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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (1735)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Good evening, members.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I thought, as we talked about this morning, we would get our motion out of the way as quickly as possible.

The Chair: Okay. Do you want to do that now?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I should think so. Again, I had hoped this morning that it would be quick, and I was wrong.

The Chair: It's your right, and I understand.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I get these things wrong. My intention is for it to be quick.

Just to remind committee members—and I haven't changed anything—the motion from last night is as follows:

> That the Committee invite the Minister of Democratic Institutions to table a summary of her public consultations with the Committee.

The Chair: Who would like to speak first?

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): As I asked this morning, just to be clear, it's not that she would appear as a witness but just that she would table the results, correct?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, just that. If the minister would like to come, I'm sure we certainly wouldn't have an objection to it. The invitation would be open. However, if she would rather submit a written brief then that's fine as well.

Mr. Scott Reid: I was going to suggest a friendly amendment, but I won't move it if you don't think it's a good idea.

The Prime Minister has indicated that what we are working on here may or may not be a very substantial part of where the government is going. This is critically important if we're trying to design something that is actionable by 2019.

The Chief Electoral Officer has indicated that he intended to start his machinery moving based on our December 1 deadline to submit a report, which means that he assumed that our report would actually be definitive for the government, at least in its broadest strokes.

The practical implications of being unclear until they table legislation, which can't be earlier than February, effectively means we would lose some time. That's critically important.

I think having her explain how they're still going to achieve something other than simply transferring to a preferential ballot in the existing ridings is, I think, a matter of grave concern to everybody, certainly to us.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: May I, Chair?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I understand Mr. Reid's concern because it's a timing thing. If the government isn't committed to agreeing to what we put forward as a committee then we lose those two months, which Elections Canada has told us.... I understand that sequence of events.

I'm just sort of making this up on the fly.

This motion as it is is what I'm going to present.

To Mr. Reid or to others who are curious about that, something specific could be asked of the minister. If she comes to the committee, it would certainly make sense that we ask timing questions and whatnot.

However, outside of that, if the committee seeks some direction or some input from the minister on that specific timing question—it's one that has come to my mind in the last couple of weeks as well—we would certainly support something like that in terms of correspondence from the committee, but that's not for right now, Chair.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, I accept that.

The Chair: You're not bringing an amendment?

● (1740)

Mr. Scott Reid: No, I wanted to clarify whether I should, and the signal I got was that I should not, so I won't.

The Chair: Okay, so we're voting on this.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The only thing I would add, Chair—and I put this through to the government members on the committee—is that we haven't put any timeframe on this. We haven't said that its due within two weeks, or that type of thing.

I would simply express through the committee members, and will express it as well through the parliamentary secretary, that timeliness matters. Getting it to us on December 1 won't help in terms of hearing what the minister had to say.

I present it in good faith that the government understands that if the minister is to present the summary it can't be weeks and weeks from now, because it won't serve the purpose of this motion, which is simply to hear from the minister as to what she has heard. I don't know how many there were, but the parliamentary secretary has suggested that the minister has done 40 town halls or events. We had 23.

The Chair: Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): A point of clarification would be that we're asking for a tabling of the summary of the public consultations undertaken in her role as minister, and not the seven town halls that she undertook as a member of Parliament, which were received by the committee in a summary report. We're talking about the additional pieces that weren't originally in the mandate.

There's no aversion here. I just wanted to make that clarification.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you for that. It sort of speaks to the many paths of input that this committee is dealing with right now; the one we're doing as we are tonight; the one we've all done as members of Parliament, which has come through us as committee members; and this third stream, if you want to call it that, which is the minister's 20, 30, or 40 consultation events.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak to this or are we going to vote on it?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I don't think we need a vote.

The Chair: Is it unanimous?

Okay, it's unanimously accepted.

Mr. Scott Reid: Before we go on, Mr. Chair, if I could, I have a notice of motion that I'll submit to the clerk. I don't want to discuss it now. I just want to make sure it gets circulated and that it's available for people to look at.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks.

We'll now proceed with our hearing. We have essentially four witnesses this evening. We have Mr. Francis Graves from EKOS Research. We have Ms. Kelly Carmichael and Monsieur Réal Lavergne from Fair Vote Canada. We have Ms. Ann Decter from YWCA Canada. Is Ms. Decter here by videoconference?

Ms. Ann Decter (Director, Advocacy and Public Policy, YWCA Canada): Hello.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: From the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, we welcome Ms. Sylviane Lanthier.

I would like to welcome all the witnesses appearing before the committee today.

Each witness will have up to 10 minutes to give their presentation. Ms. Carmichael and Mr. Lavergne, you can of course share your 10 minutes.

The presentations will be followed by a question period during which each committee member will have from five to seven minutes, depending on the time available. I will keep track of the time during the presentations and will confirm their exact duration later on.

Without further ado, I now give the floor to Mr. Graves.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Graves (President, EKOS Research Associates Inc.): Thank you very much.

I am honoured to be here to talk about what I think is an extremely important topic. I am going to present only a tiny fraction of the material today, because I have just updated 36 variables on this question, which I understand would give me about 18 seconds of questions to talk about, so I'm going to mercifully spare you that and just give you the highlights.

I am also going to try to embed this in terms of some of the long-term shifts that have been going on. We've been tracking many of these questions for a long time. They look at the state of the relationship among citizens, democracy, and their governments, and it's very different today from what we saw in the past.

Also, the reason I think we need more than single questions is that these issues are complex. There are no simple answers to questions about whether we should be moving ahead today or delaying. To answer these questions adequately, I think you have to triangulate and look at several different kinds of variables.

I want to talk briefly about the broad state of health of democracy. Then I want to talk a little about the specific outlook on issues of electoral reform and the main options on the table. I want to broaden the horizon and talk a little about some other possible methods of improving the relationship among citizens, their government, and their democracy.

I would begin by noting that, even though things look a little better in our polling today than they did, say, a year ago, there is still a fundamental malaise. There has been a precipitous decline in trust in government over the past several decades, to the point where, in either Washington or Ottawa, the incidence of people who trust the government to do the right thing all or most of the time has gone from 70% or 80% back in the sixties to as low as 20% recently. It's risen a bit more. I want to point out that this change in outlook is not restricted to Canada. It's gone on in most advanced western democracies, and it poses very different challenges for the relationship between citizens and government.

Remember that our institutions were invented to deal with a nation of people who were working in farming, fisheries, and mining or extractive industries. They weren't particularly well educated. Those systems are showing considerable tension in terms of being able to deal with the pluralistic society we have today.

These declines are rooted in a much less deferential citizenry who are more skeptical, better informed, and looking for more than just a kick at the can every four years on election day. I'll talk a bit about that as well. There is a broad sense among Canadians that, in many cases, governments don't really care what they think. That sense of low political efficacy—"my views are really not important"—is a problem. Although it has improved somewhat in the last year, it is still a significant issue.

I would characterize the system as being in disrepair, but it is by no means hopelessly broken. In fact, we could use Churchill's famous adage about democracy being the worst system except for all the others. Canadians feel the same about their democracy. They tell us, “It has lots of flaws.” Would you prefer any others? “No, I think it's pretty good”. What we are looking at here is that Canadians want to rethink, not reinvent democracy, and that's important. They think it can be done in a way that will be fairer, more responsive, and more in tune with the current needs of the population.

On the issue of whether this is something of real importance, it depends how you ask it. This issue doesn't have the same visceral immediacy as issues around health care, climate change, or economic stagnation, but I argue that this is an issue of deep concern for citizens. In some trade-off analyses we've done, it comes out as the most important thing they would like to see governments doing.

Here's a question. I would stress that I have not actually been asking it that long. I've been around a long time, but this goes back to the fifties. It asks the question, comparing Canada with the United States, whether you can trust the government in Washington or Ottawa to do the right thing all or most of the time?

You can see that things look very different today than they did in the past. Some of that is the end of this blind deference or blind trust. That's not all a bad thing, but it does produce serious tensions in how the public looks at their democracy.

You can see that there's been a significant spike upwards. We'll have to see where that goes. There's some sort of general competence in the result of the last election that has persisted for quite a long time, but I don't think it solved the fundamental problem that we see throughout these charts.

It's also interesting to note that Canada and the United States work in lockstep despite the fact that they've had very different event episodes. What's changing this is broad changes in cultural outlook —the decline of deference, the rhythms of post-materialism.

Here's another question that I think is representative of the way some people think. “I don't think the government cares much about what people like me think.” You can see that almost half the population agree. Only 34% disagree. That's considerably improved, but there still is a serious problem here.

● (1745)

To look at some more specific questions, if we were going to rethink our electoral system, or if we were going to create one from scratch, what would be the most important principles that the public would want to build it on? Our research showed that are three dominant and separate principles. One of them is legitimacy or trust. People want a system that they think is fair and that they can trust. The second is that they want, pragmatically, one that produces good government. They want it to produce a government that reflects the best overall equilibrium of the values and interests of most members of the public. Finally, they want one that produces equality. They want one where all votes are of equal value. We'll return to that, but I'd like you to keep those in mind, because I think they're quite important.

You can see that there are some variations. Now, on the case about whether we need to move forward, I think the lean is clearly, yes, it would be a good idea, and the timing is right. We've been talking about this for a long time, packing our bags for a trip we seem to never take. But the fact is that there are serious divisions on this question. One of the most important, I think, is the generational divide. The sense of confidence in the current status quo is much higher amongst older Canada. There's much less receptivity to that in younger Canada. You could argue that these changes probably will have to occur at some point because of the mounting pressures and the expectations of younger Canada. But you can see the lean here. To “I see no reason to make major changes...”, 38% agree and 45% disagree. There's a lean to make major changes, but it's not decisive.

To “Canada’s electoral system does a good job in representing the will of voters and doesn’t need to be changed” and “Canada’s electoral system does not do a good job in representing what voters want and needs to be changed”, you can see that you get a pretty clear lean to, yes, it is broken, and we need to do some things, but a pretty strong residual group out there says we should leave it alone. This is very much divided on a partisan basis as well as generational. Older Canada is comfortable with the current system, and Conservative voters are comfortable; everybody else, not so much.

We looked at some of the specific preferences for electoral reform. We tested them in a couple of different ways. These are updates of the same testing that we've done over the last few years. I can point out that there's almost rock stability in some of the questions when you ask them at an unreflective level, just providing minimal information. What we did here is we randomly divided the groups into some that received a little bit more information about the basic pros and cons and other who didn't. We did find some differences. The results suggest that the first-past-the-post system did perform a little better on the detailed descriptions. That might be a result of the fact that there are complexities in trying to find some points of consensus, but the clear lean, in our view, is to go ahead with some form of proportional representation that meets the ideal of a more equal democracy. This will certainly leave some groups unhappy, but it's quite possible that a much larger group will be unhappy on the other side of the equation.

The public expects the government to deliver on its current promise. In terms of asking what they need to do to move forward, voters say, to the tune of almost 60% versus 25%, that the government promised this and they should actually deliver it. There's a clear lean to wanting this solved before the next election, but the margin isn't huge. There is concern that we do this with great care and deliberation.

You can see in here the results of the different testing on proportional representation. I think the way we present it is pretty fair and accurate, with preferential voting and first past the post. In the one where there wasn't a lot of information, the overwhelming lean was toward proportional representation. The pattern seemed similar when we gave them more information on pros and cons, but the case became more mixed. We would like to return to this sample, provide a ballot after we share the results, and get them to actually vote on this. The sample is representative of all Canadians.

To “Electoral reform is something the Liberal Party campaigned on, so they should deliver on this promise”, it was 59% to 29%. That's a pretty clear lean. On whether electoral reform was “too important to be rushed”, so we should be doing more careful consultation, people agreed with that. But to electoral reform being “crucially important” that should not be delayed to the next electoral cycle—that's one of the money questions right now—you can see there is a lean of 47% to 32%. So it's yes, but there are some who will be offside.

Now, I suggest that if we restrict our attention to just our voting system and just these three options, we will probably miss some of the opportunities to really improve the state of relationship between citizens and their governments and public institutions. The public is very warm to other innovations—for example, mandatory voting, which an increasing majority of Canadians think would be a good idea, and an online ballot. There's a strong case for doing both. The public is overwhelmingly of the view that it's time to have an online ballot.

● (1750)

We do our banking online. We buy our music online, and we shop online. We should be voting online. I'll look at the case for that shortly.

There is a huge demand as well.... This is less obvious. It's not what we do during elections but between elections. The public say they would feel much better about government if it regularly consulted with people like them on a reflected and informed basis. This process of citizen engagement, which really hasn't been a part of government, may be top priority for Canadians.

A number of countries, such as Australia and Brazil, have implemented compulsory voting, where citizens are required to vote. Would you oppose or support? You can see the numbers are rising. Only 29% disagree. The divisions here are not as strong across partisan or generation lines as they are in some others. We can get into this in the questions. I would argue that, as we've moved into the era of the permanent campaign, and campaigns focus on how to get my vote out and how to keep your vote home, we've had an unsavoury shift in focus from trying to define the public interest to “dark ops” and other techniques to get this vote out and keep that vote home. It would be nice to relieve that pressure. In Australia, 93.5% of people show up, and 85% support it in the same polls. It doesn't seem to favour any political party in particular. This might be something well worth looking at.

The case for online voting is even stronger. What's interesting about this is that there are no divisions across demographics. Older and younger Canadians are equally warm. If you actually did this in the next election, far more people would vote online than in a polling booth. You probably wouldn't even need a polling booth the next election after that. It would go the way of the buggy whip.

Think about some of the advantages in terms of creating a digital infrastructure that would allow this to happen. It could also be used to secure information and preferences of the public between elections, perhaps on referenda. We could talk a bit about that.

Also, the debate about rigged elections and maybe Mr. Trump's supporters showing up to monitor things would again show the advantages of doing that from a smartphone at home and not worrying about that.

When we put it all into the hopper, with the question of what the best way of improving democratic health in Canada would be, it is instructive that regular government consultation with Canadian citizens that is informed, reflected, and representative tops the list. There is a menu, a recipe of a number of things that people feel. There isn't a single magic bullet that is going to restore trust in government. They are very receptive to proportional representation. They also like the idea of online voting. Mandatory voting fits into the mix as well. The preferential ranked ballot, not so much.... It's something that people prefer somewhat to the status quo, but it really doesn't seem to be as favoured.

That's a quick tour of our findings. I think the public wants reforms that will enhance legitimacy, equality, and good government. There is no need for recklessness or speed, but there is a will and a need to move forward to the next level, and the leaning is to do that before the next election.

Thank you very much.

● (1755)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graves. That was very informative. I'm sure there will be many questions later.

We'll now go to Ms. Carmichael and Mr. Lavergne.

Ms. Kelly Carmichael (Executive Director, Fair Vote Canada): Thank you.

Before we start, we're just going to show you a short 40-second video.

[*Video Presentation*]

We started this process with a commitment from our Prime Minister to make every vote count.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee, and we are here to celebrate the government's progress in carrying out one of the most important election promises.

Fair Vote Canada is a grassroots, multi-partisan, and citizen-run organization. We are supported by over 65,000 Canadians, 35 prominent advisers, 40 regional teams and chapters, and over 500 Canadian academics.

Recently, we helped found the Every Voter Counts Alliance, which represents millions of Canadian, and independent organizations who care deeply about this issue, and are calling for equal and effective votes.

I grew up in the riding of Lac-Saint-Louis, and lived in the riding of Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie. I moved to Toronto–Danforth, and I now reside in the stronghold of Kawartha–Haliburton–Brock. I used to ride my bike across my riding, and now I have to pack an overnight bag.

Every riding, every province, and every territory in this country offers a unique cultural and geographic experience.

Every Canadian is equally invested in the future and well-being of our country, and our beliefs in equality and diversity have set us apart from the rest of the world. It's written in our Constitution.

When you take a closer look at our country and the way we run our elections, you soon discover that we are not all that we profess to be. We do not live in a system based on equality, and we do not respect the diversity of this country. In fact, we cast aside half of the votes in every election, labelling our neighbours losers.

Voters should not be systematically advantaged or disadvantaged in choosing elected representatives because of who they voted for or where they live. Ridings should not be divided into strongholds and swing ridings. Minority voters should not be able to construct a parliamentary majority. We need a level playing field.

Your vote should be equal to mine and mine to every other Canadian. That is fair and democratic.

Electoral systems matter, a lot. They shape the way we do politics, politics shapes our laws, and our laws shape society.

Canada has over 35 million inhabitants and 25 million eligible voters. You often hear us talk about 39% majorities, but that number reflects all of the voters who cast their ballots for a winning party.

The truth is that just over 4.6 million voters, 20% of the electorate, elected 184 MPs who now have all the power. A fraction of Canadians get to decide on the policies that affect our lives.

Our single member ridings make our country look regionally divided, when, in fact, most parties have support across the country. Canada's democratic deficit manifests itself in other ways as well.

Government accountability and legitimacy is undermined when 51% of the voters elect no one. Canada's democratic diversity, including women, is not fully respected in the House. Voters feel compelled to vote negatively to block the election of a less-desired candidate, and unrelenting party discipline has fostered an increasing concentration of power in the PMO.

Then there's the issue of policy lurch, where governments spend their time undoing policy of the previous government, which is an incredibly ineffective way to govern. Then you get skewed results. For instance, in 2008, when the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party both achieved about 1 million votes, the Bloc got 49 seats, while the Green Party got zero.

We recognize two families of voting systems: majoritarian systems and proportional systems. One family distorts results, provides false majorities, and leaves half the electorate unrepresented. The other family corrects distortions, has a capacity to create stable majority governments, and provides effective representation for most.

● (1800)

We draw on the experience of over 90 countries, 85% of OECD countries, and a wide range of experts. We know PR ensures that a country's leadership and policies reasonably reflect the values and choice of a voting majority by providing representation in proportion to votes cast.

Research shows that PR outperforms winner-take-all systems on measures of democracy, quality of life, income equality, environmental performance, and fiscal policy. Canadians have asked for real change, and I believe they have given you a mandate.

Justin Trudeau promised to make all our votes count. He doubled down when he promised to deliver on all promises. Cynics are already lining up and saying you can't find consensus. The honest truth is the consensus has already been delivered to you.

Three parties stated that 2015 would be the last election using first past the post. Three parties stated that they would make every vote count in 2019. Many Canadians feel 2015 was the referendum because 63% of voters voted for parties that said they would make every vote count. In this process, over 90 of your experts have recommended proportional representation. Only five have asked for the alternative vote.

Thirteen commissions and studies have said proportional representation. Citizens turned out en masse at town halls to ask you to implement a system that is fair. Millions of Canadians are calling for change under the Every Voter Counts Alliance.

We believe that if this committee truly listens to Canadians, if it relies on an evidence-based process, and if it wants to design the best system for Canada and its citizens, it can only choose a system of proportional representation.

If democracy flows from the people, then this committee has no other choice but to recommend a system of proportional representation. This being the only body that truly reflects the way Canadians voted, the minister and the government have a duty to respect and implement your recommendation. Parties have a responsibility to work together on behalf of all Canadians. We expect you to keep your collective promises to make every vote count. The only legitimate choice is proportional representation.

Mr. Réal Lavergne (President, Fair Vote Canada): Thank you for this opportunity to speak. I am a volunteer for Fair Vote Canada and was recently elected president of the organization. A lot of you already know me. I've met you in this room many times. I live just down the street, a 10-minute bike ride away, even when it rains.

I'm going to talk about the last section of our brief, which is on the different systems, MMP, STV, and rural-urban, and I'm going to do that in two and a half minutes, which is about how much time I have left.

Our general approach is to bring forward more than one proposal simply because we're a very complex organization and people have different preferences, but we are unanimous in one thing. We're unanimous that we want proportional representation and we're unanimous that we want serious proportional representation, real change not just cosmetic change. However, we've limited ourselves to three options here that are options that have been tried somewhere else in the world.

Rural/urban, you might wonder, has that been tried anywhere? Yes, it has been tried in Sweden, and it combines MMP and STV, which are systems that themselves have been tried. As a combination, it's something that we can be fairly comfortable with.

I'd like to talk about two values that when we consult Canadians, because we've been consulting with Canadians on this for 15 years, are primary for them. The first one is fairness and equality of every vote. That criterion is extremely important, because when we look at what's wrong with our current system, that's what's wrong. That's what has to be fixed. So anything that we put forward has to perform strongly on that criterion of equality.

You saw the simulations yesterday that Byron Weber Becker put forward. All three of the systems that we are putting forward have high levels of proportionality, but it does depend on how they're designed. If in this committee room, if in Parliament, you want to keep the multi-member ridings fairly small, you want to keep the top-up regions relatively small, you're going to have to sacrifice proportionality. So how do you manage that trade-off, and that's where rural/urban comes in.

Rural/urban gives you very high levels of proportionality by combining both multi-member ridings and top-up seats, and that allows you to have slightly smaller electoral districts. That's valuable if it's what you're after, so that's one of the basic arguments there.

The other thing we've heard a lot of is the importance that voters accord to voter choice. In terms of MMP, this means two things. They like the two votes that you get in MMP and they like open lists. We hear this over and over and over again. We also hear that a lot of voters like the idea of STV, once they know something about it, because STV maximizes voter choice. They like the fact that they can vote preferentially, even across parties if they want. They like that they can elect independent candidates if they want. They like the idea of having more than one MP who they can turn to and they like that all MPs are accountable directly to local constituents.

If you like voter choice, if it's an important value for you, under rural-urban PR, you can use STV and you can use ranked ballots, so it gives you those options, and you can use best runners-up for the top-up seats. In conclusion, we recommend that the special committee should propose whatever option among the three they consider most democratic and acceptable to their fellow parliamentarians.

I'm open to questions about any of these systems during the question period and we can look at other values, other desiderata, if you like, such as simplicity or local representation. I had those in my first draft, but I had to take them out because I just didn't have enough time. I also have some thoughts on designing a system that could be most politically acceptable at this particular historical juncture. That might be a question that might interest some of you to tease out with me.

Thank you.

● (1805)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lavergne.

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

Ms. Ann Decter: Thank you. Good afternoon.

I am Ann Decter. I am the director of advocacy and public policy at YWCA Canada.

We appreciate the invitation to appear before the committee as the oldest and largest women's multi-service association in the country. The first YWCA was founded in 1870, making us pretty much as old as Canada. Our national association was founded in 1893, before women were legally persons in this country, and decades before any women were allowed to vote in federal elections or to run for election to Parliament.

YWCA Canada, our national association, was created to advocate for women's equality and continues to advocate for women's equality to this day. Developing women's leadership in all spheres of society, from girls' empowerment, to young women's leadership, to supporting campaigns to elect more women, is a major focus of YWCA Canada's work.

Our entry point to discussions of federal election reform is the lack of progress on women's equality in elected positions generally, and specifically in the representation of women in Parliament. Almost 100 years after Agnes Macphail became the first woman elected to the House of Commons, women's representation stands at 25%. At that rate of increase, it would be another century before we achieve equality in numbers in the House of Commons.

Contrast that with progress on women's equality in other spheres. A slight majority of Canada's population is women, and we are essentially an equal portion of the workforce. Young women became the majority of post-secondary graduates in 1990 and continued to graduate from universities and colleges at greater rates than young men, including in highly skilled professions like law and medicine.

While there is still a substantial income gap—women earn about 72% of what men earn for equivalent, year-round, full-time work—it is much smaller than the equality gap in Parliament.

Canada ranks number one in the world in women's education, but 62nd on women's political representation in national parliaments. With the best-educated population of women on the planet, our House of Commons remains almost three-quarters men. I think we can all agree that it is less than ideal.

We need to address the failure of the current political system to ensure progress towards women's equality in the House of Commons for women generally and also to ensure representation of the cultural and racial diversity of women in Canada. To help address the gender gap in elected representation in the House of Commons, YWCA Canada supports electoral reform that would include a change to a made-in-Canada system of proportional representation that includes local representation.

We also agree with Equal Voice that changes to the electoral system can and should include changes to the nomination process. Nomination processes have been identified as a barrier for women interested in seeking political office.

Evidence shows that proportional representation results in more women elected, particularly in countries where there is strong support for women's equality. Again, I think we can agree that Canada is such a country. A recent poll showed that over 80% of Canadians think women and men are equally good political leaders.

The current 26% is a record representation of women in the House of Commons, but it's only 1% higher than the previous election. The pace of change has slowed to a crawl. Over the 20 years and five elections from 1974 to 1994, the percentage of women MPs more than quadrupled, increasing from 4% to 18%. The six elections between 1997 and 2015 produced a 5% increase from 21% to the current 26%.

We believe that a proportional representation system developed with a gender lens—that is, attention to gender differences between women and men in politics—can change that.

I mentioned nomination processes. Only one-third of nominated candidates in the last federal election were women. In 98 ridings, or 29% of all ridings, all of the candidates were men. The percentage of women candidates nominated by party varied widely from a low of 19% to a high of 43%. Equal Voice has identified the current nomination process, overseen by the respective federal parties, as one of the major barriers to opportunities available for women who seek to become candidates.

● (1810)

Women have reported that the cost, lack of predictability, and lack of transparency of nomination processes are for some a major disincentive. We would like to point out that some proactive measures have been successful in nomination processes. One federal party has instituted a practice of holding off nominations until riding associations either have an equity candidate, a group which includes women, or until they can demonstrate that they have actively canvassed women and other under-represented groups for a candidate.

This strategy has been successful. In 2015, 43% of the candidates running for that party were women, compared to just 31% of the Liberals, and fewer than 20% of Conservatives. In fact, that party, the NDP, often returns the highest percentage of women in its caucus, with the exception of the Green Party of Canada, for obvious reasons.

Representation is not only an equality issue, it's a policy issue. It's generally accepted that the tipping point for policy change that reflects women's lived realities is at least 30% women in a legislature. More equitable representation of women in Parliament means that women's diverse interests are more likely to be taken into account in policy frameworks. This would include, for example, across-the-board application of gender-based analysis to federal government policies, implementation of pay equity, a well-supported national child care system, and strong representation of racialized and aboriginal women in Parliament.

YMCA Canada supports electoral reform that would include a change to a made-in-Canada system of proportional representation with local representation. We believe it will support the election of more women, and Canada needs more women elected. We need the full advantage of our well-educated population of women, and we need to build a country that truly works for all women.

Thank you.

● (1815)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lanthier, you have the floor and you have 10 minutes.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Thank you.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for inviting the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada to give this presentation today.

Founded in 1975, the FCFA is the main voice of the 2.6 million francophones in minority communities in the country's nine provinces and three territories. The FCFA has 20 member groups: 12 provincial and territorial representative associations, and 8 national organizations representing various spheres of activity and clients. It also coordinates the Leaders Forum, a group of 42 organizations committed to the development of francophone and Acadian communities.

The members of our communities are engaged, aware of their rights, and want to be better represented in Parliament. In October 2015, they elected 16 MPs whose primary language of communication is French, and many others who are perfectly bilingual and familiar with francophone issues. This representation is very important to us. That is why the FCFA commissioned an impact study of the various electoral reform scenarios.

Our message today is the following: it is imperative that any new voting method take into account the realities of francophone minority communities in order to uphold their constitutional right to effective representation in the Parliament of Canada. To our knowledge, we are among the only ones to bring this perspective to your study.

You have before you a brief from the FCFA, which is largely based on the impact study we commissioned. The first part sets out the constitutional foundations of the representation of francophone and Acadian communities. The second part examines the impact of two models that could replace the current voting method, including a proportional representation model.

A model of proportional representation in which there would be fewer, but larger, constituencies would weaken the influence of francophones and diminish their political voice. In my riding of Saint-Boniface, 13% of my constituents are franco-Manitobans. If my riding were combined with the five neighbouring ridings, which are predominantly anglophone, this would considerably reduce the relative weight of francophones.

Another feature of the various proportional representation models is the awarding of seats based on the results of the popular vote, using candidate lists previously created by the parties. The parties would not in any way be required to include Francophone candidates on those lists. Maintaining the ability to effectively represent francophone minorities could in that sense be seriously jeopardized.

How can we ensure that francohpone minority communities continue to have a voice and a place under a proportional representation system?

Given the wide range of possible voting methods, we believe that, in analyzing the potential models, the committee should ensure that consideration of the francophone minority vote be included in its list of criteria. Perhaps measures would be needed to ensure that the party lists include a minimum number of francophone candidates or perhaps a percentage of MPs selected from those lists must come from our communities?

These remarks are of course made without the government having yet put forward a concrete proposal for electoral reform. That is why we recommend in our brief that the government launch a series of consultations on the concrete reform proposal or proposals once they have been decided upon, and that these consultations include a separate series for francophone minority communities. Any concrete electoral reform proposal must also be subject to an analysis of the impact on minority groups, including francophones. Moreover, governments must ensure that the voting method chosen makes it possible at least to maintain, but ideally to increase, the effective representation of our communities in the House of Commons.

As I said before, the members of our francophone communities are engaged, and that includes young people. In support the current campaign by the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française, the FJCF, the FCFA recommends that the Canada Elections Act be amended to change the voting age to 16. Like the FJCF, we think this could plant the seeds for a long-term commitment to civic participation among our youth. This commitment would be good for the francophonie and good for Canada.

● (1820)

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, Canada's francophone and Acadian communities are much more than minorities. They are an integral part of Canadian identity. It is thanks to them that we can truly talk about linguistic duality from coast to coast. Our communities believe in justice and fairness and are thus always open to the idea of the Parliament of Canada being more representative of the richness and diversity of Canadian society. Yet the specific realities of our communities also mean that any reform intended to achieve that objective must also include measures to preserve their voice in the House of Commons.

Thank you.

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

We have now reached the question and answer period. We will go around the table so each MP will have the opportunity to speak with the witnesses. Each MP will have seven minutes to ask the witnesses questions.

Ms. Sahota, you have the floor and you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses who came out today.

There were diverse presentations, but my first question is going to Ms. Decter.

Since you're from the Toronto area, I wanted to find out from you what you think achieved the success in the Ontario legislature. The representation of women in the Ontario legislature is now at 35.5%, which is higher than New Zealand's representation of women in their federal parliament, which has an MMP system.

Ontario is still a first-past-the-post system, but what do you think they did, compared with the last election, to increase the representation of women?

I legitimately really don't know what they did, but I know that their stats look pretty good, and they're better than ours here.

Ms. Ann Decter: I haven't studied it, in particular, but I would point out that they have two parties that are led by women, which would obviously encourage women to feel that they could legitimately run for office.

You also hate to say this, but when an election is skewed to centre and centre-left and left parties, you tend to get more women elected. The Conservative Party does tend to lag in the number of women who are nominated and who are elected. Depending on which parties win the most seats, you tend to get more women.

I'm not here to say that proportional representation is the only way to increase the number of women elected, but I am here to say YWCA Canada supports that. In many countries that are similar to Canada, it has increased women's representation and normalized the much higher level of representation of women.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I completely understand that you're here endorsing it, but what we're trying to figure out, as a committee...or I'm trying to figure out what the connection is. Tomorrow, if we change to a particular system, are we going to have those benefits that we are now advocating for?

I would hate to move to a system and say, “The reasons we're doing this is *x*, *y* and *z*,” and then *x*, *y*, and *z* don't happen.

How does Ontario end up being more successful than New Zealand? It just boggles my mind, because all I've been hearing for a long time is that it's the voting system that has to change in order to encourage more women to participate or to get nominated.

Do you have any idea about, at the nomination level, what they did differently to get to that level, or do you think it was just that influence of having female leaders that encouraged women to step forward?

● (1825)

Ms. Ann Decter: Again, I haven't specifically studied what happened in Ontario, but I know that with the NDP the same policies apply at the provincial level as they do federally, so the same equity process would apply.

We know that it encourages women to run when there is a woman leader in place. If you look at the last provincial Liberal leadership race, it came down to two women running against each other, which is a pretty strong signal that women are welcome to run, that women are supported to run, and that they might get some backing from the party.

We have named nomination processes as a problem. I really don't know what role Kathleen Wynne, as a leader, took in that, but she may well have been out encouraging more women to run for office.

We are seeing progress. We see regress, at times, as well. The standard used to be for women that when they came in to lead a province or a party for the first time, it often happened when the party was pretty much in complete collapse. If you look at the first woman to be a premier, Rita Johnston, in British Columbia, as the leader of the SoCreds, they were about to lose office. With Kim Campbell, our first and only woman prime minister, the indications were that the Conservative Party was going to lose office.

We have evolved beyond that to a point where women are leading parties into election, getting re-elected as leaders, and in some instances that does lead to change.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We heard an argument earlier today, and it's come up quite often, that the nomination process is where, perhaps, women aren't getting in. The parties are not nominating or putting in place or appointing enough women to run. If that's the actual issue, who is going to be asking those women to run in a proportional system, if we change to a proportional system? It's still going to be the parties, is it not?

Ms. Ann Decter: It won't be if we make change at that level.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What would that change be?

Ms. Ann Decter: I gave you one example of a system that tends to result in more women getting nominated, where there's an equity process. I think that you have the power to set the rules for nominations.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You'd have to set different rules, and they would be for the nomination process.

Ms. Ann Decter: You could set some kind of affirmative action rules around nominations. There have been suggestions in the past. When there were the subsidies for votes, there was a suggestion that you wouldn't be able to collect the government subsidy for votes—I know we don't have it anymore—unless you had a certain percentage of women candidates, for example.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Would you agree that changing the electoral system alone, without having some kind of legislation in place, would not ultimately have a huge effect?

Ms. Ann Decter: The evidence isn't really clear that changing it alone won't do anything. The biggest factor to go with it, I think, is that you have a country that already believes in women's equality. I think if you had a country that didn't believe in women's equality and where women weren't, as I mentioned, extremely well educated, in the workforce, all of those things, then I don't think, on its own, it would make a difference.

On the evidence, it seems that Canada is positioned to have women benefit from a move to proportional representation. We can only cite the evidence as far as it goes.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll go to Mr. Reid now, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the presenters for their presentations.

Thank you to Wilf Day, who is sitting on the side. Wilf and I have communicated on numerous occasions over a period of more than a decade, largely dealing with redistribution. I've been on the relevant committee twice, and Wilf has had intelligent thoughts on redistribution on both of those occasions. His thoughts are very much appreciated by me and by members of other parties who have been in communication with him, as well.

I wanted to start, if I could, with Mr. Lavergne, who I think is the right person to turn to, although I stand to be corrected.

I have a series of maps that were distributed. I think you are the person responsible, and I think Wilf is also partly responsible. I'm trying to make sense of them. I can see that you've gone through and that you have four maps for each region of the country represented by an MP on the committee. I see eastern Ontario; that's me. I see Montreal; that's presumably for Sherry Romanado's benefit. It continues right down to New Brunswick for Matt DeCourcey, and so on.

Having said that, it looks to me like you've put forward two systems to show us. One is called MMP-8, and there are two maps for that for each region. The other is called rural-urban PR, and there are two maps for that for each region. Am I right, so far?

● (1830)

Mr. Réal Lavergne: Yes, you're essentially right. There is a map for each of the members of the ERRE. Wilf is the one who did all of these maps. That is why I was frantically pointing to Wilf over here.

You're supposed to have one map for MMP in each case, and one map for rural-urban in each case. Rural/urban also illustrates what the STV might look like because under rural/urban you might be using STV as your multi-member mechanism.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, so now let me ask some questions about those maps.

I'm looking at the ones for central eastern Ontario. There are 19 members of Parliament in the region right now, if you leave out Durham, which I assume is how you've drawn the region.

The first map says six local MPs; the second one says three regional MPs. That, of course, adds up to only nine. May I assume that the other 10 who aren't mentioned there are on a proportional list, either for some other region that is larger than this, or for the region as a whole, or else for an Ontario-wide list, or something like that?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: That's right. This is an MMP-8; it's actually MMP-9, in this particular case. So the region is going to be—

Mr. Scott Reid: What does the code MMP-8 or MMP-9 mean?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: It means that the top-up region would have an average of eight seats.

Mr. Scott Reid: In this case, you said it's actually nine for this region.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: In this case it's nine.

Mr. Scott Reid: So you have nine regional seats for the region that includes 19 members of Parliament now, and then it has six local MPs and three sort of subregions that are.... Or am I misunderstanding?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: No, it's not a region that's 19 now. This is a region that currently has nine. It currently has nine and the MMP—

Mr. Scott Reid: Oh, so you're not counting the city of Ottawa. You're taking the city of Ottawa out.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: The city of Ottawa is not in this one; that's right.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: If you turn the page, when you get to the rural-urban PR page, that one does include Ottawa, and now we're looking at a top-up region of 19 as I remember it.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: So they are kind of different scenarios.

The idea is that with MMP you might want to keep the regions a bit smaller. But the thing about rural-urban is you're actually trying to maximize the proportionality of it—

Mr. Scott Reid: Of course.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: —by having relatively large top-up regions, usually in the rage of 16 up to 20. That reduces the threshold for third parties to about 5%. I'm looking at Elizabeth May here; that's something she might like.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): I don't care, to be honest.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: You don't care.

But that's the idea, to have a top-up region that's large enough to have a threshold that's fair to third parties.

Mr. Scott Reid: Ironically, I actually do care. I think the threshold should be as low as possible—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Scott and I have had this conversation.

Mr. Scott Reid: —for reasons of maintaining proportionality. As I like to point out, the purpose is to freeze out extreme parties, but my experience as a former Reform Party member is that whether you are extreme or not, you get characterized that way by the incumbent parties. As for being small, every party starts with one supporter, right?

Turning to rural-urban proportional then, and this is actually true for both of them. You have these happy faces on a grey oval. I just want to make sure I understand them. I assume a happy face means an MP?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: That's right.

Mr. Scott Reid: There's one over Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, which is my riding. I note with some alarm, however—not my alarm, but Mike Bossio who is here might feel alarm at this—

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Uh-oh.

Mr. Scott Reid: —that there is no happy face over Hastings–Lennox and Addington, his riding.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Uh-oh.

Mr. Scott Reid: I don't know if that was an oversight. I'm trying to figure this out. Are you saying the ridings essentially are not redistributed except to the extent that you combined some urban ridings? Or are you saying something else?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: No, it should be the same. These ridings should not have changed, right?

A voice: Are we talking about rural-urban?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: It's rural-urban for this Ontario east and centre.

Mr. Scott Reid: What I'm really asking is to what degree there's redistribution. Obviously in the urban ridings, which become a form of STV riding, there is redistribution in that you smush a certain number of them together. I'm trying to find out whether in the other ridings you're rejigging them or whether it's the case that they retain their current boundaries.

● (1835)

Mr. Réal Lavergne: Nine becomes eight. Okay.

Mr. Scott Reid: What Wilf just said is “nine becomes eight”.

Wilf, you're not technically a witness here, but if you nod, we can read those things into the roll here.

So there are nine ridings under this model and in eastern Ontario they go down to being eight ridings in rural eastern Ontario, freeing up one member. That's correct? Okay, that explains it.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: Nine becomes eight, five becomes four, and five becomes four. That frees up three top-up seats, which is what you have in the other map.

So you still have 19 and you've freed up three seats.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Thank you very much. That's very helpful.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: So this is the reconfiguration model of rural-urban.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. Okay.

Is this stuff available online anywhere? I'm about to run out of time, but if you can guide me in that regard, that will help the committee.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: I could give you the link. It's on our Google Drive. You can access all the maps there if you like, in colour.

Mr. Scott Reid: I suggest you submit that to the clerk, and that way it will be included for all members of the committee, if that's acceptable.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: We'll do that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That was great. Thank you very much, all, for being here. It's a really good moment for these particular witnesses to appear before us. We're just at the very last bit of our meetings as we enter into the next phase of what we've been doing, which is to try to pull all this information in and then sort out what would work best for Canada.

It's also been an interesting 24 hours if I can call it that. We had initial indications from the Prime Minister yesterday that maybe the enthusiasm for changing the electoral system has dropped, because people are happier now. People wanted it when Harper was in but they don't want it now because they're happier. Then today, I've just read a news article saying that the Prime Minister is saying that he's deeply committed to following through on the promise.

Mr. Graves, I'm just looking at your polling here—which also made some news today—that an astonishing near 60% of Canadians want the Prime Minister to keep his promise.

Mr. Francis Graves: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: There was some notion yesterday that maybe there isn't enthusiasm for this, or that the enthusiasm has dropped, but then I read your submission this morning, and now. Why hasn't the enthusiasm dropped? Weren't voters only into this issue when they didn't like the government?

Mr. Francis Graves: I think they separate the issue of, were you more satisfied with the results of this election than the last election, and there has been a bump up in trust levels, but I don't believe it is dealing with some of the fundamental, structural issues that plague democracy.

For example, when we asked the public if they thought it was fair that a government that receives less than 40%, which would be very close to the 39.5% and 39.6% that the current and previous governments received, should get most of the seats, by a margin of three to one the public responded no.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Three to one, so Canadians like fairness and they want it in their—

Mr. Francis Graves: They said they placed fairness and equality as some of the dominant principles they would like for rethinking the electoral system.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: One of the things you said in your testimony, and I'm pressed for time, but you talked about how the system is strained, that when the system was designed the country we have now would have been unrecognizable to the country then.

Mr. Francis Graves: Correct.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Only land-owning men voted. White men voted.

Mr. Francis Graves: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's like trying to drop a 2016 Ferrari on a village road 150 years ago and seeing how well it goes. It's not designed well for the adaptations we've gone through as a country. We've changed.

You also said the expectations of voters have changed. You talked about how they expect more involvement. You talked about public consultation, which is good and interesting.

The equality of votes was your third test. I like these tests you've put to us, that it must be legitimate and it must produce good government that represents voters' wishes.

Boy, I have a lot of questions.

Ms. Decter, I missed the numbers, but you talked about from 1974 to 1994 we went from 4% women to 18% women, so almost a four times jump in women in Parliament. One would have hoped maybe in 1994 that that trajectory would have kept on going, but from 1997 onward, it went up only a few per cent. Even with the big change we had in this last election, which was a big-change election where an entire government got tossed out, and with a whole bunch of new members, we only went up another 1%. I actually don't have confidence in your suggestion that if we just left it as is in another hundred years we'd get equality.

I wonder also, because I want to get this to the policy level, if we had 75% women in Parliament right now and had had for years, if pay equity wouldn't have been solved by now. Women would still be earning 72¢ on the dollar in Canada. I'm just guessing.

● (1840)

Ms. Ann Decter: Sorry, that's your suggestion? I hope not.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes.

The question I have is, do we need to do both things? Do we need to change the nomination process and how women and other under-represented groups can gain access to the political system, as well as how votes are counted in this country in order to get to the promise of some sort of equality in the country, and that our Parliament actually looks like this country?

Ms. Ann Decter: Yes, absolutely. I think so. As other people have pointed out—not today—you also need to look at how Parliament functions. Obviously, while women continue to do the majority of child care in the country, it's very difficult to be someone who is in a different city, say, four days a week.

There are things to do that are slowly happening in Parliament. We now have women bringing babies into the House and things like that. There are various sets of things that can be done, but those two are definitely part of it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I can remember a fierce and private debate I had with a former speaker of the House when one of our members needed to breastfeed in Parliament and he wasn't so excited about it. I said he'd just have to avert his eyes because it was going to happen. Anyway—

We haven't talked enough about this, but would it be your suggestion that we need to apply a gender lens to the voting system we ultimately arrive at and the recommendations that we make?

Ms. Ann Decter: Yes, absolutely. We repeatedly talk to parliamentary committees about the need for a gender-based lens on all the work that you do. I think it would be of immense value to apply it in this process.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Great, because it's also in the government's 32-point plan for real change, that we have a gender-based lens applied to whatever it is we decide here.

We're number one in the world for having educated women, and number 64 in the world in actually electing women to Parliament. Did I get that right?

Ms. Ann Decter: I think it was 62nd, but I can check, but in the sixties for sure. So there's obviously a huge disconnect there. There are very talented women who aren't getting elected one way or another. They aren't stepping forward, aren't getting through the processes, and aren't getting elected.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: To our friends at Fair Vote Canada, we've seen your folks everywhere, from Iqaluit to Victoria to St. John's and all points in between. It's great. You have a bunch of enthusiastic people out there.

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's within your organization.

I just want to get a sense of your feeling, especially for the last 24 hours but even beyond that as we head to the point of the rubber hitting the road, so to speak, the energy out there that you're sensing or feeling, Mr. Graves or others, points to that desire for this promise to come to fulfilment, for this committee to do the work that we are mandated to do.

The Chair: Just briefly, please.

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: I can say it briefly. I also hope somebody will ask me about the women's issue as well, besides that.

Our members are incredibly motivated. In the last election there was a lot of strategic voting that went on, and they parked their votes often around this issue. They are very motivated and yesterday, with the announcement that perhaps we were waning on this issue, actually put a lot of gas in our engine. This desire to change the voting system is not changing, because it's not about government or a party, it's about voters.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. May, please.

Ms. Elizabeth May: On the heels of your comment, Kelly, that you were hoping someone would ask you about the women's issue, please comment on what you think is needed, within electoral reform and any other measures, to increase the proportion of women in Parliament.

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: Thanks.

It's a really important issue to me, the issue around electing more women, and I know there are barriers to electing women. We know that it's during the nomination process. There was a study by Kaminsky and White who talked about women's responsibility, confidence, barriers to getting into nominations, and different things, but the electoral system changes the mechanism by which women run. If you think about our ridings, the way that they are silos right now, we vote for certain members, and we don't know outside of our silo if a party is running a lot of men or a lot of women. When you change the dynamic of the way the electoral system runs and you can see multi-member regions, you start to see parties that don't run any women, and that puts a lot of pressure on parties to start running women.

The other thing is it's a diversity issue. Australia is a perfect petri dish example of this. When Kaminsky and White looked at Australia, the same voters vote in their Senate and in their lower House, which is the alternative vote. It's a winner-take-all one-member riding, and the upper House is STV. They have elected more women year-over-year in their upper House, and the study they looked at said it can only be the electoral system because of the population, because the ballots are the same, the voters are the same, all of these variables have been eliminated and it's the voting system.

When you look at New Zealand, you see a whole range of numbers on diversity that change. For women, the numbers go up, but from 1996 to 2011 the number of women in the House doubled. We believe it's the multi-member ridings. There are also ways that you can do zipper lists, when you give people the option to run males, females and, yes, some legislation would be great. There's quotas in some countries and different things, but I think it's tied to the electoral system. We're not saying it's going to give you gender parity, but it will certainly give us a bump in more women being elected.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Picking up on your point about Australia, I hadn't actually turned my mind to all the elements that are exactly the same, but the same people are voting on the same day in the same campaign.

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: They have preferential ballots with single-member winners in the lower House, a preferential ballot with multi-member winners in the upper House. When you have an opportunity to elect more than one person, you can elect women. It's not 50/50, either a male or a female. Now, all of a sudden, you have the opportunity to elect a team of MPs.

● (1845)

Ms. Elizabeth May: It also occurs to me that the very same parties are running the candidates under two different systems.

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: Yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: So it's a pretty interesting example.

I'm going to try to come back to Fair Vote versus specific questions on the rural-urban mixes. I wanted to put some questions to you, Mr. Graves, while you're here, because you're the third person, and I think I've counted correctly, who's come with polling information. We've heard from Darrell Bricker, we've heard from Forum Research, and then we heard from you today. There's some consistency in that it seems to be an issue Canadians care about. Most Canadians, but not overwhelmingly most, want to see some form of electoral reform.

I wanted to ask you, because I've asked the others, when you're doing these polls, and I see from the notes it's an online poll, how do you explain to the respondents the different voting systems before you put the question to them? We know that we're going to, one way or another, be explaining electoral reform to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We've been hearing from people who are quite concerned and well informed, people who have gotten themselves up to speed. I think over 20,000 went through the online e-questionnaire the committee put out, which I think is extraordinary. How do you distill a complex system enough for respondents to be able to answer the questions?

Mr. Francis Graves: That's an excellent question, and I can walk you through, if you want, how we presented the questions. We presented them in a couple of different ways.

Our experience is that the public's level of fluency about these types of issues is relatively low. They are interested, but they don't understand all the plumbing and dynamics, nor are they that concerned with that. That's why I tried to translate this back to questions of ultimate principles and the idea that people were seeking equality or fairness or legitimacy.

By the way, our online approach is quite different from the other ones in the sense that we've actually called every one of those people, using random selection, and we recruited them to do the polls. So everybody has an equal probability of appearing in this. We often do a telephone hybrid to deal with the roughly 15% who still don't want to do things online, but it is still representative of the entire population.

Ms. Elizabeth May: How many people were in the sample collection?

Mr. Francis Graves: There were 1,600.

Ms. Elizabeth May: So it was bigger than our last one.

Mr. Francis Graves: One of the questions was a pretty simple one: under Canada's first-past-the-post system, Canada is divided into 338 ridings and in every riding the candidate who wins the most votes wins the right to represent their riding in the House of Commons, regardless of whether they have received a majority of votes. That's the first-past-the-post description.

An alternative system is called proportional representation, where parties share seats in the House of Commons, reflecting the percentage of votes they received. For example, if a party wins 40% of the vote, it will receive roughly 40% of the seats.

The final one was another alternative called preferential voting, where the voters ranked their preferences instead of voting for a single party. One by one, the least popular candidates are dropped and the votes are redistributed to other candidates based on those preferences. A candidate wins when they may have obtained more than half the votes.

I don't think we have time, but we had a much more detailed presentation that presented what we consider to be some of the major pros and cons out there. For example, in describing first past the post, we would've had a more detailed description. We would have said that the first-past-the-post system has the advantage of being easy to understand. It makes it easier for a party to win a majority of seats and govern on the basis of its platform, rather than having to form a coalition government with other parties. It also provides clear, local representation. The cons are that it doesn't require a majority of the votes to win a majority of the seats.

Both the Trudeau majority in 2015 and the Harper majority in 2011 won with about 40% of the vote. In a multi-party system, there may be an imbalance in the main options. For example, the Conservative vote may split across the Progressive Conservative and Reform parties. Today the progressive vote splits across...and so on.

● (1850)

The Chair: We'll have to go to Mr. Aldag now.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Yes, I'm out of time.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): That's fine, because I was actually going to go there. You're well into where I wanted to begin my questioning, so you can tell me if there's any more. When you outline at the high level that first round of questions about whether you want to see 40% of seats assigned to 40% of the votes, it sounds very nice until you get to the next level of discussion on the pros and cons. Are there any other examples that you have, examples that you needed a minute or so to finish responding to?

I was fascinated with the results you were giving, and I was trying to figure out how that was presented. We heard from Forum Research this morning, and the level of misunderstanding was really quite striking. People couldn't identify what the existing system was, yet they wanted to get rid of it. Are there any other bits of information you wanted to give, or does that give us a sample of how —?

Mr. Francis Graves: Since I've already walked through the example of the difference between the more reflected and the top-of-mind approach, the simpler approach that we use, I would point out that we did do a random controlled assignment experiment, where half the respondents actually received one version, and the other half....

There were some differences. The general ranking remained relatively the same, proportional representation was still on top, but the disadvantage that the first-past-the-post system had was a lesson somewhat, when people were presented with this particular argument about pros and cons. I think it reflects some of the difficulty of moving from the elegant simplicity of half the votes, half the seats, to the more complex questions about do you have local representation, and is this going to...?

By the way, on that question that we had in here, I would have actually liked to probe this a bit more. We are going to return to this sample representatively and give them a ballot and some more information with the results of this first survey. However, one thing I would like to point out is that we have extensive polling showing that the issue of coalition governments is not something that is seen as scary or dangerous by most Canadians. In fact, they're at least as warm to that idea as single-party solutions. That's quite a distinct change. It may be the case that as we move into a more pluralistic, complex society, the ability to solve all of this with a single party is not as evident. I just want to stress that it is, I think, a sea change change in the way the citizenry looks at the issues of coalitions, which historically was that they're dangerous and they can't work well. They really don't feel that way today.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

We had a really good example this morning that I hadn't even thought of about small parties actually influencing the election of the leadership of the other parties. I thought, wow, that's really interesting; are Canadians ready for that? Anyway, I won't get into that, but you get all these other kinds of implications that play out and I think it's a discussion that, as Canadians, we need to have as to how far we can go.

That leads me to my next piece that I found really interesting. In some of your comments, it was this idea of there being no need for undue haste, and I'd written down “no need for recklessness or speed.” So it's a question of incrementalism. Do you get a sense from the polling that you've done about, as my seatmate here likes to talk about, how quickly do we rip off the Band-Aid and go full throttle, exactly, or to throw in sound effects, snap, crackle, pop? How fast do we go with this? Are Canadians ready to throw it all out and start again? How do we get this right on bringing it in?

● (1855)

Mr. Francis Graves: No, they're not. As I said, Canadians tell us, to the tune of 51%, that they think we have the best democracy in the world. So it's not like they're saying to throw everything out, holus-bolus. On the other hand, though, they do say there are some parts of this that they really don't think are working as well as they could in terms of those principles of equality, fairness, and legitimacy.

I think the timing is that more people, by a significant margin, say we should do some things now. I mean, let's be blunt; we've been talking about this for a hundred years in Parliament and some of the problems still persist. They may be less aggravated right now for reasons that may or may not persist, but I think the public are ready and have given us some guidance as to what a citizen-built prescription for improving the health of the democracy would look like, recognizing that the fundamental system we have is something that still enjoys institutional legitimacy.

Mr. John Aldag: I'll leave it there.

In the time remaining, I'd like to turn to the other panellists who brought a bit of a different perspective than we got from the poll. It's a line of questioning that I had explored a bit this morning and I'd like to get your thoughts here.

When we look at disincentives or incentives for parties to change their behaviour, on nominations as an example, how do they get more women, a real basic part of our democratic process is that it's very grassroots. The political parties are able to set their rules and they implement them. That's what feeds this whole system. I'd like your thoughts about how much you think you would like to see us as parliamentarians, as legislators, imposing our legislative will on Canadians, on those political grassroots. If we're saying as with the bill from yesterday that there will be financial penalties if you don't achieve 50% women in your nominations, that starts taking away some real ability of the grassroots to run their nomination processes.

Do you have any comments to offer about how hands-off versus hands-on we need to be as government compared to political grassroots in this country?

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: I think the government is doing a great job listening to Canadians—and that is what you need to do first—but after you've received the information back from Canadians, I think some leadership is needed to create an evidence-based decision and go out and justify to Canadians why you are doing that. I think it's a dialogue.

Mr. John Aldag: Is there anything else, or can I move to Ms. Decter?

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: Go ahead.

Ms. Ann Decter: I would agree on the issue of leadership. I think it's good for the government to think about where the country needs to get to.

Also, you are talking about grassroots as if barriers and prejudices don't manifest at the community level. I think they do, so some encouragement to act differently is a good thing. Setting a standard —“This is a benefit you can get if you meet this affirmative action level”—is good.

The federal public service is a great employer of women, and it's because these kinds of affirmative action programs happen there. I think you can show some leadership, and people will respond.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Richards, go ahead.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): I have all kinds of questions here, but we'll do what we can.

The first thing I'll say is to my friends at Fair Vote Canada. I am looking at the package we have in front of us, and I have to confess that, even after the questions that have been asked by Mr. Reid and others, I'm still a little confused. I appreciate that you are going to provide us a link, and I'll have a look at that. If there is a little time at the end, maybe I'll ask you some things to try to get some clarity, but if not, I can do it that way, and I know how to find you if I have further questions. I'll come back to that if there is time.

I want to start with a question for either of you from Fair Vote Canada, whoever would like to answer.

It might not be a very smart assumption to make, based on some of the comments the Prime Minister has made in the last 24 hours or based on his record of keeping promises, but let's assume that he is going to keep the promise and that there is going to be some kind of change. Is there a type of change that you would see as a negative change?

In other words, would any change be positive, in terms of a system, or are there systems that you would see as a negative change, something that you wouldn't want to see supported?

● (1900)

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: Our mandate from our supporters is voter equality. People want equal, effective votes, so we support proportional representation.

On the other side, just another shift to a majoritarian system would not be a great idea: You still leave half of the electorate unrepresented; you still have problems with false majority governments; and you have exactly the same problems that you have with first past the post.

We support proportional representation. We put three systems on the table for you to look at, which we've worked very hard on and which we think are very proportional. They are based on a lot of feedback that we get from Canadians.

There are some decisions and trade-offs to be made. How big are ridings going to get? Fair Vote Canada believes in local representation. We think that all candidates should face the voters. There are some nuances within the system that we feel very strongly about.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: I'd like to add one thing on the other majoritarian system, the alternative vote. It worries me tremendously, because what that system does is create pressure towards a two-party system. As you move towards a two-party system, getting new reforms gets even harder, because the two parties that are dominant have vested interests against reform. I think that's what we have in Australia, where they have that system. For that reason—it's kind of a political-economic argument—I think it's worse. There is more risk.

Mr. Blake Richards: Along the same lines, I saw a report today from the Fraser Institute. I want to read a one- or two-sentence clip from it and see if you agree with this assessment. It says,

> The AV system fails to address any of the five values the government seeks to address in its electoral reform initiative, and, in fact, it would create a new problem: our future elections would be less competitive.

Is that a statement you would generally agree with?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: Yes.

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: Certainly on some points of effectiveness.... If you are still leaving half the electorate unrepresented, you are not hitting that bar on effectiveness.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks.

I'll come back if we have time.

Ms. Decter, I don't know if it's obvious, but I would hope it's obvious, everyone in this room I think can agree that the goal you've expressed is important, which is to see more women serve in our Parliament, our legislatures, and elsewhere. It's a goal I think we all would agree with, and one we should all be doing everything we can to encourage.

The one concern I have with regard to the idea of incentivizing parties or punishing them based on the idea of a quota is the idea of democracy within the parties themselves. At some point when you're talking about a certain number of male or female candidates needing to be chosen, then you get to a point somewhere along the way when you're telling a riding they must choose a candidate who's male or who's female, whatever it might be. My concern is we're then interfering a bit with the internal workings of the party by these carrot-and-stick approaches.

Could you make some other suggestions that would help to provide encouragement that wouldn't require that sort of incentive or punishment approach in a nomination process, things we could do to help encourage greater participation by females in both nomination processes and elections?

Ms. Ann Decter: Other strategies have been proposed. One is having funds available for women within a party. These funds are set aside to help women run for office because we know women on average have lower incomes, and they often don't have the same fundraising networks that men do. We've certainly heard elected women talk about how difficult those things are especially when you're starting out, so the party sets aside funds that could be only be drawn on by women candidates.

You could do things that would encourage riding associations to look harder at or for women candidates that aren't necessarily prescriptive in the same sense, but you could say this is the process you need to go to—it's a way of describing what the NDP has done—before you can have your nomination meeting. We need to know you have talked to *x* number of qualified women candidates or something like that. There are ways.

A party system that is producing the current results needs to change. You're talking about a more natural, slower, education process rather than a forced one. If you want a different result, you have to do things differently.

● (1905)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Blake Richards: Is that all the time I have? Thank you. I appreciate that. We all share the same goal. I think we're trying to find different ways to get there.

The Chair: Ms. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Many thanks to the witnesses and to the community members for being with us this evening.

[*English*]

As my colleague mentioned, we're going to stay calm and ERRE on because, as we know, the Prime Minister has reiterated his deep commitment to this process, so rest assured we are soldiering on.

On that note, I would like to talk a little about some of the information we heard. I'll start with Madam Carmichael. You mentioned women, and I know I bring this up often because as a woman who ran in what you would call a non-stronghold, I must have been elected because of the electoral system. Rest assured that my decision to run for office had nothing to do with the electoral system. It had to do with the job itself. I just wanted to mention that.

You asked how voters can know if a party is running candidates. I'm pretty sure if they were to go on the party website they could see who the candidates are. I'm pretty sure people do look into that kind of information.

[*Translation*]

First of all, I would like to thank you for being with us today, Ms. Lanthier. As Quebeckers, it is very important to us to be able to communicate with citizens in their preferred language. The fact that you are here is very important to me. This is the first time we have had the opportunity to hear from someone about the reality of francophones outside Quebec.

We held a public consultation in the village of St-Pierre-Jolys, Manitoba. We were very proud to be there. I also spoke with someone from the QCGN, which represents the anglophone minority in Quebec. So we heard about that reality.

In any case, thank you for being here this evening.

[*English*]

Now I'd like to go back to the issue that we've been talking a little about. We've heard a lot about the importance of the nomination process. Regardless of the gender, when someone decides to run for office, there are two things. The first is getting the nomination, and the second is then winning the election.

In the testimony we have received, we've heard that women don't have a problem getting elected once they get the nomination. We're really good at winning, which is great, but it's to get the nomination. We've talked a little about fundraising, in that women may not have the means to put forth the required funding for their campaign. There are also issues with respect to day care and being able to take time off work and so on.

I know that some initiatives have been taken. I note, for instance, that in the Liberal Party we have a fund that is available for female candidates to help them. In fact, in our nomination process as well, there is a criteria that the electoral district associations must make every effort and prove they've done everything they can to find a female candidate. I'm quite happy about that as well.

The question of enticing people to run for office, though, is not always as easy because of the actual job itself. For instance, if you happen to live in Calgary, you're thinking of running for office, and you have a young family, the idea of the commute can probably be a barrier for you, the idea of not being near your family, and also, there are the long hours and so on and so forth, as well as the tone in Parliament.

I'd like to get your opinion on this. Do you think there should be more weight put on the nomination process and those barriers rather than the actual electoral system? I'm just talking about getting women elected. I'm not talking about all the other things that we can be doing. I'm just saying that I don't think it's the electoral system alone; I think it's a suite of things that we need to do.

I'd like to get your opinion, Ms. Decter, and then of course yours, Madam Carmichael.

● (1910)

Ms. Ann Decter: Yes, I would agree that the electoral system alone is not the issue or the solution, but we've come to the conclusion that it is part of the solution.

All of those other things matter. In particular, the travel matters, more so at the federal level. If you think of it traditionally, decades ago, women moved with their husbands to Ottawa and raised their kids there. It's just not the way politics is done now, but all those kinds of things about the other structures that make it easier for women to work also make it easier for women to be elected.

These things are part of it, but we also think that electoral reform is part of the process.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Madam Carmichael.

Ms. Kelly Carmichael: Thanks.

I think we agree with that. There's a bunch of things that we can do to help women get elected, and I think we are doing a bunch of things already, but we're still not rising in the numbers.

Some of the initiatives are great to see, and I think they're very helpful, but if we're changing our electoral system, and if the government is also looking at issues under a gender parity lens, then I think we have to look at the electoral systems, and proportional representation does better. When you look at the numbers, you see Sweden at 45%, Finland at 43%, Norway at 40%, Denmark at 39%, the Netherlands at 39%, and Germany at 37%. Then you come down to Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom at 26%, 25%, and 23%.

First-past-the-post systems create barriers. If we can't identify them, then maybe we need to do more work on it, but on the results, on the correlation, Arend Lijphart has said that up to 8% more women get elected in proportional systems. It's a correlation.

We need to figure out what those things are, but I think we can be confident that PR elects more women.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I just wanted to say—

The Chair: We don't have much time. Do you want Madame Lanthier to answer too?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lanthier, would you like to say anything about the recruitment of female candidates?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: The difficulties that women face in being elected to the House of Commons are the same ones that linguistic minorities face. It is the same reality. How can you convince people who are different from you to vote for you, adopt your values or understand life through your particular lens?

The questions relating to the representation of women are about the same as those relating to the representation of minorities.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Romanado.

Thank you to the witnesses.

It is over to Ms. Sancoucy now.

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

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here this evening.

This is the committee's 44th meeting. It has now heard from close to 100 witnesses and has received thousands of comments.

My first question is for the representatives of Fair Vote Canada.

I was interested to hear that the comments the Prime Minister made earlier this week, to the effect that reform might not be necessary, actually mobilized the 65,000 members you represent, rather than decreasing their motivation.

The same thing might apply to the people you surveyed, Mr. Graves. Who knows? That might be why he said the opposite today, from what I understand.

In any case, as a Quebecer, I must admit that it felt like Groundhog Day this week. We have seen the same thing in Quebec. An opposition party denounces the unfairness of the voting method, since one party can win a majority of seats with a minority of support, and suddenly it is the opposite once it gets into power.

In your presentation, you said that 90 countries around the world, including 85 OECD member countries, have adopted proportional representation. From what you know about their transition to proportional representation, how do you get out of the vicious circle in which a party maintains one thing while in opposition and something else when they are in power, because what is fair in one situation is no longer fair in the other situation? How do you get away from that?

● (1915)

Mr. Réal Lavergne: I can answer easily. How do you get away from that? In general, you cannot. Unfortunately, that is a fact. Scott Reid wrote an article about this in 2005. There have hardly been any countries that have moved from a system like ours to proportional representation, and it is precisely for the reason you mentioned.

That is why we are now calling on the government to do things differently and not make decisions based on partisan interests. We are asking the same thing of the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP, and the Green Party, because that is the only way we can actually achieve change.

You were not here yesterday, Ms. Sansoucy, but Mr. Hughes, who is from New Zealand, said that the decision should not be based on what happened during the last election or what will happen during the next election. A decision must be based on what we want for the next 100 years. That is the perspective we must take.

We are calling on the government and the opposition to work together, to give us what we deserve as citizens, and to keep the promise that every vote counts.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

Mr. Graves, I understood your presentation, but a few bits escaped me.

You talked about public disillusionment. I understood that adopting a system in which each vote counts could help reduce that disillusionment.

I would like to hear more about that please.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Graves: What I think the public is saying in our surveys is that they feel a voting system that produced an equal impact from all votes would be one with which they would feel considerably more comfortable. But I do believe that the research that we've been doing over the years suggests that we should extend the horizon beyond that question, which I think we should do. The public thinks we should look at some other methods for improving the relationship between citizens and their governments.

Even though it's way outside the realm of electoral reform, when we put these things into a forced choice hopper, the public is saying that it's great to make the elections every four years as equal, fair, transparent, and valid and produce the best...That's great.

However, the skepticism and cynicism which characterizes the citizenry today, who are much better educated and have access to a blizzard of other types of information that wasn't available in previous eras, doesn't make them comfortable with the idea that they just get a kick at the can every four years. They want some kind of method between elections where the voice of citizens can be heard.

By the way, we've tested this quite carefully over the years. Even though they heartily approve of consultations where those people who have a point of view can make their views known, they also understand that they need something that is more representative, that would look more like what everybody would look like if they all showed up.

Frankly, when you're doing things like open web consultations or town hall meetings, you're going to give additional emphasis to the voices of those who are most concerned, who are perhaps most knowledgeable, who perhaps have an axe to grind, or to other types of vested interests.

We need to have an approach—and I think the tools are there and available to do this brilliantly, inexpensively, and rapidly—to provide representative, informed, and reflected input from citizens as well.

I don't want to belabour that, but this would be an important ingredient for dealing with some of the skepticism. I can show you all kinds of other indicators about how deep the scepticism is. Only 10% of Canadians trust politicians. That's cartoonishly low. When I ask if they trust people like you, well 75% trust. Well, from where are we recruiting these politicians? They must be coming from Mars because they don't look anything like the good stock of average Canadians. It's really not healthy at all.

I have one final point. Our research suggested that if you were to do routine citizen engagement, there would be an important role for MPs, which would expand the kinds of things they do. This would be a natural combination for MPs to be involved in this process of citizen engagement. It would be a really interesting additional responsibility to give to the MPs in addition to the other duties they have.

● (1920)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

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

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Lavergne, hello.

Mr. Lavergne is a regular here. I think everyone has seen him often, in the hallways, at the entrance. He always says hello.

I noticed that you were very attentive yesterday. I a previous answer, you were able to quote one of the witnesses from New Zealand word for word. I will come back to you later.

[*English*]

Mr. Graves, my question is for you. You did some polling research about many issues. We welcome that kind of investigation, and that kind of result.

I would like to get back to the specific issue of an electronic voting system. We are ready to make millions of dollars, if not billions of dollars, for some business and banking transactions, but we are very afraid to move toward an electronic voting system.

I can speak for myself. I have an open mind, but first of all a sheet of paper can be put in the computer and it's all right. But by computer, by telephone, or something else, even by iPhone, I don't know why, maybe it's because I'm 52 years old, but I am very afraid of that.

Let me give you this example. Two weeks ago there was a huge political event in Quebec politics, the leadership race of the Parti Québécois, the official opposition. Believe it or not, it was by an electronic system and believe it or not, they had some problems.

This is why the call for the new leader was postponed for almost a full hour. Everybody wondered what happened. I got a cue from some friends there, and I still have friends even in the Parti Québécois. I'm not a separatist. Don't get me wrong, even if I do respect their position, I don't really share it.

I was told that the system crashed. Based on your polling, what do you have to say to us?

Mr. Francis Graves: Our questions asked this: "if the system was secure". By the way, there are obviously serious questions that many experts have raised. In an era of WikiLeaks and pervasive hacking, we know that this is not a walk in the park, but I would stress that all of these problems are being solved in other complex areas such as fintech. The development of these new blockchain technologies is brilliant. Let's be clear as well, paper systems are not flawless either. We've had hanging chads and other kinds of problems in the past—not we, but others have.

I think we have to build a system that is at least as secure as the current system. I think the technologies are going to make that absolutely possible, if not today, tomorrow or very soon. This will eventually happen, and I think the public are telling us that it's time to do this. You have the expertise to shore up that other problem, and it's not a trivial problem. It's a profound problem, but they think it is solvable and frankly, as a non-expert, I think the evidence is that this could be solved now.

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

[*Translation*]

Back to you, Mr. Lavergne.

Not to flatter you, but I know you have been very attentive to our proceedings, for some time. You have been very attentive throughout the process to achieve electoral reform. I also had the pleasure of talking with you last summer, when the committee met in July. We held eight meetings, in the middle of the summer.

Mr. Lavergne, I would like to hear your comments in very broad and general terms. How do you see our work so far, since you have been a very attentive witness at the committee's last 43 meetings?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: I have truly been very impressed by the quality of the witnesses. In fact, I had the honour of summarizing nearly all the meetings for our organization. We also created a table showing how many witnesses supported proportional representation, how many were opposed to it, and so forth. That gave us a very interesting view of things. You invited witnesses from all over the world. This has been a tremendous learning experience for me. I have really enjoyed it.

By the way, regarding the list of witnesses, we calculate that approximately 85% of those who expressed an opinion were in favour of proportional representation. Mr. Mayrand, the Chief Electoral Officer, did not express his preference, of course; it was not his place to do so. There were a handful of people who preferred the current system, the first past the post system, and an even smaller group who preferred a first past the post preferential system.

● (1925)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Over to you, Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: I will let Mr. Bossio begin, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Bossio: I do really appreciate Scott expressing his concern over my riding being neglected in this diagram under rural-urban. To me, it actually looks more urban and small urban than it actually looks rural-urban. I have one of the largest rural ridings in southern Ontario, with a very strong rural presence. My largest town is 8,000 people.

I had three electoral reform town halls, which were very well attended, I might add. They all were very much in favour of electoral reform—as am I, to be perfectly up front. The biggest concern that all of them expressed was this rural mix. How do we get it right so that we end up maintaining rural representation? Every time we redraw the maps, our ridings get larger and larger. My riding is barely sustainable now. It takes four hours to drive from one corner to the other corner of the riding. I have 19 municipalities, one Mohawk territory, two county levels of government, the attached myriad entities—economic development, business, community, social—all of which I'm trying to represent on the Hill and lobby on behalf of. Compare that with an urban centre like Toronto, which has 30 MPs and one municipality, one chamber of commerce, one housing authority.

The deep concern that they have, and that I have, is what are we going to do in the rural ridings? Under your map here, once again it looks like the rural areas will get crunched, will get hammered. As I said, you don't even have anything where my riding is. Where you do have your circles, they mostly just happen to be right near a small urban centre, not a large urban centre like in Ottawa, but Kingston, Peterborough, Cobourg, Trenton, Belleville. These are all larger centres in eastern Ontario that all have representation.

I guess Scott's riding will expand substantially, and maybe Haliburton; I don't know. I don't know how you cover this massive hole that you have in the middle, which is actually the largest riding in the whole bunch.

I guess I would throw it out there once again: how do you address...?

Mr. Réal Lavergne: Can I speak to that?

That is in fact the whole purpose of the rural/urban model. We haven't called it "rural/small urban/urban" model, because that just gets too complicated.

Mr. Mike Bossio: No, it's actually small urban and urban. It's not rural.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: Small urban is included in the rural umbrella that we're talking about. The idea is to create a model that has enough flexibility that where there is felt to be a strong need to retain, more or less, the boundaries of a riding as exists currently, this would be possible. It would still be possible to have proportional representation.

If you like, we can meet you on this at any time. I can come to the Hill. As I said, I'm 10 minutes away on my bike. I can come by, we can chat about it, and we can look at it very closely.

In this example that's in this map we were looking at earlier, you have nine existing rural ridings, rural and small urban ridings, that become eight. There is some expansion, but it's really modest compared with what you would have to have under MMP, where you'd be expanding the size of ridings by 60% or 70%. It makes a huge difference. It's a huge difference relative to STV, where the only way you can have multi-member ridings is to group two ridings together. You actually have to double the size of ridings.

● (1930)

Mr. Mike Bossio: Excuse me, but the problem we already have is this. I'm the chair of the national rural caucus. The reason I created the rural caucus was so that we could offset this lobbying capability that you see in the large urban centres. Any further increase in rural ridings is completely unacceptable. We're already stretched to the max. You can't stretch it any further than that. That's in southern Ontario. What are you going to do in the north? Right now many of them have to commute by plane just to travel around their ridings.

To me, this really is at the root of the biggest issue you have to deal with. As I said, I support electoral reform because I think, yes, every vote should count, and we need to find a solution that will work, but if it will be at the expense of rural, not a chance. We're already getting hammered as it is. We're already at a total disadvantage.

Mr. Réal Lavergne: It's really not at the expense of rural.... The distribution of seats, rural and urban, stays the same. You don't have an electoral reform and try to rebalance power at that stage.

Mr. Mike Bossio: This really goes to the crux of the situation. Because right now we have the small communities fund that is defined. How they define a small community is 100,000 people or fewer, which is what you've done here, as well, right in your written report. This is the conundrum. How does a community of 1,000 compete for funding against a community of 100,000 people?

And now you're actually creating an even more unequal representation by increasing the size of these ridings. Even a 15% increase in the size of these ridings.... You don't understand. Have any of you grown up in a rural community and had to compete for those funds or been a representative on a rural municipal council and had to compete for those funds against the larger centres? It's very difficult.

Even though there are a lot of rural areas within eastern Ontario, they're controlled by urban centres, like Kingston, Peterborough, Belleville—

Mr. Réal Lavergne: I have a solution which is that, instead of reconfiguring the ridings, you add a small top-up of 10% to 15% new seats. Then you can leave the rural ridings exactly the way they are. If you think that's politically viable, that's one way to move ahead with proportional representation.

You can't have proportional representation without having some formula for multi-member ridings or top-ups. So, if you want to have multi-member ridings and top-ups, and you also want to keep single-member ridings exactly the way they are in rural areas, the only way to do it is to add a certain number of MPs.

That's what we're trying to suggest with the rural/urban model. If you want to go that way, that is an option. If it's—

The Chair: Our time's up. But it's been a very vigorous debate, and that's what keeps up coming back day after day.

Thank you to the witnesses. That was a very stimulating discussion tonight.

Mr. Reid?

Mr. Scott Reid: I'll wait until you dismiss the witnesses.

I wonder if we could take a few minutes just to pass out the motion that I....

The Chair: Oh, yes. Okay. This is not in camera, though. Do you want it in public?

Mr. Scott Reid: It's a public thing, yes.

The Chair: Okay.

I thank the witnesses. Mr. Graves, thank you for your data; and Ms. Carmichael, it was nice to meet you. Mr. Lavergne, it's nice to see you again and to have the input from the French-language minority communities. It's very important.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Lanthier. Thank you all.

[*English*]

Okay, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: If you don't mind just hanging on a second, until I get a copy of my own motion. It's late and we've been sitting in this committee, in various rooms, for six hours, so I may not be as crisp as I would like to be.

Colleagues, yesterday, Professor Becker testified—

● (1935)

The Chair: Just a second, Mr. Reid.

We have Mr. Fraser with us, as well. Welcome, Mr. Fraser.

We have more business to take care of.

Okay. So, if Mr. Reid could have everyone's attention, please, that would be ideal.

Mr. Scott Reid: You may recall at yesterday's meeting, while I was asking him questions, I said I'll be trying to get back to you with some suggestions about other models that you haven't done that are within the three families of proportional models that I think are the most high profile in the discussion in Canada, those being, STV, MMP, and the rural-urban model.

I said, for each of them, would you be able to run something that does not run into problems with the issue of proportionate representation under the Constitution, which could occur if you add seats?

This is an attempt to actually give him one model for each of these three categories, the first restriction being it has to comply with no new seats for any province. You get exactly the same number of seats, or the same number of MPs, rather, as you had under the 2000—and I see there's an error here. I see 2011. I actually meant to say....

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's 2015.

Mr. Scott Reid: The 2015 redistribution. Forgive that; it's 2015.

Secondly, the redistribution has to be capable of being executed on an expedited basis, which means any redistribution cannot be...as we see here, nine seats becoming eight, which would require a full two-year-long redistribution, but rather the briefer redistribution that is possible if you simply merge two ridings or three ridings or whatever together.

For all of this, once you've complied with those two restrictions, try to make this as proportional as possible, and the technology or the metric for measuring that is the composite Gallagher index. So that's what I've tried to accomplish in your task. Have us ask him to prepare those models for us.

I would love to pass this tonight, but if people want to take it home, I'll accept waiting until Tuesday. I just mention the obvious constraint, which is that we are trying to get this stuff back. Our negotiations are supposed to be wrapped up on November 10, so getting something back to him earlier is preferable to doing it later, but I leave that to the committee's discretion.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is good. I too feel that sense of urgency for anything the committee wants to really consider, that we need to get at it pretty quickly.

My only thought is to ask for more time, because at first blush these two conditions you have down here, Scott, seem fine, but I have this inkling that there might be one other condition, just in terms of guiding his process. I feel if we set him off on a course and then say, “Oh no, you've given us some modelling that is actually stuff we can't consider because of X”....

I wouldn't mind the extra bit of time, even though I get that sense of urgency also.

Mr. Scott Reid: Chair, do you mind if I respond to that before you go to the next person?

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Nathan, I appreciate that. The goal here is simply to make sure we have something that will not cross a practical barrier that would make it impossible to implement for 2019. There may be additional things. Those are the two that I know of.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: But broadly, Chair, just in terms of the intention, I'm totally in agreement. And I was impressed by Professor Becker's attempt to go at this a different way, which is to track your proportionality rather than start from some opposite thing of “imagine the House is 5% this way and 10%...”. That actually answers the wrong question. This answers the question we're actually going for, which is the trade-off question that we keep talking about: “If you do this, you have to trade off that”.

I'm in favour of it broadly. I wouldn't mind a bit of time just to see if there's a third condition that would be helpful.

The Chair: Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I would support this entirely. I was also impressed with Professor Becker. He appears also to be prepared to continue to do work on this issue for us without expecting a contract, so I don't think there's a financial issue. It's an extremely generous offer. He will need time, because he has a day job. I would urge that we move it forward now with some wiggle language toward the end that says “and any other conditions that strike us that don't slow down his work”.

If we tell him tomorrow that we really want him to do these, he could work all weekend. I think we're down to days that matter, and I'd rather let him know thumbs up that we appreciate his civic-minded brilliance and we like his composite Gallagher index, that we really want this work, and we may have another condition to tell him about later—if Nathan can live with that.

● (1940)

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Yes, Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: I'd be happy to send this off now, and then any addition would come back to this committee in the form of a motion.

The Chair: I missed that part, about any addition.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If there are any further conditions that we would add, it wouldn't be just unilaterally done; the committee would have to pass it.

The Chair: We send this off. We ask Mr. Weber Becker if he'll do this.

Ms. Elizabeth May: We'll say, “We want you to design it...”.

The Chair: That's what we'll do.

Mr. Scott Reid: Sorry, what Ms. May was saying.... I don't think Mr. DeCourcey meant it as an amendment, but you can ask him.

The Chair: ...and any other condition—

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: No, there is no amendment. This would be passed as it's written now, and then if we discuss any other conditions that we want to append to this, they would come forward in the form of a new motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Scott Reid: I think that's a good idea.

The Chair: There seems to be unanimity and no need for a vote. We'll go ahead with that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Just to be clear, it's with the 2015, not the 2011. That was my error.

The Chair: Are we in camera at the moment? No.

But we'll be seeing each other on the 26th.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Lafrance): The 25th, 26th, and 27th.

The Chair: No, I mean informally getting together.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, right.

The Chair: Yes, that's all. You'll be getting more information about that.

Nothing earth-shattering, but normally we discuss that in camera.

Thank you very much. Have a good weekend, everybody. We'll see you next whenever.

The meeting is adjourned.