



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

ERRE • NUMBER 046 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, October 26, 2016



Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Wednesday, October 26, 2016

• (1905)

[English]

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

This is meeting number 46 of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

We finished our witness hearings; last night we had our last set of witnesses. Tonight is our big open-mic evening here in Ottawa. We've had open-mic sessions all over the country. We spent about three and a half weeks travelling the country.

[Translation]

We have crossed the country and visited the three territories and 10 provinces. At each stop, we heard from witnesses but also set aside time to listen to comments from the public.

We will do the same thing today.

[English]

We're going to basically use the formula we used on the road when we had public open-mic sessions.

Those of you who wish to speak have registered, which is great. Essentially, each person at the mic has two minutes. I know it doesn't sound like much, but it has worked very well everywhere we've gone.

I'll call two people up to the mic. At any given time we'll have two people at the mics, the person speaking and the person waiting to speak. The person waiting to speak can gather their thoughts, and when the person speaking is finished, we'll go to the person who's waiting. Then we'll call another person up to the mic that's free, and they can wait for their turn.

We have, to start off, Ms. Helen Johansen and Mr. Mark Batten-Carew.

Go ahead, Ms. Johansen, please, for two minutes.

Ms. Helen Johansen (As an Individual): Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak with you.

I think that democracy is the worst of all possible governments except for all the others.

The Chair: I've heard that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Helen Johansen: I believe that 30% of the vote should lead you to approximately 30% of the seats. A majority government shouldn't be based on 38% of the popular vote.

I do not want to have to vote strategically so that a particular group or party does not get in. I want to be able to vote for the person with the values and interests that I have.

Parliament should reflect Canada's diversity. A minority Parliament is not all that bad. It forces parties to work together, and it also.... If you think back in time, our universal health care system was actually put into sway by a minority Parliament.

I also want to tell you that I am very concerned that the Prime Minister is on record as having expressed support for the alternative voting system, which is used to elect members in the House of Representatives in Australia.

If Canada were to adopt the alternative vote, it would be a major step in the wrong direction. The alternative vote would produce a House of Commons that would in general be even more politically unrepresentative of the electorate than the House produced by first past the post.

I know this from personal experience because I married an Australian. In our family, we know what happens in that country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Helen Johansen: I would like to add that changing Canada's voting system to a proportional one should really be a no-brainer.

I would say to the Liberal government, please stick to your promise and change the electoral system so that it is a proportional representative one.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Johansen.

I call Mr. Stephen Nickerson to mic number 1.

I have a couple of cards here. From time to time, when there's about 20 seconds' time remaining, if we're really going over time, I'll put up the yellow card. That will be followed, at some point, by the red card, which signals that time is up.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): That's so biased. Where's the green card?

The Chair: Green means go. At the start, it's a green light.

We'll give the green light for two minutes to Mr. Batten-Carew.

Mr. Mark Batten-Carew (As an Individual): Hello. My name is Mark Batten-Carew. I strongly endorse the proportional representation submissions from both Fair Vote Canada and Leadnow, but I'd like to go further to impress upon you why single transferable vote-plus would be the best proportional system for Canada.

STV-plus is one form of the rural-urban proportional model. It uses multi-member ridings. Right away, this provides better proportionality than MMP. In addition, one seat from each riding would be moved up to the regional level to be used as a top-up seat for even better proportionality.

There are six reasons why STV-plus is the best proportional system.

First, STV-plus uses ranked ballots, along with multiple seats per riding, which enables voters to be much clearer about their intentions than they can be with a single X.

Second, since STV-plus has multiple seats per riding, each of the three major parties will stand a good chance of getting at least one seat in every riding. In fact, with STV-plus, over 90% of all voters will have a local MP from their first-choice party, and over 98% of all voters will have at least a regional MP from their first-choice party.

Third, STV-plus provides the most proportional representation in Parliament, as measured by its Gallagher index of 2.2, which was better than all 62 other systems tested by Byron Weber Becker.

Fourth, STV-plus provides the strongest support for independent and minority candidates, due to the fact that there are multiple local MPs, giving minorities a greater chance to win a seat.

Fifth, STV-plus enables voters to hold MPs to account by giving voters the chance to change the MP they vote for, while still voting for their first-choice party.

Sixth, STV-plus encourages a new civility in politics, both during the election and in Parliament. Since there are multiple seats to win, it will be impossible to know whom to target, which will reduce negative campaigning. Also, after earning a seat, every MP will have to work with their former opponents, so there will be consequences for bad behaviour.

I want to make one point about mixed member proportional. MMP is basically just first past the post with a layer of proportionality added. In effect, MMP asks, since you were forced to vote strategically at the riding level, which party did you really want to vote for? In contrast, STV asks, what combination of representatives will best satisfy the largest number of voters?

Thank you.

•(1910)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I just have a little note of caution to speakers. The interpreters have to keep up. I understand you want to get it all into two minutes, but we'll give you a little flexibility for the sake of the interpreters. Every now and then, I can tell that they're struggling. Thank you very much.

Also, we are in a House of Commons committee room, and the formal rules of committee proceedings apply. That means there cannot be any pictures until the gavel comes down at the end of the meeting. If you could respect that rule, that would be greatly appreciated.

I call Mr. Christopher Wilson to mic number two, please.

Mr. Nickerson, go ahead, please.

Mr. Stephen Nickerson (As an Individual): I submitted a brief, but there is no time in two minutes to talk about that, so I thought I'd address the question of this referendum that we keep hearing about.

I assume there is a perceived need for a referendum because the current House was elected using the old FPTP system and as such does not accurately reflect the will of Canadians. While I sympathize with this concern, I think it would be better if the cost, delay, and potential divisiveness of a referendum could be avoided.

The decision that gave this committee its credibility, and the highlight of the electoral reform process to date, was when its makeup was adjusted to reflect the proportionality of the popular vote in the last election, instead of the seat count. The crowning accomplishment of this committee could be something similar.

Several briefs have been submitted to this committee extolling the simplicity and efficiency of weighted or fractional voting. It is a system based on the House as it is currently constituted, but it provides near-perfect proportionality by weighting the votes of each member according to the popular vote obtained by their party.

If there were to be a free vote in the House of Commons, and the votes were counted in this way, the results would be almost identical to those that would be obtained by a referendum. This is the principle on which representative democracy is based, and you have the opportunity to make your work an example of what is possible, if you follow through—and it is imperative that you follow through.

Personal legacies are on the line. Not only will Justin find a place of honour beside his father's bill of rights and freedoms, but each member of this committee and the party they represent will be remembered for their contributions, both positive and negative. Eventually, PR will come to Canada, and this is your opportunity to get on the right side of history.

I'm sure that if we adopt some sort—any sort—of PR, future Parliaments would, over time, come up with a system that truly meets the needs of all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nickerson.

I'll call Gerald Ackerman to mic number one.

Now we'll hear from Christopher Wilson, please.

•(1915)

Mr. Christopher Wilson (As an Individual): My name is Chris Wilson, and I'm a senior research fellow with the Centre on Governance at the University of Ottawa.

From the first few comments here, I may be in the wrong place, because I didn't come here to advocate for anything. I came here to learn from you. In particular, what I'd like to learn from you is, over the course of these last few months, in all the submissions you've read and received, in all the comments you've received during this time, what have you learned that is different from your initial position on this subject? What has changed your mind about what's needed? What can lead Canadians into the future?

I'm very curious to hear what you have to say.

The Chair: You threw us for a loop there.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Wilson, unfortunately, the format doesn't lend itself to that, but I'll take a stab at it. We travelled across the country and we heard that a great many people would like to see their vote better reflected in the seat count of the House of Commons, but it's a highly technical issue. We've learned about different voting systems that typically aren't discussed and about experiences in other countries. I think you'll find our report full of interesting facts and insights.

We'll go to Mr. Ackerman, and I'll ask Bradley Mullen to come to mic number two, please.

Go ahead, Mr. Ackerman.

Mr. Gerald Ackerman (As an Individual): I have been interested in Canadian politics for quite some time, and I have come to understand what is wrong: that the majority of the seats in the House of Commons are controlled by those people who vote in two provinces: Quebec and Ontario. I'm sure this is not news to anyone.

I have worked with each of the other four parties over this period of time, and I ran for one of those parties in 2006. Those are my credentials, if you like, and that's why I'm here tonight: to say this system stinks. It is not right. It is not fair. Most Canadian electors do not get their voices heard. That has to change.

The simplest way to change it is with what John Carley will explain to you tonight, what has evolved from a group of grassroots people of various political orientations who have put together a plan somewhat like the plan on page 3 of the handout tonight, except it isn't to deal with the seats in the House of Commons. It's the votes of the representatives. That's what's called for. That representative from my riding will vote in accordance with how many of his party are represented in the entire House. That's the key. That keeps it fair, simple, and exactly what I want to have happen.

The Chair: Thank you.

David Shostal—

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Chair, just on a point of order, Gerry mentioned he ran in 2006. He ran against me, and he was a great guy to campaign against.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: Not everybody is. He was a really thoughtful and intelligent candidate.

The Chair: Thank you for letting us know. I was wondering where; it was in your riding.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Ackerman.

Go ahead, Mr. Mullen.

Mr. Bradley Mullen (As an Individual): Good evening, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I'd like to be the first to rise in favour of the first-past-the-post system, and hopefully not the last. This system is simple, straightforward, and easily understood by all voters, and does not require an entire briefing document to explain. It allows for effective majority governments and lively minority governments, which have enough threat of turnover to keep the governing party on its toes. It has produced a functional and effective multi-party system that represents the views of the vast majority of voters while keeping the loonie fringes at bay.

It's also contributed to a remarkably peaceful and calm and orderly political history for Canada. We are remarkably free of revolution and political disorder in this country.

If the government wants to hear from all voters about electoral systems and not merely staffers, seniors, academics, and activists, I encourage it to ask us directly, including those who favour the current system, by holding a referendum with a clear question and clear rules of procedure.

Finally, if the government wants to hear from the public, why are they holding this meeting at suppertime in Centre Block? That excludes quite a few people who have families or are otherwise occupied with their day.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

•(1920)

The Chair: Thank you.

As a point of information, when we are travelling, typically a committee holds hearings during the day and travels at night. We travelled in the morning so that we could hold hearings in the afternoon and evening, so that people who were working could come out in the evening. I guess some people prefer the afternoon, but it was an attempt to open it up to as many people as possible. That's the reason.

Mr. Bradley Mullen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I call Mr. Denzil Feinberg to mic number two, please.

We'll go to Mr. Shostal.

Mr. David Shostal (As an Individual): Thank you, everyone.

While I appreciate the hard work that you all do for us, I'd like to express my disappointment that so many elected representatives feel that it's okay to change the method by which we as electors elect you without our clear consent by way of a referendum. This would be akin to the owners of a business being told by the current employees what the hiring process is to be for all future employees.

This committee would be better to examine alternative electoral methods and make recommendations to Canadians on what they have determined might be a better alternative to first past the post, but it must be Canadians and all Canadians who make the final decision in the end. To do otherwise would be to completely undermine and violate, in my opinion, the sacred trust of the relationship between our elected representatives and those who elect them.

Our elected representatives govern on matters of legislation and state on our behalf and with our consent. In my opinion, changing the way we give our consent without our consent would be an abuse of the authority and trust we have given you.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shostal.

I'd call Mr. Cosgrove to mic number one while we give the floor to Mr. Feinberg.

Mr. Denzil Feinberg (As an Individual): I'm Denzil Feinberg from Ottawa, formerly from Winnipeg, and originally from Cape Town, South Africa.

The southern hemisphere has some benefits. One was Australia's requiring that people have a compulsory vote. There are four to five other countries that have compulsory voting. I don't know who they are, but your committee has probably heard about this.

That to me should be an essential part of the next referendum. It will be a big thing to bring in, but I feel it would be right. It's just like the case with giving donations of organs: Spain requires it, and it's a negative option to get out of it. There are more countries that should adopt that system.

If Prime Minister Trudeau and his government decide that they will not go by this particular electoral vote and promise, then I will promise to reduce the money that I've given to them. It's quite nice, now that I'm 72 and get a great tax deduction in the voting system here, but I will redirect my donations away from the Liberals and put them more to the Green Party, Ms. May, because they deserve it because they're going to stick to their word.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Denzil Feinberg: Another point is that I would prefer not to have a referendum. There are too many deplorables like me around, which means people who disagree with my way of thinking. I trust your expertise in going to this effort in learning about the various systems, so I don't want a referendum to decide against what you have studied so hard, and you have all the committee impressions that you get from us too.

Finally, I would like not to have a Wallonia or Walloons or somebody waiving a feather deciding, despite all the practical suggestions that have been heard so democratically, to undo everything. Your decision is what I would take as the one that should count.

I thank you for all that you've done for us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ian MacDonald may advance to mic number two, and we'll hear from Mr. Paul Cosgrove.

Mr. Paul Cosgrove (As an Individual): Mr. Chairman and members, a number of former MPs and senators from all parties, and there were 40 in total, considered the issue of alternatives to first past the post, and that was in 1984 when looking at the issue of Senate reform. They reported that first past the post should be retained.

The committee observed that it had insufficient time to adequately study jurisdictions that had opted for alternative processes of voting, but more importantly it recommended that the election process for the House of Commons and the Senate be the same.

Your committee might wish to consider the potential effect of your recommendations on an elected Senate. Public support for an elected Senate continues today, and someday it may win the day. I'll be very interested in your analysis of alternative voting processes in other jurisdictions, and that will assist me in deciding which way I would go on the issue. I haven't decided one way or another.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, it's ironic that whatever the Commons decides on the issues before you, the non-elected Senate will pass judgment on the democratic elected process for the House of Commons.

Thank you.

● (1925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cosgrove.

I ask Mr. Andrew Madill to come to mic number one.

Mr. MacDonald, you have the floor.

Mr. Ian MacDonald (As an Individual): I'd like to thank you for spending your valuable summer and evenings doing this valuable work.

This has probably already been identified, but some first nations friends of mine do not consider themselves part of Canada, and they do not vote federally. Any consideration of mandatory voting should consider the first peoples' needs. I don't know...are we allowed to ask individual committee members a question?

The Chair: Not really. It's not the format.

Mr. Ian MacDonald: Okay; well, my question is—

The Chair: You can still ask it. It's just that we're not going to get into a conversation. Ask it rhetorically, if you'd like.

Mr. Ian MacDonald: Well, it's open, then.

My understanding from a presentation I saw on the U.K. electoral reform society was that electoral reforms are not advised unless there was a long lead time to enable voters to become knowledgeable about the issue and that the timeline for this election wouldn't be sufficiently long.

I'm just wondering if this was the general consensus from what most referendum expert witnesses who presented said.

The Chair: I don't believe the society was for a referendum.

The point is well taken. It's important that people be adequately informed. We'll leave the timelines to the committee's report, but it's important to engage the public. This is why we're doing this and why we've had hearings both in Ottawa and across the country.

Mr. Ian MacDonald: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Thompson, could you please go to mic number two?

Now we'll hear from Mr. Madill.

Mr. Andrew Madill (As an Individual): Thank you. Good evening. My name is Andrew, and right now I live here in Ontario, but I was born in Saskatchewan and raised in Manitoba. That's where my roots are, and so my own life experience along with my studies and political interest have shaped a strong appreciation for regional interests. In other words, the closer our system brings politics to the local level, the better.

Federal politics are driven by intense disagreements over ideology or grand visions, but the best test of political success and what should be our primary motivation is to make life better and find the common good on the ground. Every place has its own needs and way of life, and this includes across as well as within provinces, and that deserves to be heard in the government.

Everyone knows that first past the post isn't perfect, but if it does nothing else well, then it keeps elected representatives in contact with their local ridings, and that's incredibly important. At the very least, any reform to the voting system should do that exact same thing, only better.

I would like to point out that within the committee responsible for the consultation, I've noticed that over half of the members are from Quebec or Ontario. The process is looking a lot like regional alienation all over again, and that's my fear. Therefore, I strongly believe that the right way to bring about change and to involve not only the provinces but every riding is to bring this question to a referendum.

Thank you.

• (1930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Madill.

I would invite Roderick Ramsden to mic number one.

Mr. Thompson, please go ahead. You have two minutes.

Mr. Nicholas Thompson (As an Individual): Good evening, members of the electoral reform committee. My name is Nicholas Thompson, and I'm from Peterborough, Ontario.

I am here tonight because I believe that the Canadian government is taking an undemocratic approach to the electoral reform.

When the last election was held here in Canada, I was unable to vote as I was 17 years of age. This year, I am now 18, so I have the privilege and the right to vote and participate fully in Canadian democracy.

Will the electoral reform committee deny me my vote by not holding a referendum? Will you deny me this democratic right? Will you not let my voice be heard on this issue that I feel so strongly

about? Will you disregard my concerns regarding this issue and will you deny me my right to vote?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

I would mention, though, this committee is a consultative committee and not a decision-making committee, so those decisions will belong to the government. We will be making recommendations, but we won't be making those kinds of decisions.

Ms. Darian Bittle, please go to mic number two.

Mr. Ramsden, it's your turn.

Mr. Roderick Ramsden (As an Individual): Thank you.

I think any attempt at electoral reform must go to referendum. I've come to this conclusion based on my experience as a resident of Ottawa Centre. I've lived in the riding my entire life, and when speaking with friends, neighbours, and family who also live in the riding, none of them knew about the consultation process that was held in Ottawa Centre. I only found out about the consultation process in Ottawa Centre three days after it occurred, through a newspaper article.

For this reason, I think the consultation process is fundamentally flawed and I think that a referendum must be called prior to any changes.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. David Gibbons, please come to mic number one.

Ms. Bittle, go ahead, please.

Ms. Darian Bittle (As an Individual): Hi. My name is Darian Bittle, and I strongly support a referendum. The voting system belongs to the people of Canada, not just the few who can come to a committee meeting or a town hall.

A referendum guarantees that everyone's voice is heard. Anything else would be undemocratic.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Harding, please come to mic number two.

Mr. Gibbons, go ahead, please.

Mr. David Gibbons (As an Individual): Good evening.

My family comes from a small borough on the Quebec side of the river called Quyon, Quebec. Four years ago, I had the privilege of going to Vimy Ridge. There I saw where my uncle's brother lost his life. It had a profound impact on me and my family. Given that he gave his life for our rights to be democratic in this country and to make decisions, and given the fact that we are now approaching Remembrance Day, I'm sure you would all understand how this decision you will make here today will impact our country for years to come.

For 150 years we've had the current first-past-the-post system, and for 150 years it has worked relatively well. We have produced great prime ministers—Mackenzie King, Pearson, Mulroney, etc.

With this in mind, I would implore you that before you do anything, please let all Canadians have a right to vote.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is Mr. Harding in the room? No.

Ms. Chelsea Mahon and also Ms. Emma McLennan, please both come to the mics.

Go ahead, Ms. Mahon.

Ms. Chelsea Mahon (As an Individual): I'm here today to express my concern that one of the fundamental traditions of our parliamentary democracy, how we elect our representatives, could be changed without the direct approval of those doing the electing.

If there is a real desire among Canadians to change the way we elect you, our representatives, we should be presented with options and provided the opportunity to vote for a new system or to keep the one we have, but it must be our choice to make, not yours.

Thank you.

• (1935)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I must say you're all respecting the time limits.

Is Ms. McLennan here? No.

Okay, is Mr. Carley here?

Go ahead, sir. Mr. Redins, please go to the mic.

Mr. John Carley (As an Individual): Apparently the submission that we made does not correspond with anything on the document we received here today, because it's not multi-member proportionality, but party proportionality in the House of Commons.

A lot of people feel their votes don't count. One of reasons is that a majority government can be elected with 39.6%. We have proof of that.

We're suggesting another form, and it's single member, whereby everybody in a particular constituency has the right to vote for the person they think is the best person to represent them in the House of Commons. However, when they get to the House of Commons, they are limited to the proportionality issue because, according to our plan, the power of their party would be related to the percentage of votes they get across Canada.

For example, if a party got 50% of the vote, then they would have 50% of the power in the House of Commons. Similarly, if they only got 10% of the vote, they would still have 10% of the power. In the case where they only got 10%, usually they had one or fewer elected members, but yet the people who voted for that party considered their vote lost.

This single-member party-proportional system is the way to get around that without having a lot of gerrymandering. You have the same system of electing your member as you have now, but when they get to the House of Commons their vote is based on the

percentage of votes they got across the country. This allows for everybody to believe their vote counts, because it does, and it can be done simply.

A lot of people tonight have been concerned about their rights regarding a referendum, and I'll respect your right now to cut me off. I just wanted to raise those two points. We have a lot of support for it.

The Chair: It sounds like weighted voting.

Mr. John Carley: That's correct.

The Chair: Yes, it's come up many times in our hearings.

Okay, thank you.

Mr. Redins, I'll call Mr. Gussow to mic number two while you speak.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. John Redins (As an Individual): Good evening.

First of all, I've been involved in one federal election, three provincial elections, and one municipal election. I'm disappointed that my MP didn't have any consultations in Ottawa South. His office's response was he had one in Gatineau. That's why I want to see the statistics from the minister.

As a former resident of Thunder Bay–Superior North, I can tell you voters feel alienated both federally and provincially by the theft of resources and commodities, and they get peanuts. They have no voice. That's why you have talk about separation in northern Ontario all the time. I campaigned on PR. I also believe that you'll probably get a lot of co-operation from indigenous people if you have some type of representation at all levels.

My background was in the automotive field; when you buy a new car, you want to test drive the vehicle. What's the best way? Test drive the vehicle, and then go for the referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Andrea Strathdee, go to mic number one, please.

Mr. Gussow, go ahead.

Mr. David Gussow (As an Individual): I wanted to make a representation. I submitted a brief so that you people can look at it.

It's a little different from some of the others. I tried to submit a brief that would enable a consensus, a compromise, for all the members.

For instance, for the Liberals, it agrees with what one would expect, maybe, that what the Prime Minister wants is a ranked ballot, so it deals with that as an optional preferential vote. In the case of Mr. Reid, it tries to accommodate his wishes when he was the spokesperson for the Conservative Party on a bill in 2007. It was the bill for an elected Senate. In other words, it wanted proportionality for multi-members, and if there was one vacancy, then it went for the ranked ballot. Obviously I'm trying to go for proportional representation for Ms. May, as well as for the New Democrats, because I think it's essential that they have it. I even thought of Monsieur Thériault, because with proportional representation you would have had

● (1940)

[Translation]

—a recognized party in Parliament and all the advantages that it might have.

[English]

In any event, this is my background.

[Translation]

I was a House of Commons table officer. I have been retired for 19 years, so it was a very long time ago.

[English]

I've heard of different things over the years, things such as mixed member proportional, how it worked in Germany, and so on and so forth, but I wasn't going for that. I was trying to do a brief that you all might be able to agree with.

The key, of course, is that it's dealing with parliamentary reform, not just House reform. In other words, House reform is the preferential ballot, and Senate reform, as Mr. Reid had proposed, is proportional representation, which might avoid a referendum.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gussow.

Mr. Martin Laplante, proceed to mic number two, please.

Go ahead, Ms. Strathdee.

Ms. Andrea Strathdee (As an Individual): Hello. My name is Andrea Strathdee, and I support a referendum for electoral reform. I think it is very important that the majority of Canadians consent to and be able to understand any changes made to the electoral system.

I'm also proud to be from the small town of St. Marys, Ontario, and the rural riding of Perth–Wellington. I've always been very appreciative of the strong relationship between the member of Parliament and the constituency. I think that is a very important relationship to maintain, and I hope that if the electoral system does change it will maintain that strong relationship.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jerry Dan Kovacs, please go to mic number one.

Go ahead, Mr. Laplante.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Laplante (As an Individual): Good evening.

I am Martin Laplante, one of the co-founders of 123 Canada, which promotes preferential systems and two-round systems.

I would first like to thank the committee for this “great window on direct democracy”, as Steve Guibord said.

[English]

The committee has heard from many respected witnesses—that was quite nice—and has examined PR in particular with great breadth and depth, but I can't say that it has seriously examined other electoral systems to the same degree.

Journalists, MPs, and even many activists have noticed that the committee has heard from something like 100 PR proponents but from virtually no proponent of preferential voting. Has unanimity suddenly broken out in the ranks of academia? No, of course not. We're in contact with a lot of political scientists who are proponents of preferential voting, and they were simply not given the opportunity to present evidence.

The campaign platform on which this committee is based was that it was to be a committee to review a wide variety of reforms, such as ranked ballots, proportional representation, mandatory voting, and online voting, and the committee has done a commendable job on three of those four.

In Canada, as in the U.S., there is a slow conversion to preferential ballots, which not everyone has noticed, starting with municipalities in Ontario, provincially in New Brunswick, most likely, and possibly P.E.I. Maine and many other states in the U.S. are converting. There are nearly 100 countries around the world that use a preferential or two-round system in some of their elections, so there is no lack of expertise or scholarship in this area.

Unfortunately, for whatever reasons, it was not sought out as expert testimony at this committee. This makes it a challenge for the committee and for Parliament to come to a consensus based on evidence, because so much of the evidence is missing. That was our disappointment.

● (1945)

[Translation]

You have heard the opinions of a self-selected group—and I'm part of it—who have told you what it considers to be the faults of the current voting system, but what do the voters themselves think?

We can see this by looking at strategic voting. Strategic voting allows voters to soften the distortions in the voting systems, and the distortion that they are choosing to soften is vote splitting. They could use it to soften other distortions, but that isn't their choice.

Well, I seem to have run out of time.

Thank you very much to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you for your remarks.

Could Sharon Reeves come to microphone number 2?

Go ahead, Jerry Dan Kovacs.

[English]

Mr. Jerry Dan Kovacs (As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm here tonight because of Elizabeth May, whom I saw on an airplane travelling from Calgary to Ottawa a few weeks ago. She impressed upon me the importance of average Canadians making representations before this committee and making their views heard. I'm glad to see a room filled with people here tonight.

For those who do not like the present system of first past the post, for whatever reason, the question then becomes, what will we replace the present system with? I did a bit of research, and I compared first past the post with the mixed member proportional representation system for 60 years, from 1957 to 2016, involving 20 federal elections.

I determined that if you have a mixed member proportional system, you essentially have the first past the post, but it then addresses some of the concerns that other Canadians have regarding the idea that, for whatever reason, their vote's not counted, their views aren't heard, or they don't have adequate representation because of the current system.

My results show that under a single-member plurality system, in the last 20 elections since 1957, we would have 11 majority governments and nine minority governments. If you change our present system to one involving mixed member proportional representation, for example, you will have two majority governments—and John Diefenbaker and Brian Mulroney would be glad to hear they were theirs in 1958 and 1984—and 18 minority governments over a 60-year period.

What does that mean for our system? It means that we might add members of Parliament. It might cost additional financial resources. It will involve not just changing our electoral system, but it means that our parliamentary system will also change. With more minority governments, it means that we might need more co-operative government. We might need more interaction with parliamentarians.

The bottom line is that if you change the system as I've suggested, the parties that stand to gain the most are the smaller third parties, such as the Green Party and the New Democratic Party. The party that loses the most is the Bloc Québécois, for obvious reasons.

I have given a copy of my presentation to the clerk. My PowerPoint presentation, hopefully, will be distributed to all of you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jay Fallis, please go to mic number one.

Ms. Reeves, go ahead.

Ms. Sharon Reeves (As an Individual): I would like to thank the committee for all the work that it's done this summer and fall. The percentage of votes a party gets should approximate the percentage of seats it gets in the House, and because of this, I'd like to go on the record as saying that I strongly support a change to a made-in-Canada system of proportional representation.

While no voting system is perfect, they are on a continuum, with first past the post at the bottom of the list for representation, fairness, and democracy. I'm counting on the Liberal government to live up to the pledge it made in its party platform prior to the 2015 election and on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform to recommend a system of proportional representation in the report that it tables on December 1.

This committee has provided every opportunity for Canadians to provide feedback on electoral reform. You've heard from many thousands of Canadians, most of whom overwhelmingly support a move to PR. I trust members of Parliament of the Canadian government to represent the views of the majority of the Canadian population and to support the move to a PR voting system without holding a referendum.

It would certainly be desirable for the committee to have an all-party consensus for PR, but not at the cost of a referendum that could be exploited for partisan reasons. If the committee can't come to a consensus, the recommendation of the majority of committee members for a system of proportional representation will have to be sufficient.

Thank you.

• (1950)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McKinnon, you'll go after Mr. Fallis.

Go ahead, Mr. Fallis.

Mr. Jay Fallis (As an Individual): In reference to a report I sent you all earlier this morning, I'm going to talk about a system referred to as ABC-plus, which I think, at the very least, should be considered seriously by the committee.

The system offers voters the capacity to make up to three selections on the ballot.

The first choice is worth four points, the second choice is worth two points, and the third choice is worth one point. In single-member ridings, the points are added up, and the candidate with the most points wins. In multiple-member ridings with a maximum of six seats per riding, each of the party candidates is listed under the same slot on a ballot. When a party wins the most points, it wins the first seat, and then its total is multiplied by a number less than one and compared to all the other parties to determine the next winning seat. This continues until each seat is distributed.

There are a couple of advantages to the system. First, having checked with a former Canadian CEO, I can confirm that the seat redistribution model I have proposed would be implementable by 2019 and that recounting could be done by hand, unlike other ranked ballot systems.

Second, we can draw from experiences in four nations that use modified forms of this system.

Third, it would improve regional representation for each of the political parties and would guarantee voters a greater capacity to influence the final result.

Finally, having run this by actors on all sides of this debate, four of five political parties represented here today, and experts in the field, I can confirm with certainty that it would at least be palatable to most Canadians.

The final thing I want to say is that a couple of months ago I was studying in the Library of Parliament and flipping through the big manual on procedure and House affairs, and I found, on page... something like 892, a little citation that referred to the previous electoral reform committee that we had. As someone who has studied the subject extensively, I was shocked. I had never even heard of the committee before, and my plea to this committee is to not be another citation in a big, green book; be the committee that brings electoral reform to this country—which, clearly, a lot of people want.

That might mean recommending some form of ranked ballot in coordination with proportional representation, and it might even mean recommending some referendum, but this committee needs to find unanimity if we're going to proceed further.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ted Cragg, please go to microphone two while we listen to MP Ron McKinnon.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I have a really great five-minute presentation. I'll cut it down. I'm here today to talk really quickly about a system called ranked pairs, which I emphasize is not ranked ballots. I submitted a not very brief brief entitled "The Ranked-Pairs Project", and I urge you all to delve deeply into that document for the particulars.

Ranked pairs is a member of the class of electoral systems called Condorcet methods. You've already heard at least one witness, Dr. Maskin of Harvard, on August 30, speak of majority rule elections, which is just another name for bare-bones Condorcet. As you may recall from Dr. Maskin's presentation, however, it's possible, though arguably rare, that bare-bones Condorcet in a real election doesn't work. In order to deal with such cases, we need to complete the basic Condorcet model, and that's what ranked pairs does.

In summary, ranked pairs is easy for voters to understand and do, although somewhat more work for election officials. It can use the same ballots we use now, changing only how we mark them and how we evaluate them, though I do propose a different form of a ballot to facilitate using optical reader technology, which has been tried and true for generations.

In a single voting round, each voter casts a single, simple preferential ballot from which, in a single counting round, a round robin one-to-one matchup of each candidate against the other candidate ensues, holistically considering all preferences from all ballots. There's no harm whatsoever to any candidate due to the presence of similar candidates. There's no concern about vote splitting, no strategic voting, and the result will be readily accepted by most people as the true majority decision.

Ranked pairs are scrupulously unbiased and confer no systemic advantage to any party. As an added bonus, we can use the exact same ridings, so we don't need to wade into extensive redistributions and the time and effort that would entail, meaning that it is eminently feasible to implement well in time for the next election.

While my immediate purpose is that this be a straightforward plug-in replacement to our existing first-past-the-post elections, it's important to also note that it can be easily used to augment a mixed member PR system in whatever flavour that might end up, or even replace a multi-representation system such as STV. It slices, it dices, it chops.

I would refer you again to the details in my submission, "The Ranked-Pairs Project" and my website, ranked-pairs.ron-mckinnon.ca, and I will be happy to make myself available to the committee should you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you.

● (1955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McKinnon.

I'd invite Jon Legg to mic number one, and we'll give the floor to Mr. Ted Cragg.

Mr. Ted Cragg (As an Individual): Thank you very much. *Merci.*

My name is Ted Cragg, and I'm here to state my support for a proportional system of voting.

I believe that every vote should have equal weight. I believe that Canadians deserve a system that doesn't require them to vote strategically no matter where they live across the country. I myself have voted for many different parties and I can sympathize with the Conservative voter in downtown Toronto, the NDP voter in Alberta, or you name it across the country. We've heard lots of stories of people having to vote strategically.

The system we have now is not designed for the type of multi-party plural democracy that we live in. It's designed for a country that has two parties, where you can choose one or the other. It is simply a question of modernity to bring us up to a system that virtually every other modern democracy uses, of course, in the world.

Referendums sound very fair and democratic, but we can certainly see lots of results around the world where results have been skewed and they've been unexpected. There are examples of this, of course, in the U.K., and recently in British Columbia.

I would also point out that there's certainly no guarantee that a referendum would bring the kind of turnout that you might expect. You could have a referendum with, say, 40% turnout. Does that make it more accurate or legitimate? We saw in British Columbia that they set a particular threshold of 60% in order to pass the provincial referendum they had there. It raises the question of what the most accurate system is, and the method of changing it.

You have all been elected by Canadians and you're empowered to discuss this issue and make a suggestion, and I'd like to thank the committee for your work. I think it has been fascinating to see how a committee that is proportional, in what's otherwise a majority government situation, has been able to function together, and to see you evolve in that process over the last few months bodes well for the future as, of course, you would have more collaborative governments if we change the proportionality.

Therefore, I applaud your work. This is a real landmark occasion for Canada. We've never had anything like this at the federal level. It's impressive to see, but the work, of course, is not done. I highly recommend a proportional representation system.

Thank you.

• (2000)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lavergne, please come to mic number two.

Mr. Legg, go ahead, please.

Mr. John Legg (As an Individual): Members of Parliament, I'd like to add my thanks to that of many others for your hard work in Ottawa and across Canada.

I'd like to skip the unfairness and anti-democratic aspects of the first-past-the-post system, of which you are all very much aware, and encourage you to adopt one of the proportional representation systems you've been studying.

I'd like to quickly cover three subjects: the change of culture with coalition governments, why coalition governments are more efficient than our present system, and a plug for a delayed referendum.

On the change of culture with coalitions, I hope it's not too naive to think that parties would work better with each other because of the need to form coalitions after the election.

Second, coalitions are more efficient because there would never be any need to reverse, replace, or amend the previous government's legislation. I don't know how much time members of Parliament are spending now on changing the legislation of the previous government, but it seems to me that this activity would be a waste of time. If a coalition that represents over 50% of the population passes the legislation, there would be no need to revamp, replace, or amend the previous legislation because it would have been so well supported and represented in the House.

Finally, as Mr. Howe, the professor at the University of New Brunswick, said, "A referendum after the fact is a better idea." I believe that when New Zealand adopted the system of proportional representation, it included in the package a referendum after New Zealanders had had a chance to vote via the new system. I believe Canada should use that model and I think it would be unwise to use a referendum before trying out the PR system.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Reid: Just to be clear about this, there were actually two referenda in New Zealand before the system was adopted, and then one afterwards.

The Chair: Thank you.

Gary Corbett, please go to mic number one.

Mr. Lavergne, nice to see you again.

Mr. Réal Lavergne (President, Fair Vote Canada): Good evening. I realize this is my second chance, but I wanted to finish up some of the thoughts I started to share with you when I testified last week and ran out of time. I also want to formally thank you, on the

part of Fair Vote Canada, for all your work on this file. The hours and effort you're putting into this are truly impressive, and we have nothing but respect for the collegial and consultative approach that you have taken.

I know this is a crucial moment in your deliberations and I take it for granted that you will seriously consider MMP as one of the made-in-Canada options that you will be seriously looking at. There are good reasons for doing so. However, what I would like to suggest tonight is that you really consider some of the other options as well, and I'll explain why.

In brief, what I would like to suggest is that you try to find a way for every sitting MP to be able to run for office again in 2019 in an area corresponding to his or her existing riding, whether it's a single-member riding or as part of a new multi-member riding.

There are two ways that this can be done. One is STV. I spoke to you the other day about STV as a model that maximizes voter choice, but the appeal of STV at this juncture for your fellow MPs is that it would, in fact, allow every sitting MP to run again for office in the same riding, albeit as part of a multi-member version of that riding. This strikes me as a very fair type of proposition to be putting forward to sitting MPs that I think would be appreciated. We are asking MPs to do what is right for Canada, but wouldn't it be nice if they felt they were being given a fair chance to be re-elected under the new system being proposed?

You could also consider having multi-member ridings in urban areas while keeping single-member ridings in rural areas, as Jean-Pierre Kingsley has proposed. The downside of this approach, if no additional measures are proposed, is that it would deprive rural areas of proportionality, which is unfair for them.

That's why we in Fair Vote Canada are proposing taking it a step further by adding a small layer of top-up seats in the order of 10% to 15% of total seats under rural-urban PR. The simplest way to make way for these top-up seats without disruption would be to add new seats to the House. Anywhere from 35 to 50 new seats would suffice to do this. This would make it possible to leave existing riding boundaries much the same and regroup them into multi-member ridings in urban areas.

Again, this could be politically a very attractive proposition for sitting MPs. A model like this would involve a minimum of disruption and, like STV, would give every sitting MP a chance to run for office again in 2019.

We trust you and are counting on you to put forward a made-in-Canada PR option that is most likely to meet with the approval of both parliamentarians and the Canadian public.

Thank you very much.

• (2005)

The Chair: Okay. Next are Mr. Corbett and Mr. Lucas Holtvluwer, please.

Mr. Gary Corbett (As an Individual): Good evening. Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

I'm Gary Corbett, a resident of Ottawa Centre. I support our current system. I think it's served us very well for the last 150 years. I see no need to change it. I appreciate all the effort that's gone into changing it or in putting the thought forward, but at this time I see no benefit in cost or any effective outcome.

That's all I had to say.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Holtvluwer—am I pronouncing it properly?

Mr. Lucas Holtvluwer (As an Individual): It's pretty close.

The Chair: I'll call Mr. Michael Mallett to go to mic number one, and Mr. Holtvluwer can now proceed.

Mr. Lucas Holtvluwer: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. It's much appreciated.

I'll be quick and straight to the point.

I'm outlining my points in favour of a referendum. In the last election campaign, the Prime Minister promised that this would be the last one under the first past the post, as you all know. Along with that promise came the promise of a consultation. What better way to consult than a referendum, right?

First past the post has been criticized for being very undemocratic, in the sense you can get 40% of the vote and still be in government and have 100% control type deal. It would be very ironic for the current government to impose change without at least the approval of the majority of Canadians.

Another point to keep in mind is that this change would be huge because it would shake up how the House is made up. That obviously has an effect on all the other law-making that goes on. It is also a change of constitutional proportion. I believe it's best left up to the people under the Constitution to decide.

Of course, there is precedent for a referendum, as you were saying before, Mr. Reid. In New Zealand, they had two referendums before they chose to actually reform their system, and they've also had a referendum in Britain. Even though the New Zealand one had multi-stage voting, it still produced reform.

That leads into my next point, which is that beneath every objection to a referendum is the fear that voters will not vote for change and for reform, but that is what happened in New Zealand, and they did end up getting reform.

Therefore, yes, if you have a clear question in a referendum and provide the appropriate amount of information to Canadians, Canadians should be trusted to make this important call.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Would Jean-Nicholas Martineau please come to mic number 2?

Now it's Michael Mallett's turn to speak.

[English]

Mr. Michael Mallett (As an Individual): Thank you.

I didn't bring any notes, so before I just ramble awkwardly, one of the issues I believe the committee is looking at is electronic voting. May I speak about this?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Michael Mallett: This is a good place for it? Okay.

As a software development professional, I advocate and develop open-source software. I believe very strongly that open-source software, such as Linux and Firefox, is more secure than closed-source proprietary software, such as Microsoft Office or Apple iOS. One of the reasons is that open-source software can be publicly audited and the source code can be read by anybody with the skills necessary to do that, whereas closed-source proprietary software is a black box and nobody knows how it works.

I would suggest that our current paper ballot system is publicly auditable, insofar as I understand that when I put my paper ballot in a box, at the end of the day a human being counts those paper ballots and other people are in the room watching what they do. I think we should look to the United States for what not to do in this regard. I think that they have implemented a disastrous electronic voting system that undermines their democracy. They have voting machines that are owned and operated by for-profit businesses. Nobody knows how their black boxes work.

There are examples of good implementations of electronic voting, such as in Estonia. Citizens in Estonia are issued ID cards that have an encryption key stored within them. I understand Canadian military personnel have such technology. It's not fanciful future technology; it exists in Canada. We can do this. That's a really important point.

If I have a couple of seconds, I'd also like to say that I don't like first past the post. In the last two federal elections I voted for a losing candidate. I feel unrepresented. I believe that there are many good alternative options that the committee has been looking at. I throw my weight behind pretty much anything that's not first past the post.

I would put forward, though, a little bit of a thought experiment in relation to any kind of party proportional system. Sometimes it behooves an MP during a Parliament to leave their party, to cross the floor, because a schism develops for whatever reason. I would be curious about what would happen in a party-proportional system when an MP who is not a representative of a riding, but rather a representative of solely the ideologies of a party, left that party and crossed the floor to become an independent. Would they be a rogue MP or would there be a by-election or would it go to somebody else on the list? It's worth consideration.

Thank you.

● (2010)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Carl Stieren, please go to the mic.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Mr. Martineau.

Mr. Jean-Nicholas Martineau (As an Individual): First, I would like to congratulate the committee for the great work that the members have done. I'm sure you had to make some long flights.

I would like to talk about three points.

The first is the need to change the system. As you know, Canadians want to change the system. Frank Graves of EKOS appeared before the committee and said so. His company conducts polls, and the majority of Canadians want a new system.

I was surprised to see that the rate of participation in the last election was the highest in 18 years. However, this means that almost 30% of Canadians did not vote. That's a problem. Changing the voting system may be a solution.

It is important that the new system includes elements of proportionality. We have majority governments when the majority of Canadians did not vote for them. With 35% or 40% of the votes, they have the majority in the House. This seems strange to me, and I think that is true for many Canadians, as well.

The second point is simplicity. Many MPs and commentators have said that our system is simpler than others. Please, stop insulting the intelligence of Canadians. I think that Canadians are as intelligent as Germans, New Zealanders and Australians. Our ability to understand a new voting system is as good as theirs. Saying that the one we are using now is simpler comparatively to the others is an insult to the intelligence of Canadians.

The third point has to do with the referendum. As I said earlier, we know that the majority of Canadians want change. Why spend millions of taxpayers' dollars to find out what we already know, which is that we want to change the system? Your answer may be that you need to determine which system to change it to. That's true, but I hope the Prime Minister will offer a vision. He can use the committee's report to determine exactly what vision he wants to give to Canadians. Then, we will move forward, and people will have the opportunity to understand the vision and the system that we want to adopt.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martineau.

[English]

Jon Westlund, please go to mic number two.

Mr. Stieren, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Carl Stieren (As an Individual): Thank you. My name is Carl Stieren, and I live in the riding of Ottawa–Vanier, where I vote.

[English]

First, thank you to all the members of the electoral reform committee, all you hard-working members—and there's more. I attended your last meeting, and to your credit, I could not identify by political party who was speaking at that meeting. You all raised points that were valid and non-partisan.

Second, the percentage of the seats in Parliament should match the percentage of votes for each party. Germany did it, New Zealand did it, Scotland did it after the Second World War, without a referendum but with careful consideration by all political parties. It was the conservatives in Germany who said, “Hey, wait a minute. We can't have list proportional; we need single member”, so they invented mixed member proportional.

As for lead time, we've had nearly 100 years since Parliament has been discussing electoral reform. We've had the lead time.

Third—and who would have thunk it—the last method proposed for proportional representation, in my opinion, turned out to be the best. Rural/urban proportional representation, with top-up seats, as suggested by Réal Lavergne, can keep the size of one-member rural ridings. That's with a nod to Nathan Cullen, whose riding is larger than Poland. We should do that.

Finally, we should design a system that should ensure that a party that just meets the threshold of nationwide votes for proportional seats always gets their matching proportion of seats. If we had a party that met, for example, a 4% threshold of the vote, they should still get 4% of the seats. If this means enlarging the House of Commons by 10%, that's a small price to pay for democracy.

• (2015)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Carole Bezaire, please go to mic number one.

Mr. Westlund, go ahead.

Mr. Jon Westlund (President, Humanist Association of Ottawa): Good evening. I'm Jon Peter Westlund, president of the Humanist Association of Ottawa. We're a secular community group that has been active since 1967.

The Humanist Association of Ottawa supports the implementation before the next federal election of the mixed member proportional system proposed by the Law Commission of Canada in its 2004 report entitled “Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada”.

Our membership is pleased with the government's initiative to move Canada towards a more robust democratic system. The defence of democratic principles of governance and free and open debate is one of our most cherished values.

Most Canadians believe that our first-past-the-post system is archaic and that Canadian democracy would be better served by a system that introduces proportionality to voting. The mixed member proportional system would strengthen our democracy by having the composition of Parliament more closely reflect the electoral will of the Canadian people. The current system makes our population appear more regionally politically divided than it really is, and a proportional system would show in the House of Commons that the major parties enjoy support across the country.

An advantage of the mixed member proportional system is that it doesn't increase the size of Parliament. Many ridings would increase moderately in size, but voters would still elect a local candidate and in addition a regional candidate.

A referendum, although it will be demanded by those who oppose the change to a system with proportionality, should be avoided if possible. In the 2015 federal election, four of the five seat-winning parties ran on a platform that included change to the electoral system, and they collectively won the majority of the popular vote.

In conclusion, the Humanist Association of Ottawa believes that the mixed member proportional system proposed by the Law Commission of Canada is the best voting system for our country in the next election, but the most important point is to introduce proportionality. Other systems that allow this would also be a huge step forward for Canadian democracy.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Aurora Arrijoja, please go to the mic.

Go ahead, Ms. Bezaire.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Carole Bezaire (As an Individual): Good evening, committee members.

First, I would like to sincerely thank you for all the work you did over the summer. You spent many sunny days inside. I followed you in the morning, afternoon and evening. I attended meetings. So I can appreciate the energy that you were looking for in these meetings.

After all that, you have pretty much heard everything on the matter, but you haven't heard from everyone. In fact, although they were invited, many people did not come. They did not want to participate. I, myself, invited people to come with me to the meetings, but I was told that you didn't want to hear what they had to say. Which isn't true. They didn't believe that you wanted to hear from us, nor did they believe that their vote counts and that it can change something. I won't go any further because I think you know where I'm going.

Tonight, I would mainly like to say that I would like you to remember why you decided to get into politics. A long time ago, you believed that you could change the world, that you could make a small improvement to the day-to-day lives of your constituents. I think you have a golden opportunity to do so. Give us a true democracy. Work by means of consensus and change the political culture.

To do this, you have to take the bull by the horns, which means changing the voting system because, even though there are ways to improve the system, to have true change, we need to adopt a new voting system.

If you haven't already, I invite you to read chapter 5 of the book by Professor Jean-Pierre Derriennic, who you met in Quebec City, I believe.

● (2020)

The Chair: Yes, we met him in Quebec City.

Mr. Carole Bezaire: It was indeed in Quebec.

I think that it will give you a good idea of the path you could take. If you take that path, I am sure that you will make liars of many

political analysts who believe that, because you are too focused on your own interests, you will not be able to make the change.

Good evening.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bezaire, for attentively following our committee's work. It is greatly encouraging.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Olsen, please come forward.

First we'll hear from Ms. Arrijoja.

Ms. Aurora Arrijoja (As an Individual): Good evening, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Aurora Arrijoja.

First of all, I would like to thank the committee for the extensive work you have been doing and continue doing to examine the options for electoral reform and to reach Canadians and consult them on this issue.

I think every Canadian has had the opportunity so far to express an opinion, and those who have responded to your call have made the effort to educate themselves on the issue before giving their opinion to you. I think it's very important that you have and are consulting with Canadians across Canada.

The best possible system I can think of for Canada is one that involves proportional representation. It would just be fair that all voters were represented in Parliament. I think it is our right to be equally represented in Parliament.

All votes should have the same weight, but at this moment they don't. For reasons that have been already brought out by members of the public who have spoken before me, I really do not support a referendum. I don't think it is necessary after this extensive consultation, and I think it could even be undecidable.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is Ms. Olsen here? Please come to the mic. You will be followed by Ms. Sonia Smee.

I'll let you go ahead, Ms. Olsen.

Ms. Marilyn Olsen (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm sorry; I didn't hear my name earlier.

I scribbled a few points and came rushing over here from my workplace. I'm a full-time worker and have a full family life, as we all do, so I applaud your work and efforts just as I know you probably applaud mine for doing my little part to keep the Canadian economy going.

I'm hungry. I was watching Ms. May and I was thinking how I would love to have a dumpling.

● (2025)

Ms. Elizabeth May: If you had just said something, I could have shared it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Marilyn Olsen: No, it's okay. Thank you.

At the end of the day I literally scribbled a few notes because I really didn't know how this was going to evolve, and my heart is pumping as well.

For me, voting takes place locally, as for all of us; thus, my vote needs to count to elect my member of Parliament in my riding. That's my feeling on that point.

First past the post has worked for better and sometimes for worse since Canada was formed in 1867. We're approaching that 150-year mark, so in my humble view I think it's not the best, but it's not the worst.

Any changes that may need to be made should be planned—I don't mean to be negative on this—but maybe a little better than these public consultations have been. I'm a pretty locked-in person, and there was nothing held in my riding that I know of, and not enough advertising for the one that was held in a nearby riding. The newspaper ad on Monday in the *Ottawa Citizen* caught my attention right away.

It's not the most convenient time, and I know you're trying to do the best for all people. That's the difficulty with trying to do that broad consult. I totally appreciate it and get it. I maybe take objection to saying that many people aren't here because they don't want to be, because many people are home doing their laundry or having their supper. In knowing that, many people are maybe trying to be their voice here.

In closing, then, the current government received less than 40% of the popular vote during the last election. We've seen majority governments having a similar kind of popular vote. Again, it's not the best, but not the worst.

This is such a fundamental issue to our democracy that all Canadians need to have a say in this basic way we select our elected representatives. Ultimately, then, I ask this committee to allow the people to decide via a referendum on any changes that may be considered.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is Mr. Alan White here? Would you come to mic number one, please?

Go ahead, Ms. Smee.

Ms. Sonia Smee (As an Individual): Good evening. Like so many of my friends in the audience, I'd like to thank you, not only for this evening, but for the opportunity that you're giving Canada. I believe it's really an extraordinary opportunity that Canada has right now. I realize you're not here all of your own accord, but you're doing the legwork.

I've been educating myself this summer. I have been reading, debating, over wine, tea, coffee, whatever, in between working full time and caring for my child and my family. I didn't really understand, but I have come to perceive first past the post as a kind of dark ages or infancy for democracy. I pray and hope and urge that Canada can come out of the dark ages. Your committee has shone the light on some other ways of doing things, and I hope that we can come out of infancy into a more mature democracy.

I have a son. Our youth, his friends, all face a precarious future, not just a precarious job market, and my heart goes out to them. I don't know how I'm going to help them, but I really believe that proportional representation can bring in a new era and really lead the world and not just Canada, and take us out of precarious times. Right now, I see nothing on the horizon for change. I see nothing to say to my son why he should engage.

I have to say that as a youth, I engaged in politics and then I gave up because I didn't understand how first past the post worked. I gave up.

I believe that proportional representation and your committee, by its recommendation, can bring about an elegant, orderly, well-governed sea change that Canadians want and will benefit from. I support the rural-urban model that Fair Vote Canada has presented to you. Ranked ballots, from what I can tell, will only codify what has been strategic voting. I see it as a tool, not as proportional representation, and it would be a sad day if that's the "change" that Canadians are offered.

To see that the few are ruled by the many just goes against my conscience, so the rest is logistics. What we do come up with? I see that through proportional representation we will have more questions, we will have more research, and we will have more substantial debate, but we will have less polarization. I believe that with more members, we will also have less corruption, so with less polarization and less corruption, we will have more stability.

• (2030)

The Chair: Thank you. We'll have to—

Ms. Sonia Smee: I thought it was a yellow card, not a red card.

The Chair: Well, the yellow card came late.

Go ahead, you've got another 10 to 15 seconds, but then we'll have to move on.

Ms. Sonia Smee: The committee has a mandate by a majority government, but also by the other parties that voted for change and proportional representation. The committee has a mandate. Either way you cut the pie, you have a mandate, and I urge you to heed that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is Mr. Matthew Hauch in the room?

Go ahead, Mr. White.

Mr. Alan White (As an Individual): Good evening. My name is Alan White. I met with my MP as long ago as the 1970s to urge for electoral reform, and since then I've been advocating for ranked ballots and so on through the years. However, this summer I've been reading all I can get, and I've been going to various meetings and so on, and I'm now convinced that proportional representation is a preferred option.

I am concerned, though, that with all the nuances of the various systems proposed, it's fairly complex and intimidating to people trying to learn it and trying to understand it. I'm rather concerned that this could actually cause a reduction in participation rather than the increase that we'd all like to see.

What I'd like to do is just summarize quickly four points that came out of one of the constituency meetings that I attended, which had a general consensus. One of those points is that we supported mandatory voting, or possibly an incentive to vote, as a way of increasing the vote and making people realize that voting is a civic duty. With the mandatory requirement there, we felt that there should be a "none of the above" option included, so that people don't have to spoil their ballots.

We support a return to giving all the parties funding related to the votes that they receive, similar to the system that was in place a few years ago. We support increasing emphasis on individual candidates, as opposed to strictly party and party figurehead options.

The other point is that we feel that the referendum should only be held after a trial run, after the voting has had one opportunity to show itself.

Thank you.

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

Is Mr. Hauch here, Matthew Hauch?

Mr. Joel Charbonneau and Mr. Julian Potvin-Bernal are next.

[Translation]

Welcome, Mr. Charbonneau. Go ahead.

Mr. Joel Charbonneau (As an Individual): I am here to tell you that I am in favour of the first-past-the-post system. I am also here to criticize the lack of consultation.

I live in the riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. As far as I know, my MP held a single consultation, and only about 20 people participated.

If such a major change is made that will have a big impact on the future of our democracy, the only way to proceed is with a referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Charbonneau.

[English]

Is Mr. Clive Doucet here tonight?

Could you come to mic number one, Mr. Doucet?

Go ahead, Mr. Potvin-Bernal.

Mr. Julian Potvin-Bernal (As an Individual): Good evening. My name is Julian Potvin-Bernal. I wrote this at my seat; hopefully it's coherent.

I'd like to talk more about the actual system. I personally support a PR system, but I want to gloss over that quickly and talk about something else.

On that matter, though, I think a variation of STV would work very well in terms of being a flexible expression of voters' stances. It's a very complex opinion you're trying to present in a ballot, and allowing a ballot that has all the parties listed with all the candidates of each party and ranking amongst everybody seems to be quite a flexible way of expressing that view. Also, a variation of it would work for the Canadian geography, obviously.

Regarding the actual system, you've listened to many witnesses throughout the summer, experts in the matter who most likely know a lot more about the system than all of us sitting here, and that is the point and the reason I want to talk about the referendum issue and about why a referendum is not necessarily fitting for this topic.

The issue we're talking about here is to institute a system that reflects voter views, and both sides of a topic are not necessarily equal, in the sense that it's arguably more of an objective debate than a subjective debate.

I think it would be disrespectful to the work of the whole committee and all the witnesses who spoke to you if the 99% of Canadians who aren't in these rooms got off their couches and went to vote in a referendum in a black and white manner, yes or no, when the issues are very much more complex than that. It's an impossible task to formulate a question that can reflect the full gradient.

I know that many people have taken flack—for instance, Professor Dennis Pilon—for suggesting that voters might be ignorant on these matters, but it's the truth, and not a shameful one, that you might not know as much as everybody sitting here and all the witnesses who spoke to you.

If a referendum is a matter of unanimity in the committee, then perhaps it's fair to have one and to have as much education as you possibly can and engage everyone, so that if you have a referendum you can have a coherent outcome to it.

•(2035)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Potvin-Bernal.

Mr. Doucet, it's nice to have you here tonight.

It's Clive Doucet, the councillor and writer.

[Translation]

Mr. Clive Doucet (As an Individual): Good evening.

[English]

I'm not used to the refined atmosphere of Parliament Hill. City Hall is more my bag, so if I'm a little rough, I hope you'll forgive me.

I want to make two very simple points. The first one is about the referendum. Do you remember when we brought in NAFTA? I don't remember any referendums. We seemed to be able to cope with that.

The second thing is that if there is a referendum, the best way to kill it is to do what you are doing now—ask people to talk about what choice, what kind of system they want. The whole thing will dissolve into conflict: first past the post this, mixed proportionality that, etc.

If you want to have a referendum, make it really simple: “Do you think we need electoral reform, yes or no?” I’ll tell you that when you get the response, it will be yes. We need electoral reform. We need it because most Canadians are disenfranchised. In the last several elections, 60% of Canadians were not represented in the House of Commons, and that creates tremendous illegitimacy among the people. People did not really believe in the government, because it didn’t represent the majority of Canadians. I don’t really care what you choose, but we need to have a system that represents the majority of Canadians.

The second thing I’d like to talk about is who wins. I was a politician, and I know that you guys don’t sit here unless you win. At the end of the day, you have to win. I had that lesson impressed upon me in the last election. Who wins? Well, there are a whole bunch of people who win. The Canadian people win. The majority of Canadians, 60%-plus, are left of centre. Who wins around the table? Well, people mention the Greens and the New Democrats, but the biggest winners are the national governing party, the Liberals. They are the biggest winners because they will always have the biggest chunk of that 60%, and that will guarantee that Mr. Trudeau will be Prime Minister for life.

I don’t think he was being unthoughtful in promising that this is the last first past the post. He will be Prime Minister for life, because coalition governments will be the order of the day, and he will lead the coalition. It’s that simple.

You look around the world—Sweden, Finland, Germany—and you see coalition governments. I know the Swedish government had one majority government in the last 50 years. The Swedes seem to do okay. I think we can do okay.

Anyway, Nathan, everybody, I’m glad to see you here. I hope I didn’t disturb anyone’s place in the world.

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

Next are Mr. Cardozo and Mr. Lamarche.

• (2040)

Mr. Andrew Cardozo (Executive Director, Pearson Centre for Progressive Policy): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It’s hard to come after Clive Doucet, although I’m not sure I agree with everything he said. Every party comes to an end at some point. Sorry; it’s just the truth.

I have three points I want to make.

The first is that I want to urge you, when you make your report and put forward a system, to talk about the pluses and minuses, the benefits and the downsides of any system you put forward. I say that because in a lot of the debate that happens around this, people talk about one system or another as if it is perfect and don’t talk about the imperfections. You are dealing with a bunch of really complex systems that have pluses and minuses. At the end of the day, you’ll pick one as you balance it all out. I urge you to be honest with Canadians about that. Tell them about the positives and the negatives of the system you put forward.

I happen to support proportional representation, but it is far from a perfect system. I think it is a little more perfect than our current

system, which hasn’t served us all that badly but which I agree is somewhat antiquated.

The second point I want to make is about the need to reform our political culture. That goes beyond the mechanics of our system. If we go to proportional representation, we are going to have minority governments forever. It becomes really important for parties to be able to work together. I think that we will be changing from an adversarial system to a collaborative system.

I want to remind you of the motion that you passed this week in the House of Commons on Yazidi women and girls. It was a tremendous motion put forward by the Conservative Party, supported by the other parties, and then supported by the government. What happened was a negotiation, on the floor of the House of Commons and behind the scenes, to come together and form a motion that everybody was able to work with. The Yazidi motion should really be the gold standard about how government can and should be done. I urge you to do that more and start practising it soon.

The third quick point is just in terms of decorum in the House of Commons. I’d urge you to adopt a Green Party approach to question period, which is that when the leader of the Green Party stands up to put forward a question, the party doesn’t stand up to applaud and heckle during that period.

I notice that the Liberals have followed that recently, over the spring. I think that’s tremendous, and I urge the other parties to do the same. What you do in question period really changes how people look at politics and government.

Thanks.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Can I just add that no one knows how difficult it is to control my caucus?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I’ll invite Teresa Legrand to the mic.

Now it’s time for Mr. Lamarche.

Mr. Julien Lamarche (President, National Capital Region Chapter, Fair Vote Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

In the Quebec National Assembly, in September 2011, a member said the following:

We have about 30 months before the next election. We have the time to do what every party has always demanded, which is a proportional system.

These remarks in the Quebec National Assembly in September 2011 were made by Gérard Deltell, who is a member of this committee.

We can quote the comments of Gilles Duceppe, Bob Rae and Jason Kenney, who said that they are in favour of proportional representation. We can also quote Mr. Flanagan and Mr. Harper, who said they wanted to get rid of the current first-past-the-post system.

[English]

I think with rural/urban proportional, we have achieve balance between the geographic reality of Canada and the need for voter equality. We can have more competition and choice in cities, while with a 15% top-up we do not need to change the boundaries of rural ridings.

In September 2007 a Strategic Counsel poll found that 47% of respondents knew nothing about the proposed reform of Ontario MMP, 41% were somewhat informed, and only 12% were informed.

We are taxpayers and citizens, and we simply deserve an equal and effective vote. Referendum advocates often say it is our voting system, so we deserve a say. If it's our voting system, it would give us an equal and effective vote. I want their voices to matter in every election. The referendum advocates can't say the same about my voice.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Eric McCabe, please go to mic number two.

We'll hear now from Ms. LeGrand.

Ms. Teresa LeGrand (As an Individual): Hello. First of all, I'd like to add my voice to the chorus of thank yous. I've had the opportunity to attend a few of your sessions, and I know you've worked very hard.

Today I want to address a few points about representative democracy, which is the exercise we're engaged in. We have a representative democracy. We will have one at the end of this, regardless of the system.

I consider myself to be a non-partisan Canadian. I've supported various elements of the platforms of various parties. I don't belong to a political party, which I think really puts me solidly with the majority of Canadians, although perhaps not the majority of people in this room. I'm an engaged non-partisan person.

When I look at your committee, I'm pretty sure that you're all members of political parties. I like the way you've changed it so that the organization of the committee is proportional rather than representing the results of the first-past-the-post election, but still, you're all party members. You're a minority.

As MPs, I believe you all operate as if you represent everyone in your riding, regardless of whether or not they voted for you. I hope that's what you bring to your role in this committee, that you represent all Canadians, the vast majority of whom are not party members.

All Canadians are represented by an MP. We've talked a lot about people feeling disenfranchised. Everybody's represented. Anybody who walks into one of your constituency offices, I would hope, is going to be treated equally to any other Canadian who walks in: you're going to help them if they have something that's within your purview. However, they don't all feel as if they're represented, because their vote didn't count in the last election. I think it's very legitimate that on the one hand, yes, everybody has a representative, but a majority of Canadians really don't feel represented.

Of these non-partisan Canadians, most of them probably don't have electoral reform at the top of their list of things they're really concerned about, but I think that most Canadians want to have a better system, and poll after poll has shown that they do. We're counting on you to deliver a better system for the Canadians who want to have a better, more collaborative government. I hope that you come up with a solution that's better, that we can all live with, and that will be a big improvement.

Thank you.

• (2045)

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

I'd invite Daniel Horn to mic number one while we listen to Mr. McCabe.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Eric McCabe (As an Individual): Good evening, everyone.

I'd like to mention that I've lived in Canada since 1973, and for about 40% of that time I've lived in rural ridings. My experience with both provincial and federal elections during that time has led me gradually but inevitably to the fact that the case for changing our electoral system is so strong that I would be extremely disappointed if this committee does not make a recommendation to Parliament to change the voting system.

A report from the Law Commission recommends that to the extent practicable, we should create a legislature that closely mirrors the political preferences of the electorate instead of one that is overly generous to the party that wins a plurality of the vote, rewarding it with a legislative majority disproportionate to its share of the vote.

We have a representative democracy. Most citizens do not have the time to research, study, discuss, and come to rational conclusions on the issues that we must collectively deal with if we are to live together without serious conflict. Parliamentarians are elected to carry out these responsibilities on our behalf. The majority of voters in the 2015 election voted for parties that included electoral reform in their platforms. Any change to our first-past-the-post system is not irreversible. Parties opposed to change are free to make change back to first past the post into a major campaign promise in the next election.

If this committee honours the principles of effectiveness, legitimacy, and local representation, it must recommend to Parliament that a proportional representation system that would best suit our country's federal structure and geographical reality be in place for the 2019 federal election.

Thank you.

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

Would Colin Betts come to mic two, please?

Mr. Horn, go ahead; you have two minutes.

• (2050)

Mr. Daniel Kyle Horn (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm presenting a new voting system, proportional seat distribution, or PSD. It maximizes party proportionality in Parliament without compensatory seats or larger ridings.

With PSD, voters mark a single X for their candidate, as they do now. Once all polling results are in, total votes for each party and independent candidates are calculated. Independent candidates with more votes than any other candidate in their riding receive their riding seat as now, but total votes for each party are used to divide all remaining seats among the parties, minimizing overrepresentation and under-representation in Parliament.

Once each party's seat count is calculated, seats are automatically assigned so that each riding is represented by the candidate of the party with the most outstanding success in the riding. In creating this new system, I've strived to ensure it is principled, impartial, internally consistent, and robust enough to provide suitable results even in odd and unlikely voter scenarios. I have successfully simulated PSD provincially and nationally. When applied in each province and territory separately for the 2015 federal election, PSD shows great regional proportionality, a Gallagher index composite below 2%.

PSD calculations are fully automatable and thus rapid. They took under two minutes on my old laptop. Results are maximally proportional, and since parties receive seats by popular support, when your candidate does not win your riding, your vote can still help your party get a seat in another riding. In simulations, over 98% of votes decide Parliament.

I have written a comprehensive description of this new voting system with design justifications and extended examples. I'm happy to share it with anyone interested. I ask this committee to give proportional seat distribution serious consideration. There are no compensatory members of Parliament, no bigger ridings, and 39% is 39%.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Andrew Hodgson, please go to the mic, but first we'll hear from Mr. Betts.

Mr. Colin Betts (As an Individual): Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak.

I just scratched out a few notes and I just want to make a couple of observations.

One is about the strangeness of changing the system of elections for the House of Commons while we see the continuation of an unelected, unaccountable upper house. While I'm encouraged that members of Parliament are discussing electoral reform, I hope that this discussion will continue and eventually look at both houses of Parliament. Direct accountability to Canadians by the Senate can only come through an election of senators; otherwise, why do we have them? I hope that work does continue to move us toward a democratic upper house. Frankly, it would be a great place to look at proportional representation.

Another consideration that I want to raise is with regard to voter turnout. Whatever the ease of the first-past-the-post electoral system, a system that sees more than 40% of its citizens not casting a vote—

not 60% casting, but 40% that do not—raises concerns about the legitimacy of that very system. If first past the post was such a success, we wouldn't be looking for alternatives. We're a mature democracy, and let's be frank: 39% of Canadians supporting a governing party when 60% of Canadians come out to vote means that 25% of Canadian citizens are electing a government. Let's not be afraid to be bold.

Finally, I have one other thought, which is that this is the worst way to have a conversation. I'm sitting here talking to you. You're sitting here talking at me, as opposed to all of us talking in groups and coming to a form of consensus. I don't know what other meetings have been like, but I hope that at the end of your sessions you will continue to talk to and engage Canadians one on one or in groups, because I think your experiences across the country as elected members of Parliament and from hearing from Canadians from coast to coast to coast will be very beneficial for us to hear. I think that our ideas will be very beneficial for you to hear in a more conversational format.

Thank you for your time.

•(2055)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'd ask Mr. Brett Hodnett to come to mic number two.

Mr. Hodgson, the floor is yours.

Mr. Andrew Hodgson (As an Individual): Thank you.

I have a list to read to begin with.

The Canadian flag, medicare, repatriation of the Constitution, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, free trade, votes for women, the Fair Elections Act, and most recently assisted dying are all examples of legislation that has had a profound effect on Canadians and that has been passed without a referendum. To those who have been proposing a referendum, would Canada be a better place if we had held a referendum on all these issues? Some of these issues, such as medicare, might not have passed. I was around, and I remember it was a very divisive debate. The Canadian flag was a very divisive, nasty debate at the time. What is there about this issue that makes it so special that it needs a referendum when so much other important legislation has not required one?

I also wonder about people suggesting that this is a profound and disastrous change to our Canadian electoral system when the committee hasn't recommended anything yet. I'm going to wait for the committee to recommend something. I hope very much that they'll recommend a system that will do a better job of fairly and accurately representing the diversity of opinions and concerns of everyone in our Parliament. I don't think it's very hard to do better than first past the post.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Marlene Koehler, please go to the mic.

Mr. Hodnett, go ahead.

Mr. Brett Hodnett (As an Individual): I just wanted to say that I strongly support switching to a system of proportional representation. I don't feel as if I'm represented in this country, and it would be really liberating to have that change.

I did an informal survey of my family and friends, and more than 50% of them routinely vote strategically for parties they don't believe in. There's also a handful who don't vote at all because they don't feel it makes a difference in their riding. You get quite disillusioned and cynical with this system, so I really hope you'll recommend a system of proportional representation.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nathan Hauch, please come to mic number two.

Ms. Koehler, go ahead.

Ms. Marlene Koehler (As an Individual): Like others, I thank you for your work and the opportunity to speak. I don't have a formal presentation, but I thought I should register the things I agree with and the things I don't.

I agree that we should continue to have a representative democracy, and for me that has implied a party system. Therefore, I would like to see voters vote for the vision of a party that they see put before them and that they be able to hold that party accountable in some manner. It's clearly important for elected representatives to maintain contact with their electorate. Almost everyone I've heard speak, no matter what they think of first past the post or proportional representation, expresses that kind of view.

Party proportionality is important, and for that reason I support proportional representation. I would say that historically—if one can say historically—I preferred mixed member proportional. I'm certainly open to other models. Your committee is in the best position, having heard from the greatest number of Canadians and experts, to shape a proposal that reflects your best sense of what you've heard and what you understand. That's what we elect you for, so I wish you well in that decision-making.

I do want to say that I am opposed to a referendum. I don't believe that there are many things on which there should be a referendum. I don't think most of us chose first past the post; I think we rather inherited that from when we were a two-party system. I don't think we have to choose this any more than the many important decisions that you're called upon as our representatives to make in every Parliament.

I thank you.

• (2100)

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

Before we go to Mr. Hauch, I'd like Mr. Gullon to come to mic number one.

Go ahead, Mr. Hauch.

Mr. Nathan Hauch (As an Individual): Thank you.

Can everyone hear me? I'm hard of hearing, so I don't know.

Perfect; that's wonderful.

My name is Nathan Hauch. I have a strong interest in electoral reform. I would like to express my sincere thanks to you for your work and to present my view for some form of proportional representation.

First, I would like to argue against a referendum to resolve this issue. Referenda are fraught with their own challenges, as we have heard, among them what constitutes legitimacy by way of turnout, the wording of the question, and the threshold that must be met to grant a change in the electoral system. I believe Canadians will hold judgment on the electoral system when casting a ballot in a general election, where they will weigh that issue with others.

One criticism of a referendum is that it undermines the authority we invest in you, our elected officials. If a ballot is believed to be skewed toward one party, I believe the voters, offended by such unfairness, will make their views known.

Second, you have heard that proportional representation results in a diluted relationship between an elected representative and the voter, but with proportional representation a dilution of the relationship need not be the result. Parties, in building lists, may have considerations of a regional nature. Mixed member systems also afford local representation while allocating overall seats based upon the party's proportional share of the vote.

As well, lists have the benefit of encouraging greater election of women and people of diverse backgrounds.

Third, I want to suggest that preferential ballots may result in a diluted result of what many voters actually want: that their will be reflected. It may privilege certain parties, resulting in more majority governments.

Fourth, while first past the post has resulted in stable governments in many cases, we have had minority governments fairly recently, and the sky did not fall. While there was some uncertainty, there was bargaining between parties, which, given that parties represent varying views, has at times provided more compromises.

Fifth, it has been argued that proportional representation may result in massive party fragmentation. This can be reduced through the use of a threshold for representation such as we see in Germany, with its mixed member system.

Finally, I submit that proportional representation, by making every vote count, encourages collaboration. It is important that first past the post, in its typically winner-take-all results, results in more adversarial relationships between parties. Indeed, I personally feel that much of the drive for the reform, or for reform generally, is based on the desire for a less adversarial system. Under proportional representation, there is much evidence to suggest that voters will punish parties they perceive to be overly adversarial.

In conclusion, many Canadians would be pleased if, after every election, the public discourse switched over from who has won and what can be done to usher in change in four years' time to what the parties working together will do today to work together and appeal to a wider range of voters. Coalition governments supported by proportional representation better reflect the will of voters, not only on election night but throughout a government's term as well.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Christopher Mahon, please go to the other mic.

Mr. Gullon, go ahead.

Mr. A.C. Gullon (As an Individual): Thank you.

To the translator, I'm skipping the first two paragraphs and the fourth one.

Having in the late sixties been part of a merger that gave me a family connection to Germany, I have given some thought several times since then to proportional representation. I have concluded that it is an oxymoron: there is no representation at all, and the resulting governments, wherever it has been tried, give disproportionate weight to the lunatic fringe.

Elizabeth, I do not include the Green Party in that last group.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I know you don't.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. A.C. Gullon: However, having the best system doesn't mean that it can't be improved. The first-past-the-post system has three chronic problems: a party can gain a five-year mandate when 60% of the vote was for the opposing parties; there is a decreasing voter turnout; and finally, there is that ubiquitous feeling that a vote for a losing candidate doesn't count at all in a new parliament.

Borrowing from my German connection for the second, I propose two electoral changes that just might cure all three problems. The first change could be called the proportional mandate. The latest date for the following election would be fixed by Elections Canada as the function of the proportion of eligible voters voting for the winning party's candidate. I am currently suggesting that the mandate would range from one year, with 25% or less of the electorate, to the full five years, for 51%.

For the translator, skip to the second page.

For the second change, we note that Germany only uses proportional representation for some of the seats in the Bundesrat. Borrowing from that, while noting that many, if not most, Canadians vote for the party or at least a sexy party leader rather than the candidate, I propose that in addition to the current 315 or 316 votes in the House, it would be up to 100 party platform votes. Each leader of a party registered for the election would have a block of votes equal in number to the percentage of the eligible electors voting for her or his party.

Translator, skip the next paragraph.

Finally, with these simple electoral changes, every vote cast would count, whether for a winning candidate or not. Actually, your vote would count many times: the first would be in lengthening, if your party wins, the mandate of the government; the second would be every time the leader of your party casts the platform vote in the House. Campaign teams, even for losing candidates, would have a simple goal: get out every possible vote. They would be inspired to fight on even when the local situation was clearly hopeless, and best

if all, we wouldn't have the complaints from B.C. that the election is over before our polls close.

Thank you.

● (2105)

The Chair: Thank you, and thank you for your consideration for the interpreters. I'm sure they appreciate it.

Ms. Ann-Marie Balasubramaniam, please go to a mic.

Go ahead, Mr. Mahon.

Mr. Christopher Mahon (As an Individual): Thank you.

Nobody in Canada right now knows what is ultimately going to be proposed to replace the current electoral system. Nobody in this room knows what is ultimately going to be proposed.

The Chair: That's true.

Mr. Christopher Mahon: So nobody can claim that whatever is ultimately proposed has the consent of the Canadian electorate.

If this government seeks to impose whatever it concocts behind closed doors, without a referendum, they will cast the Canadian electoral system into disrepute. They will destroy its legitimacy. It is important that the Canadian electoral system look legitimate, and right now it's the envy of the world. It is. We're very lucky to be in Canada. We're very lucky to live under this electoral system.

Ms. Elizabeth May: We're very lucky to be in Canada.

The Chair: But in Canada, it's that everyone gets to have their say.

Go ahead.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Exactly.

Mr. Christopher Mahon: If this government imposes whatever it contrives behind closed doors without a referendum, it will look to many like a shameless attempt to rig the system.

If this government believes in what it ultimately proposes, it should have the guts to put it to a referendum. I ask every member of this committee to please go back to the government to protect the legitimacy of the Canadian electoral system and demand a referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Schioler, please go to the mic.

Now we'll go to Ms. Balasubramaniam.

Ms. Ann-Marie Balasubramaniam (As an Individual): That's an excellent pronunciation of my name.

The Chair: Well, when you have a name like Scarpaleggia...

Ms. Ann-Marie Balasubramaniam: There are a lot of passionate arguments being presented here. I thank you for the opportunity to speak, and also for the hard work that you've been doing all across Canada. I came to listen, but I just stood to comment because I want to echo the sentiments of my fellow citizens here who have said that we don't necessarily need a referendum. I want to express my opinion that I trust your ability, as members of Parliament, to make that decision on our behalf.

I also think that the time in history for first past the post has passed. We're more than a two-party system, for which first past the post best works as a system. I think the diversity of our country is represented in our multi-party system, and that's a good thing. I think it's okay. I don't necessarily think we should worry so much about the fringe, because we're a country that's changing. A multi-party electoral system is something we should strive for to represent the multi-party system we have.

I also think this multi-party electoral system, if we change it with electoral reform, is something that would benefit not just one individual party, and not necessarily just the Green Party or the NDP, as I heard some others say. Certainly before the amalgamation of the Conservative Party, it could have benefited either the Progressive Conservatives or the Alliance. Instead of forcing parties to amalgamate in order to win the strategic vote, this would be a great alternative.

The most important thing is that the voters stand to gain, because their votes would count.

I would lastly like to say that the strategic voting of the last couple of years has made me feel like I've been at the horse races, betting on odds of what could happen. I'd love for that to stop, so if you did decide to go with electoral reform, I'd much appreciate that.

The last thing I'll say, to close, is that you have a great opportunity here. At the risk of a cliché, great moments are born from great opportunity. With the 150th anniversary coming up, I think a change would be amazing.

• (2110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'd ask Mr. Adam Houblen to come to mic number one.

Now we'll hear from Mr. Schioler.

Mr. John Schioler (As an Individual): I didn't come to speak this evening. It was only when I thought there was something missing as the discussion took place that I put my name down.

Those in favour of change seem to have gone into a lot of detail about how that was going to work, but those in favour of the referendum didn't tell us how a referendum would work. Would it be 50% plus one across the country? Would we do it by province, etc.?

It seems to me that it's incumbent upon them to show that there is something workable and something that would create confidence in the Canadian public that the right system was being addressed, and I wonder whether in your deliberations across the country you have had any representatives of the point of view of the referendum come to you with details about when, how many, and percentages.

The Chair: The subject has come up quite a bit in the hearings, both on the road and here in Ottawa. Some have said we should follow the New Zealand example of two referenda prior to a change and then one after the change to give approval or not to that change. Some have said, for example, that the 60% threshold in the B.C. referendum was arbitrary and too high, so some extent, yes, people have touched on the details, but it has revolved mostly around the principle of a referendum.

Mr. Scott Reid: One last thing is that we were in Prince Edward Island, where they're holding what they call a plebiscite later this month, but it's actually a referendum on electoral reform.

We had a number of people who are administering that referendum, and they had a previous one on the same issue several years ago in a different format. They presented, both of these administrators, on how those worked.

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, last but not least, we'll hear from Mr. Houblen, please.

Mr. Adam Houblen (As an Individual): Thank you. My name is Adam Houblen. I'm finishing up my Ph.D. at the University of Ottawa here in town. I'm studying biology. I look at algae in lakes, so that really doesn't make me an electoral reform specialist in any way, but I am very much in favour of proportional representation, and I think what we have right now, the first past the post, is clearly archaic. It's an archaic form, and I think we can modernize. There are lots of examples, and I'll leave it largely up to the experts to decide which one might be the best form.

As for the question of a referendum, well, I'm here. This is my referendum right now. I'm speaking out at these public open houses. I also did vote in the last election, and I believe all but one party had electoral reform as a key platform issue, so I think it's there. I think we can move on.

I respect all of the opinions, but the best argument I've heard tonight for first past the post is that we've had stable government and it has been working so far. Well, that's not really inspirational, and I think that we have a civil government despite the electoral system. I think we can move on and experiment. I'm a scientist. Let's experiment. Let's have some perspective. We can change it again. It's not the end. It's not the last form. There might be something better.

Canada has been in a unique position as well. We have this large geography with pockets of dense population. We'd probably have to come up with something that might be unique or novel, so I hope that we can.

I trust you. If you have questions about algae, I hope you trust my expertise, and I'm going to basically trust this panel that has been working on this, doing a great job. I love that it's proportional and across all the parties, but I'm going to trust your final decision. I'll let you whittle out the final details. I hope you can take the opinion of the electorate, though, that they do want change. I think it's quite apparent here.

Thank you.

• (2115)

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

I'd like to thank everyone here tonight and those who came to the mics to share your considered views. Thank you also for respecting the time limits, which allowed for a full and orderly discussion.

To the committee members, we meet again tomorrow morning at 7:45 a.m.

[Translation]

We will reconvene tomorrow at 7:45 a.m.

Thank you to the participants for their comments and participation.

We hope that you will carefully read our report, which must be tabled by December 1.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>