probing questions, and that's a lot of work too.

It's been great to be here today and tonight. We wish you all a safe journey home tonight.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.