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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 23rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[*English*]

The committee is meeting today to consider Bill C-14 for the first half of the meeting.

[*Translation*]

Today, we welcome Professor Patrick Taillon from the faculty of law at Université Laval.

Welcome Professor Taillon. You have the floor for five minutes to give your presentation.

Mr. Patrick Taillon (Tenured Professor, Constitutional Law, Faculty of Law, Université Laval, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the members of this committee for this invitation.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-14, which amends the Constitution Act, 1867, is clever: it masks the decline in Quebec's political weight behind a freeze in the number of seats Quebec has in the House of Commons. Frankly, Bill C-14 diminishes that decline. Without this bill, Quebec's political weight would drop from 23.1% to 22.5%; with this bill, it drops from 23.1% to 22.8%. In short, that's a difference of 0.3 percentage points in Quebec's political weight.

The reduction in the number of seats, which Bill C-14 avoids, cannot be confused here with the reduction in Quebec's political weight, which the bill sanctions.

For some, the decline in Quebec's political weight is inevitable. For others, it's possible to take action, and I share that opinion. Bill C-14 proposes to do something in that sense, but very modestly, very temporarily and without the whole picture of the problem.

The reason for the problem is complex. On the one hand, there is the factual reality, that the demographic decline in Quebec within the federation has practically been a continuous problem since 1867. On the other hand, there are many reasons for that decline. Some are linked to Quebec's political choices. However, those rea-

sons always give rise to the question of whether the federal government's actions are related more to the problem or the solution.

However, it's an even more significant problem, because it will increase over the coming years. It's well known that the current government's policy aims to substantially increase the population of Canada, almost doubling immigration thresholds over the medium term. The targets were 280,000 immigrants per year when the Conservatives were in power. Based on the current objectives, the annual number of immigrants will increase to 430,000, so there's a complete deadlock. Indeed, from Quebec's standpoint, the current policy comes down to the choice of maintaining its political weight by following Canada's pace for immigration, or adopting lower immigration thresholds and thus increasing its ability to integrate immigrants, to be a melting pot for them, an adopted home, and to help them learn French.

There is suddenly the need to consider the issue of reforming the electoral map and Quebec's political weight in the broader context. This is a sensitive issue, one that affects the very nature of the agreement between Quebec and this federation since 1867. The question is what is Ottawa prepared to do to maintain Quebec's political weight. Quebec's representation within federal institutions is not solely a matter for the House of Commons. The House can take action, but action can also be taken elsewhere. I think that, on several fronts, more could be done and done better.

There's another question: what can Ottawa do to improve Quebec's ability to follow a demographic policy similar to that of the rest of Canada? Here again, recent events give us several ideas and reveal several steps that could be taken. Of course, it goes beyond the specific issue addressed in Bill C-14, but even in the specific and technical context of the electoral map, Parliament could do more than simply freeze the number of seats per province.

After all, Quebec is a nation, as was made clear by a resolution adopted by the House in the 2000s.

Jurisprudence from the Supreme Court of Canada, including its 2014 reference regarding the Supreme Court Act, sanctioned and recognized that national characteristic of Quebec, and did so in a case that affected Quebec's political weight and its representation within a federal institution, the Supreme Court of Canada.

As well, under Bill 96, which has just been passed in Quebec, it will now be stated in black and white in the Constitution Act, 1867, in new section 90Q.1, that "Quebecers form a nation". That bill, like Bill C-14, directly and explicitly amends the text of the Constitution.

There are aspects of the makeup of the House of Commons, however, that cannot be amended by Bill C-14. The principle of proportional representation can only be amended with the support of seven provinces representing 50% of the population. However, the principle of proportional representation is a rule, a principle, a constitutional objective, and, like all other rules, principles and constitutional objectives, it's not absolute. It can be subject to reasonable limits of accommodation. Jurisprudence from the Supreme Court of Canada has repeatedly established that the court's interpretation of proportional representation is not a purely mathematical concept. It has recognized considerable flexibility within each province to tolerate certain discrepancies between certain types of jurisdictions. That type—

• (1110)

The Chair: Mr. Taillon, I apologize, but you're at six and a half minutes, when you had five minutes. You can send your presentation to all the members sitting on the committee. We must now move on to the question period.

Mr. Patrick Taillon: No problem. I understand.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll begin with a six-minute round, starting with Mr. Kmiec, followed by Mr. Fergus, Mr. Therrien and Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Kmiec, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to offer Professor Taillon the opportunity to continue discussing the provinces' considerable flexibility, as I found that interesting and would like to know more about it. If he'd like to continue on the topic, I'll offer him a few minutes. I'd then have a question for him about the decline in political weight. As a member from the west, I'd like to consider other options.

You can therefore continue Mr. Taillon.

Mr. Patrick Taillon: The flexibility recognized in jurisprudence was related to discrepancies in the principle of proportional representation that exist within the same province, between representatives from urban and rural areas. Regardless, the Supreme Court demonstrated, in its decisions, that its interpretation was not simply based on a mathematical or arithmetical imperative.

Also, in practical terms, our laws and even the text of our Constitution include small exceptions to proportional representation. I think of the senatorial clause, which establishes that a province is entitled to at least the same number of members as senators. This was also upheld in 1982 and is now very explicitly protected by section 41 of the Constitution Act, 1982. There's also an equivalent clause for the territories. In that particular case, there's no basis for the clause other than the actions of the federal Parliament. Thus, an exception to proportional representation was made for the territories through the same procedure that is being used to try to adjust the electoral map and electoral representation here.

In the case of the Senate, the exceptions have increased over time. Proportional representation was not the logic that prevailed during the allocation of Senate seats in 1867. For example, when

Newfoundland joined, it was given seats, but they did not come out of the number of seats belonging to the Maritimes.

That means there's a logic from 1867 concerning the allocation of Senate seats that was enshrined by the Constitution, which is hard to amend, but it does not prevent small exceptions through a unilateral constitutional amendment, if only for the territories and Newfoundland.

The principle of proportional representation therefore cannot be considered as absolute, as though it were the only constitutional basis in question in this type of extremely sensitive matter.

• (1115)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Taillon, the last time a province lost seats in the House of Commons was in 1966, and that affected Quebec, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan as well, I believe.

This is a bit of a persnickety question, but why should western Canadians, such as Albertans, accept having less representation in the House of Commons? It's not 1867 anymore, but 2022. As you mentioned, our country is a lot bigger now; its population has grown a lot through immigration, of course, but also through births. We're not a former colony anymore, but a major country in North America. Why do you think western Canadians should accept having less representation in the House of Commons?

Mr. Patrick Taillon: Western Canadians also have concerns about their representation in Parliament. The number of Senate seats in the western provinces raises very legitimate concerns. At times, this country must be able to have a genuine discussion to determine where it's been and where it's going.

The question of political weight for both Quebec and the maritime provinces in Canada's Parliament cannot be examined in isolation, in terms of the electoral map. Representation can be improved for everyone by strengthening their seats in the Senate and the House of Commons.

Dealing with the issue by freezing the number of seats and increasing the overall number of seats is a clever way to avoid a real debate, which we won't always be able to ignore. We won't always be able to put off considering the west's concerns or Quebec's concerns about the decline in political weight, which has been ongoing since 1867. They are legitimate concerns and must be the subject of a real debate, one that can't be continually swept under the rug.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Taillon, what are the other options for respecting the political weight of the various provinces within Confederation?

Mr. Patrick Taillon: The solution that I prefer is for there to be a certain number of provincial representatives in the Senate. Currently, senators are appointed by the federal executive. If the Prime Minister, through mere convention, were to accept the nominations recommended by the provinces, there would immediately be better senators. I'm not saying the senators would be better, but they would better represent the interests of the provinces. In Quebec's case, the National Assembly would simply need to recommend senators. Suddenly, the decline in Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons could be offset by the presence of representatives in the Senate, as a direct result of appointments by the province, made official by the Prime Minister of Canada and the Governor General.

That's my preferred solution. It's an example that shows that representation in the federal Parliament can better reflect the provinces. That would apply to both the prairie provinces and Quebec. Everyone would win.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would remind everyone that all comments by members and witnesses must be addressed through the chair.

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor for six minutes.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome Professor Taillon.

I've been reading his many articles in publications, journals and magazines in Quebec for at least 20 years. I admire his way of thinking, although I don't always agree with his conclusions. I must admit that today is one of those times when I don't entirely agree with Professor Taillon's recommendations. However, his ideas and the solutions he proposes certainly merit our close examination.

First, I'd like to thank Professor Taillon for being here with us today. I also want to thank him for recognizing that Bill C-14 is certainly a better solution than pure popular representation, which would cause Quebec to lose a lot of its demographic weight.

I should note that this situation doesn't affect only Quebec. That's what we're looking at today, but if we rely on demographic projections, in the next redrawing of boundaries, other provinces will probably face the situation that Quebec is now looking at.

I'd like to ask Professor Taillon a question.

You say that there are many complex reasons for the problem. I agree with you on that. In terms of immigration, you say that Quebec has a certain capacity for integration, particularly in terms of the francization of economic immigrants. I'm from a region of Quebec that attracts the second-most newcomers to Quebec, and many of them are from francophone west Africa.

Would it be a good solution for Quebec to increase the number of economic immigrants from francophone countries, like those in Africa, who would come to live in Quebec?

Mr. Patrick Taillon: I thank the member for his question.

The day when Ontario has double the political weight of Quebec is not far off. Do the calculation for the other provinces. The phenomenon that's emerging for the Canada of the future is visible: the demographic imbalance we're already seeing will increase.

Immigration is just one factor, but it's an important factor. In discussing the future of this federation and each province's political weight, things need to be examined from a broader perspective than just the electoral map.

Several decades ago, Ottawa and Quebec signed an agreement to give Quebec a bit more independence in the choice of certain classes of immigrants and integration policies. Here again, the issue must be examined from a broader perspective. Ottawa still plays an important role in this respect. In recent weeks, people from francophone Africa who had applied for temporary resident permits for education or applied for long-term permits saw their files—

• (1125)

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'm sorry, but my question was related, in particular, to economic immigrants, who make up the vast majority of immigrants. Those who come here to study aren't automatically admitted after that to Quebec or elsewhere in Canada. My question is about a class of immigration that could really change things in a significant and immediate way.

Does Professor Taillon have an opinion on that?

Mr. Patrick Taillon: I totally agree with the member that it's one of the many solutions. I deplore the fact that when certain types of applications from francophone Africans are processed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, those files face obstacles.

This is a phenomenon that's in the news, but we can see it over a much longer period. Quebec and French-speaking Canada had political weight in 1867, and Quebec's membership in the federation led to a decline in that political weight. That's a factual reality, but it isn't known who's to blame. Maybe it would have been worse if Quebec had been an independent country, but maybe it would have been better; we'll never know.

This is a sensitive issue, because it affects the ties between Quebec and the federation. Solutions need to be found, in particular through the electoral map and Senate representation, but also in how Ottawa acts in Quebec when it receives applications from people who want to come here to build the Canada of tomorrow in French, a language they're already proficient in. However, the processing of those files is delayed, and many applications are even rejected.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have another question for Professor Taillon. Since my time is almost up, I'd like a quick answer.

Is it possible to do what he's proposing without amending the Constitution?

Mr. Patrick Taillon: The answer is easy: Bill C-14 already proposes an amendment to the Constitution. Clause 2 of the bill explicitly states how the text of the Constitution Act, 1867, will be worded going forward.

The only difference is that the procedure used for Bill C-14 gives Parliament the right to do certain things, but not those for which it would need the agreement of seven provinces representing 50% of the population. What can't be done here, essentially, is to abolish the principle of proportional representation. There's a difference between abolishing it and slightly amending it, as is being done here for the territories. Can a bit more be done in other situations? That's somewhat the opinion that I've submitted to you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Taillon.

I'd like to ask everyone to try to give answers that are the same length as the questions. It's very important for us to receive answers to the questions the members want to ask.

Mr. Therrien, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I want to welcome the witness, who has come to give us insight on a topic that's very important to Quebec.

I agree entirely with what he said in his opening statement: this bill only masks or temporarily diminishes the decline in Quebec's political weight. It's been known for a while that Quebec is losing political weight. That's clear, and this bill offers no permanent solution.

On the one hand, there's this problem, and on the other hand, there are these draft solutions.

Last year, Parliament accepted the idea not only that Quebec was a nation, but also that French was its common language. I think that's quite clear. It's not a province like the others; it's a nation. It's the only province that's considered to be a nation, so powers have to be tied to that designation as a nation.

In March, we proposed another motion, which was adopted with a large majority, saying that Quebec must not lose any members. Bill C-14 strengthens that position of the House. However, the motion also said that Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons must not be reduced, which the bill does not respect.

Since everyone, with a few exceptions, agrees that Quebec is a nation and that its political weight must be preserved, I think the stage has been set for this bill to go further.

The member for Hull-Aylmer spoke about immigration. Last week, the Legault government asked for more powers in the area of immigration, and the federal government refused, so I don't know why we're talking about that here. I think the matter's closed. There's an impasse in that respect.

I'll ask Mr. Taillon a simple question so he can further clarify this problem. What could Parliament do to guarantee—I did say “guar-

antee”—that Quebec's political weight within federal institutions was at the very least consistent?

• (1130)

Mr. Patrick Taillon: I can propose two solutions.

First, just as the principle of proportional representation is adjusted for the territories, a slight discrepancy—a reasonable and justified discrepancy that would be statistically marginal—could be established to maintain Quebec's weight at about 25% and end this decline.

However, that requires political courage, because it could in fact spark off a debate about whether that is consistent with the principle of proportional representation. I think that a Parliament with the desire could, as it does for the territories, defend the fact that it's an adjustment and that the principle of proportional representation is essentially respected.

That's a first solution.

However, other means of improving Quebec's political weight in Parliament must be considered.

For example, senators would finally need to be appointed based on recommendations from the provinces. This would finally inject some federalism into the federal Parliament.

The same thing would need to be done for other federal appointments, such as the appointment of Supreme Court and superior court justices. Federalism needs to finally mean something in how this immense power of appointment is structured, a power that the federal government currently holds. In the end, we currently have a Parliament in which the Prime Minister appoints all senators, all judges and all ambassadors, and requires party discipline from most members of the House of Commons. The trend towards the concentration of power needs to be reversed by injecting more federalism into Parliament and, clearly, more democracy.

Mr. Alain Therrien: The Supreme Court recognized the fundamental principle of effective representation, which encompasses two conditions. First, there must be relative equality so the weight of an elector's vote is not disproportionate. Second, it's important for there to be respect for natural communities. In other words, factors such as geographic characteristics, history and community interests must be taken into consideration. That's why the senatorial clause, the grandfather clause and the territorial clause were enacted.

The Charlottetown accord guaranteed that, from a historical perspective, Quebec would not lose its political weight and that it would be at least 25%. That was in 1992. We know the rest of the story, and we know what happened to the Charlottetown accord.

Would it be beneficial to take up the intent of the Charlottetown accord and create a clause, possibly called the Quebec nation clause, that would establish Quebec's minimal representation at 25%, to ensure its political weight in the House of Commons?

Mr. Patrick Taillon: Canada's Constitution enshrines proportional representation as a limit to the ability of Parliament to act alone in amending the Canadian Constitution in these areas.

The member is correct in saying that the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court has made clear that the court did not have a strictly mathematical or arithmetical approach for dealing with these issues and that it was not the only concern.

Issues related to electoral representation are sensitive. Canada has been able to avoid the American trap of transforming the debate about the electoral map into a debate about each party's partisan interests in setting boundaries in their own way. The Supreme Court has in fact created some flexibility, as long as we respect the spirit of the matter, if I may put it that way. In that context, it relies a lot on the concept of effective representation, as the member mentioned. For the Supreme Court, proportional representation is not an absolute. It is instead about the desire to effectively move toward that objective, but in a federation as complex as Canada, that desire must take into account other concerns as well.

That said, the flexibility for statistical or mathematical discrepancies between rural and urban ridings in the same province will always be greater than the flexibility that probably exists, in my opinion, for adjustments between territories and provinces overall. It's clear that a little flexibility can be leveraged. It already is and has been for other issues, so it could be as well for the issue of Quebec's political weight.

• (1135)

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'd simply like to say that the Quebec nation clause, in terms of a minimum 25% threshold, is achievable. That's what the Bloc Québécois will be proposing in order for the bill to respect the motion that was adopted with a strong majority in the House of Commons.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

As always, through you, I'll be happy to ask the professor some questions. I appreciated his presentation today.

One of the things I spend a lot of time considering and have heard from many indigenous leaders across Canada is the fact that our democracy was very much built on, and continues to be built on, a colonial practice that often silences the voices of the first people of this land. When we talk about fairness and when we talk about looking at democracy in a new way, I think it's very important that we never forget these voices and how they have been isolated.

I think of the many communities I represent. When there is an election within their own community, of course, there is a 90% to 95% participation rate, meaning that indigenous communities are very much connected to a democratic system. What they're not con-

nected to in the same way, I think, is the Canadian democratic system. Part of that is based on the lack of representation.

We know that the House of Commons largely runs on a representation-by-population basis, but there are exceptions like the one you spoke of earlier about provinces having fewer House of Commons seats than Senate seats. In that context, is it important for us to explore representation in a broader context, especially around the first peoples of Canada?

I know there's been a lot of discussion about how those voices can be amplified. The system right now, of course, leaves it up to parties to nominate people and bring forward those voices, but should there be seats in our Parliament and in our Senate that are set aside specifically for indigenous communities to make sure those voices are heard?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Taillon: I thank the member for her question.

You'll understand that my initial presentation focused on the very sensitive issue of Quebec's political weight, which has been declining steadily since 1867. However, the issue of indigenous representation in federal institutions is obviously very important. It confirms the problem I was trying to highlight, that this country or this federation cannot indefinitely avoid certain debates.

There are many indigenous concerns, but a relationship on an equal basis with indigenous peoples cannot be built on a new foundation without there being some constitutional debate. One day, there may be a need to make room for first nations representatives in the Senate, in the House of Commons or in a house dedicated to them, one that would have jurisdiction over certain matters. These are solutions that must be considered.

The fact that there's progress for some must not eclipse the concerns of others. That's why these issues must be addressed as a whole, beyond the simple issue of the electoral map.

Ultimately, there's a way to make more room for representation of indigenous peoples in federal institutions, while making our Senate more representative of the provinces and making adjustments to the distribution of seats in the House of Commons.

The only way to do it is to consider all concerns and find solutions to resolve them. Otherwise, this federation will very quickly fall back into constitutional taboo and the refusal to discuss these issues, which are fundamental. These debates can't be put off indefinitely.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I appreciate your comments on that.

You have talked several times about having this debate on the Constitution, which I think would be an interesting thing to move forward with.

I guess I'm curious to know what other countries have had this kind of debate. Are there particular models that you think are more meaningful? As we talk about representation, that is something that is incredibly important. There are a lot of identities in Canada. That's something that Canadians are proud of, but I don't think we always amplify the voices that we should.

We look at our federal systems. We still see continuously that the people who are most prominent continue to be male, white and often straight. If we're going to talk about how to represent identity, how to make sure these voices are heard in a more profound way—and you're talking specifically about a debate in this constitutional realm—can you tell us what that format would look like? Have some countries done it more effectively than others? Do you have any examples for us?

I think, once you answer that, my time will be done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Taillon: There are two parts to the issue.

In terms of comparative law, unfortunately, I have no perfect example in front of me that could answer the member's concerns. In terms of indigenous issues, however, I would be curious to look at New Zealand and Australia, which face difficulties and challenges similar to our own, and also often have incomplete and imperfect solutions. That could be a source of mutual inspiration.

As for the constitutional debate, I'd just like to add that the passage of Bill C-14, given its content, is already a constitutional debate in itself. The text of Bill C-14 tells us how the Constitution Act, 1867, will be worded going forward.

The problem is that the Constitution of Canada is complex. It's made up of all sorts of rules. There are some that the Parliament of Canada can amend alone and others that require the agreement of seven provinces representing 50% of the population. Given our history and political difficulties, there's a tendency to sweep under the rug all debates that require more than unilateral action by the federal Parliament.

The constitutional debate still exists. It's before us in the form of Bill C-14. It's simply that we only take the easiest path: the procedure set out for the federal Parliament to act alone.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now begin the second round of questions. We'll start with Mr. Vis, who will have the floor for five minutes, followed by Ms. Romando for five minutes. Mr. Therrien and Ms. Blaney will then have two and a half minutes each.

Today, because we're hearing from another panel after this one, I will have to interrupt the speakers if the conversation is too long.

Mr. Vis, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Professor Taillon, for being here today.

In your opening remarks, you spoke a lot about the reference to Parliament's decision to recognize Quebec as a nation within a united Canada. It got me thinking back to the days of Confederation and political science 101, when we learned about Cartier and Macdonald and the creation of Canada as we know it today.

In western Canada, we were taught that Cartier and Macdonald, under the BNA Act, had some economic interests in mind, and those economic interests were largely focused in two provinces, Quebec and Ontario. It was also interesting that when I remember looking back at the BNA Act, there was no reference to region, as well as in the original Constitution of Canada, which is obviously still in effect.

In British Columbia...I appreciated your comments about possibly electing a senator, but frankly speaking, if western Canada doesn't get some type of recognition moving forward, there are going to be major constitutional battles. In one respect, I agree with you that we need to have those tough conversations.

One of the things referenced in the Constitution of 1982 are the rights of individuals. I represent individuals who pay just as much tax as individuals in the province of Quebec to the federal government. I have a hard time coming here and saying that our vote is worth less than a Quebecker's.

It's not just me saying this. Donald Savoie, the Canada research chair, has spoken at length about the attempts of the Laurentian elite in Quebec and Ontario—this is Canada; this is serious stuff—and about the concentration of power that was designed in our Constitution of 1867, which still largely exists today in the formation of our public service.

What do you say to a western Canadian who simply wants an equal say in this federation? Secondly, if Quebec had under-representation like British Columbia has, I think Quebeckers would be up in arms. B.C. and Alberta have been up in arms in the past. It happened in 1993, and it's not a far cry, even based on your analysis today, to see that happening again.

Perhaps if we adopt this threshold that we're discussing today, recognizing the 43rd Parliament as the new standard-bearer for representation in the House of Commons, but also did something afterwards to improve the allocation of seats in western Canada, do you think that's something many people in Quebec would accept?

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Taillon: Let's be factual. Western provinces and Quebec are not under-represented in the House of Commons, as proportional representation applies. However, there is under-representation in the Senate, and that is a real problem and a real challenge, but it has unfortunately become a constitutional taboo.

In the House of Commons, the principle of proportional representation is the result of a historic compromise negotiated in 1867. Through the Act of Union, to propagate an assimilation policy of French Canadians, Lord Durham recommended a principle of equal representation, which made it possible to under-represent francophones' political weight at the time. Francophones from Quebec in particular and from Canada in general were under-represented from 1840 until the demographic shift of 1850, and that was a great historic injustice. That is why, in 1867, they rallied to the idea that proportional representation contained a certain ideal of justice in the distribution of seats, but that, on the other hand, it should be part of a nation-to-nation pact.

However, Quebec never could have anticipated that the result of that Confederation would be Regulation 17 or a disregard for Manitoba's language rights. It was naive in its belief that the development of the Canadian west would perpetuate the political weight of francophones and anglophones, as was the case in that small Canada with four partners created in 1867.

The results did not make it possible to implement the pact made in 1867 and the related promises. As a result, the relationship between Quebec and Canada is now on the decline. Is that decline Quebec's or Canada's fault? That is a political debate I will not engage in. How to improve the situation? It is not simple.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Professor Taillon.

I think you nailed it there. Quebec never anticipated the population distribution that we have today. I think that's the constitutional void that we find ourselves in. In the context of changing the threshold to protect seats in Quebec, it's a problem unless we do what you actually talked about, another constitutional discussion with the provinces.

The band-aid that we're applying today to address the problem—and it's not just Liberal governments that are guilty of this; it's Conservative governments too—is only going to have to be ripped off in 10 more years. We're going to be having the exact same discussion until we reach some sort of new and agreed-upon equity among the provinces, especially I might add those that pay equalization. We're going to be basically waiting for another Reform Party or another Bloc Québécois Party, maybe a second separatist party in the House of Commons, to erupt and fight for their perceived regional rights.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Taillon, do you want to use the 15 remaining seconds to make a comment?

Mr. Patrick Taillon: No, I don't want to take up too much time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Romanado, you have three minutes and 15 seconds.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank Professor Taillon for being here and for his testimony.

I am a member from Quebec. Quebec's population currently accounts for 22.98% of Canada's population. You recommend that the representation percentage be increased to 25%. Since that has to do with the Constitution, approval from seven provinces and territories would be needed.

Mr. Taillon, do you honestly think it would be possible, by the end of this year or the end of June of next year, to hold discussions with provinces and territories and to come to an agreement to increase Quebec's representation percentage to 25%?

Currently, Bill C-14 guarantees that Quebec and all the other provinces will not lose any seats. However, your recommendation or the Bloc Québécois' recommendation would require the Constitution to be amended.

Do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Patrick Taillon: On the one hand, if a decision were made that this is the end of the principle of proportional representation, that we no longer want it and want to abrogate it, it is clear that the agreement of seven provinces accounting for 50% of the population would be required.

On the other hand, can very small accommodations or small exceptions to the principle of proportional representation be allowed, confirmed by the jurisprudence and carried out by Parliament under its power to unilaterally amend the 1867 text, a power it has here under Bill C-14? That is where I say there is some flexibility. Is that flexibility as extensive as what the Bloc Québécois proposes concerning that 25% threshold? That may be the case. Could another threshold be set between the proposed decrease in Bill C-14 and the 25% threshold? The answer is yes, definitely.

Proportional representation is just one constitutional principle among others, which can support a few developments that are based on jurisprudence on effective representation. The Supreme Court actually said that it did not need a perfect mathematical calculation. It recognized that the complexity of the Canadian federation sometimes called for exploring that limited amount of flexibility I am trying to promote through my testimony.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Perfect.

Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Therrien, Ms. Blaney shared her speaking time with you, so you now have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Chair, history is repeating itself. History is like a broken record, especially when we do not learn from it. Today's debate is exactly the same as the one surrounding the Meech Lake accord, when we talked about Quebec as a distinct society. If the Meech Lake accord has not worked, it is because English-speaking Canada wanted to make sure that the concept of a distinct society would not confer any powers and because they thought Quebecers were pretty stupid to buy into the idea that Quebec would have certain powers simply by virtue of being a distinct society. So were had.

People say that...

• (1155)

Hon. Greg Fergus: A point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Therrien. We all know the rules on how our committee works. So...

Mr. Alain Therrien: I did not say that; that is what people thought.

The Chair: People think a lot of things.

I think we should keep listening to the witness and ask him questions about...

Mr. Alain Therrien: I am getting there, Madam Chair.

It is the same thing when people here talk about the concept of a nation. Jacques Parizeau described it as a trinket. When we presented the motion on the concept of the Quebec nation to the House, people said it would easily pass. The motion was indeed passed by a strong majority. People wanted to make sure it would be a trinket, a little toy that Quebecers would enjoy playing with. We then found ourselves in the situation of having to reiterate that, if we accept that Quebec is a nation, certain actions are required to support that idea.

My colleague from Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon said he cannot understand why Quebecers should have more powers when he pays the same taxes as they do. Why does he not speak out about Prince Edward Island having four times the representation? That province should really have just one MP, but it has four. He does not make a fuss about that because it is not in his interests to do so.

The history of Quebec has shown us repeatedly that Quebec had to be treated as a minority and that this approach should not be blocked. The Constitution Act, 1867, institutionalized our minority status and, what this member said continues in that vein.

I would like to know what the witness thinks about the historical debate on the process to establish both Quebec and all Francophones in Canada as minorities.

Mr. Patrick Taillon: It is a complex issue, but it is clear that, from the 1890s to the early 1960s, there was an intentional, voluntary and accepted policy of suppressing the French fact in Canada, especially outside Quebec. This dark time in our history is having demographic consequences now, which affects Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons.

The promises made in 1867 were not kept. Quebec was happy to rally around the principle of proportional representation. Quebec thought it was fair after the injustice it had suffered in 1840. Yet it

was also part and parcel of the idea that this country was founded on a pact between two nations, and the idea that the future development of this federation would uphold this thinking. This however was subsequently betrayed.

That history has now been written and there is nothing we can do about it. There are however things we could do now to boost federalism and to give the provinces greater influence in federal institutions. In this regard, I think there are a lot of solutions in the Senate. They are solutions that would give Quebec and the other provinces a stronger voice. In other words, far too much power is concentrated in the Prime Minister's Office. If this power were somewhat federalized, Quebec would benefit. It could choose its own senators to represent it. I am not saying Quebec could elect its senators, but it could choose them, and they would then be appointed by the prime minister of Canada. The same would apply for the other provinces. That would be a winning solution for everyone.

In the House of Commons, proportional representation based on the 1867 compromise must not become a strict mathematical calculation that is designed to steadily confirm Quebec's decline. There is some leeway available. The proof is that Bill C-14 shows some creativity in order to reduce that decline by 0.3%. How long will that last though? It will certainly not be a long time. The House of Commons will probably have to reopen that debate again in a few years.

That said, there is clearly some leeway. A government and a Parliament that wanted to take a few more steps on this issue could do so, but the broader issue would also have to be addressed. Ways would have to be found to prevent francophones across the country and in Quebec from losing political weight. Quebec remains the only province with a francophone majority and the only province with a civil law tradition. So it is a province with a particular blueprint for society. How does the federation go about integrating this somewhat unique province? That is the crux of the debate.

• (1200)

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Taillon. We appreciate your being with the committee today and for sharing your observations. Should you have any further comments, please send them to the clerk, who will in turn forward them to the members of the committee.

Have a nice day and stay safe.

[*English*]

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I wish to raise a small point of order, Madam Chair.

I have a lot of respect for my colleagues Mr. Therrien and Mr. Vis. I would just like to remind them of Standing Order 18, which encourages parliamentarians to use appropriate language that does not provoke strong emotions to ensure that we respect one another.

With the good will of all members of the committee, we have created a very collegial atmosphere. That is something we created under your leadership, Madam Chair. I think it is important that we use more moderate language.

The Chair: Thank you for your remarks.

[English]

I will suspend, and we will get ready for our next panel.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

[Translation]

The Chair: We will now resume for the second part of the meeting.

[English]

We're going to continue with the second panel, as we continue our work on Bill C-14. We have with us Minister LeBlanc, accompanied by PCO officials, Allen Sutherland and Rachel Pereira.

Mr. LeBlanc, we'll give you up to five minutes for your opening comments.

Welcome to the PROC committee.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities): Madam Chair, thank you, and good afternoon.

[Translation]

I am very pleased to appear before you today to discuss Bill C-14, Preserving Provincial Representation in the House of Commons Act.

Madam Chair, you mentioned my colleagues from the Privy Council Office in attendance, so I will not repeat that information.

[English]

Madam Chair, as you know, 2021 was a decennial census year, and as such the electoral boundaries redistribution process, as required by the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, is currently under way on the basis of the Chief Electoral Officer's calculations.

On October 15, 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer announced the new distribution of seats in the House of Commons allocated to the provinces and territories, based on the constitutional formula and population changes over the last 10 years. The new distribution, as proposed by the Chief Electoral Officer, would see the House increase by four seats, from 338 to 342, with one additional seat for British Columbia, three additional seats for Alberta, one additional seat for Ontario and one seat being lost in the province of Quebec.

[Translation]

The loss of a seat in the House of Commons is significant. We understand the concerns of Quebeckers. This position has been expressed by my Liberal colleagues from Quebec and by other colleagues in the House of Commons.

That is why preserving Quebec's seats in the House of Commons remains a priority for our government. Bill C-14 is the government's response to this priority.

[English]

The bill seeks to amend section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867, to ensure that no province will have fewer seats than it did in the 43rd Parliament—the last parliament, simply put. It will replace the 1985 grandfather clause, which came in, in 1985, in Mr. Mulroney's first term in Parliament, with a 2021 equivalent. This means Quebec will not lose a seat in this redistribution process.

This bill is not just about Quebec. The 2021 grandfather amendment being proposed would apply, obviously, to all provinces, raising their minimum number of seats and protecting them in the event of a shift in population in the years to come.

Colleagues, this is a small but, we think, impactful amendment. It will preserve Quebec's 78 seats in the House of Commons, while respecting incremental gains in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

Furthermore, I would point out that in Bill C-14, the seat allocation formula, the way in which seats are calculated, remains exactly the same with all existing protections. For example, the senatorial clause, the representation rule and the territorial clause, obviously, remain firmly in place.

• (1210)

[Translation]

Ten electoral boundaries commissions were proclaimed on November 1, 2021, one for each province. These are independent, non-partisan commissions. The independence of these commissions is in fact fundamental to the electoral boundaries review process.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank them for their service and work and the members of the various commissions right across the country.

[English]

The commissions began their work following the release of the final census data in early February of this year. As they prepare their electoral boundary proposals, they will hold public consultations before submitting reports to Parliament for consideration and will ultimately decide on the changes to be made within each province.

In order to ensure that Bill C-14's new grandfather clause applies to the current redistribution process, the bill includes a number of transitional provisions to ensure what we hope would be smooth implementation. I've obviously had a conversation with the Chief Electoral Officer, Monsieur Perrault, in this regard. For example, upon coming into force, Bill C-14 would require the Chief Electoral Officer to recalculate the number of seats in the House of Commons with the updated 2021 floor. This means the Quebec electoral boundaries commission would prepare a boundary proposal that takes into account the new seat allocation—in other words 78 seats. However, they will have the same 10-month time frame as other commissions to complete their work in the ongoing redistribution process as required by legislation.

The transitional provisions additionally ensure that the work of other provincial boundary commissions can continue to advance uninterrupted. This approach will ensure, should Quebec's electoral boundaries commission require more time to complete their work as a result of this recalculation, that they will not delay the implementation of the work completed by other provincial commissions.

Finally, Madam Chair, I think it's important that colleagues are considering this legislation. I thank you and the members of your committee for the work you're doing. Our government is obviously committed to working with all parties and all members of the House on this important issue. I look forward to our conversation in the 50 minutes that remain.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister LeBlanc. We appreciate your being here with us to discuss this important legislation. We, too, look forward to the exchange.

We will have our first round. Six minutes each will go to Mr. Kmiec, Mrs. Romanado, Mr. Therrien and then Ms. Blaney. I would just ask that all comments be made through the chair.

Mr. Kmiec.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you, Madam Chair.

For my first question to the minister, during the second-reading debate on the bill, he said, “We studied all possible options”. I wonder if the minister could explain what those options were that the government considered.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, through you, to Mr. Kmiec, I thank him for the question.

Thank you for your thoughtful presentation as well, Mr. Kmiec, at second reading of the legislation.

Obviously, I'm not going to discuss what options I laid out before cabinet because that would be inappropriate, but it shouldn't surprise colleagues that we were looking for a way to ensure that the representation in the province of Quebec did not diminish. We were conscious of the need not to proceed in a way that would trigger, potentially, a constitutional-amending formula, which is seven provinces out of 10 representing 50% of the population.

Some options that were suggested, in the view of legal advisers, would have triggered that formula, so we thought this was in fact the only surgical, simple way to preserve the number of seats in the House of Commons in the last Parliament.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, the minister called the legislation “minimalist”. I think that's a point of agreement we have. I generally like minimalist legislation that does the least damage possible to our constitutional structures.

During that second-reading debate, the minister also referred to a “principle of modified proportionate representation”.

I wonder if you could explain what that principle means to the Government of Canada as it was applied to the legislation and any future redistribution legislation it might consider.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, thank you.

Obviously, we're considering no further redistribution legislation at this time. We think it's important that commissions be allowed to, as best possible, complete their work in the timelines prescribed by legislation.

With the modified proportionate representation, the riding of Labrador, for example, because of its geography necessarily has fewer electors than a riding in St. John's might in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There are obviously the territorial examples, which are long standing. I think of my own province of New Brunswick, which, because of the application of the senatorial clause, has to have 10 members of Parliament. If you divided the population of New Brunswick to try to get to the electoral quotient—the national number—it might be less than 10 MPs, but that's an example where my province will always have 10 members of Parliament or the province of Prince Edward Island will have four. A strict representation by population national formula might lead to a different outcome.

● (1215)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I have some questions, Madam Chair.

On the transitional provisions, it is possible that under this legislation there might be two different representation orders for the next general election, depending on how quickly the Quebec boundaries commission will be able to write up a new set of maps and depending on whether this legislation passes.

I'm wondering—this is for either the PCO officials or the minister—if there is an example in the past of where this has happened and a federal election was held in Canada with two different representation orders affecting different provinces. Also, then, could they speak to the potential cost associated with this legislation and the electoral boundaries commission having to redo some of its work?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, through you, Mr. Kmiec, thank you for that question. I think it strikes at the heart of what is an understandable concern for those who want this to be an appropriate, orderly process.

If Parliament in its wisdom decides to maintain, for example, 78 seats in the province of Quebec, the Quebec electoral boundaries commission will obviously respect that legislated decision of Parliament. Should there be a transitional period where an election were to happen before the Quebec electoral boundaries commission would have completed its work, as Mr. Sutherland just indicated to me, Quebec seats would remain at 78. That is not an ideal situation.

That's why I'm hoping that colleagues in this House and in the other place, if there is a consensus to support this legislation, can do so in a way such that we don't unduly create uncertainty for the commission. These are people who are going to be working extraordinarily hard and are doing serious work, and obviously the uncertainty that they might face is not ideal.

I worry about that, but I don't know, Mr. Kmiec, if perhaps Mr. Sutherland or Ms. Pereira can provide examples of other circumstances where you would have had sort of a hybrid, if you wish, series of maps.

I don't know the answer to that, but maybe Mr. Sutherland or Ms. Pereira does, and we'd be happy, obviously, to reply in writing through the chair if there is more detail that you'd like.

I'll turn to Al.

Mr. Allen Sutherland (Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Machinery of Government and Democratic Institutions, Privy Council Office): Madam Chair, just to respond to the question on whether there has ever been a situation where you had two rules existing simultaneously—not to my knowledge. If there is additional information, we would of course be pleased to get it for you.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay.

For the minister, through you, Madam Chair [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] why they used the 43rd Parliament as the new setting point of the grandfathering clause instead of using a date, like it used to be in 1985? Why isn't it being set after this legislation passes, for example, and setting it at whatever it is at the end of the 44th Parliament?

In this redistribution, Alberta is to get 37 seats, and that would form its new floor for the minimum number of seats that my home province would have in Confederation. I'm just wondering why it's the 43rd Parliament. Why didn't they pick a date or a different Parliament at which to set it?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Kmiec, that's a very good question. I don't think, out of respect for colleagues, that I want to make up an answer. Again, I'd be happy to look at previous precedents.

Mr. Sutherland did tell me that—to your previous question—in the past, apparently, previous Parliaments have done this in the context of a majority government, so there may have been more certainty in terms of the dates, for the electoral boundaries commission, just to add that.

When we were presented with options by the Privy Council Office, this was thought to be the right way to grandfather the seats that existed, including 78 for the province of Quebec, but we can perhaps provide more information. If there were other precedents, I actually don't know them, Mr. Kmiec.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister LeBlanc.

Ms. Pereira, do you have any answers?

Mrs. Rachel Pereira (Director, Democratic Institutions, Privy Council Office): Thank you, Chair.

I would just say that it also provides a measure of clarity, in terms of the number of seats that we are seeking, to reference the 43rd Parliament, in part because the Chief Electoral Officer's calculation was announced in October of 2021. If we were to refer to 2021, that could raise some confusion as to which number of seats we're talking about. Referring to the 43rd Parliament provides that clarity in the act.

The Chair: I think that's an excellent answer. I thank you for that.

Ms. Romanado, you have up to six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and through you I'd like to thank the minister and departmental officials for being here today.

It's tough because Mr. Kmiec actually asked a few of the questions I was hoping to ask.

As a member of Parliament from Quebec, it was very important to me that Quebec not lose a seat. I know that when we had conversations in the Quebec caucus, it was just not an option that Quebec would lose a seat in terms of representation. In terms of Bill C-14, it looks like we are doing what we've done in the past. In the 33rd Parliament and in 2011, we made that little tweak, the adjustment, the small amendment to make sure that seats were not lost.

In the previous panel, one of my colleagues mentioned that this is like a band-aid solution. We have to fix this, and every few years we go through this situation where we're looking at the census data, we're looking at where we are and we keep making those small amendments.

I'm going to ask a question that probably my colleagues are not hoping I'll ask, but is it time that we also start looking at, for instance, what the Bloc has proposed, which is that we increase Quebec's representation or guarantee the 25%, which I believe will require a constitution-amending formula?

Do we need to look at opening up the Constitution to start thinking about the different ways that we are preparing representation across Canada, whether it be the seats in the House of Commons or in the Senate? Could you elaborate a little bit? Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, Ms. Romanado, thank you for the question and you're right. You were one of my colleagues in caucus who in conversations we had recognized the importance of Quebec not losing a seat and maintaining its 78 seats. You're a member of Parliament from Quebec and I thought your voice was important, and it certainly was important as we drafted this legislation.

I didn't know you were going to ask questions about constitutional amendments. I thought you were going to ask about some effort in a previous Parliament to change the electoral system. I seem to remember that after 2015 we had a happy outing in that regard. That certainly doesn't feel like it's on the agenda either, and to be blunt with you, Ms. Romanado, neither would be opening the Constitution.

Successive governments, including Mr. Harper's and Mr. Chrétien's governments.... Opening the Constitution for something like changing the representational formula that exists now, or changing Senate seat allocations is certainly not a priority for this government. I'm partial to the school that says, even if we had consensus on, for example, an issue as seemingly surgical as that, when one gathers first ministers at a constitutional conference table, they arrive with their own lists and the lists are long and the results are complicated and it sucks a great deal of energy away from issues that we think are important to Canadians and that we should work on with our partners in the federation in a very collaborative way.

We're focused on working with provincial and territorial governments in a way that doesn't require constitutional amendments but that better serves Canadians, and that's the work I'm happy to try to do every day for our government.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Those are all the questions I have.

The Chair: Those were excellent questions. I thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Therrien, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I salute the minister and his team. I am very pleased to see them.

My question is for the minister.

Is Quebec a nation? That was the subject of a motion that was passed by the House of Commons.

I hope the minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe he voted in favour of the motion recognizing Quebec as a nation.

Does the minister consider Quebec a nation?

• (1225)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Yes, I accept that Quebec is a nation within a united Canada.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Oh, oh! That was not part of the motion.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: On the evening of the vote, I was at a meeting at a fine restaurant in Montreal, the Queue de cheval. I do not remember the day of the vote, but I know that Mr. Harper was the prime minister. I was not in Parliament for the vote that evening. I do recognize, however, as I hope all members do, that Quebec is a nation, like the Acadian nation.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay. Quebec is a nation.

He is referring to the motion in 2006, but I was referring to the one last year, which does not say that Quebec is a nation in a united Canada. What it says is that the common language is French. I do not wish to confuse the minister, but that is what I am talking about.

Does the fact that the House passed a motion recognizing Quebec as a nation have an impact on the powers accorded to Quebec? It is not a token.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That is a perfectly appropriate conversation. Colleagues might have different opinions on the legal meaning of the motion. In public policy, there are all kinds of examples of how the federal government seeks to support minority language communities.

On the other hand, while the House of Commons determined that Quebec is a nation, that does not change the Canadian Constitution. That is a completely different debate, as we discussed earlier with Ms. Romanado.

I accept that our government recognizes this in the way it applies public policies. It is a recognition that we must bear in mind. Moreover, it is one of the reasons that we decided to keep 78 seats in Quebec.

Mr. Alain Therrien: It is a freeze, Mr. Leblanc.

This is how I understand what you said. I have to say you are an experienced politician. By the way, I wish you would make your answers shorter. You are just so interesting that we forget the point.

Based on what you said, the fact that Quebec is recognized as a nation does not technically give it more powers.

On March 2 in the House, you voted in favour of a motion that had two parts. You knew very well that I would raise this with you. First, the motion called for Quebec not to lose any seats in the House. I have to admit that Bill C-14 is a victory in that regard. Secondly, the motion called for Quebec not to lose any political weight. In the current version of Bill C-14, Quebec retains its current 78 seats, but the total number of seats in Canada is increasing from 338 to 343. I am sure your math is good enough to see that this does not protect Quebec's political weight. There is nothing in this bill to protect Quebec's political weight in the short, medium or long term. We can agree on that.

Why did you not take any action, given that the motion was passed by a strong majority? By the way, I did not check, but I am sure you voted for this motion. Mr. Turnbull is indicating that you did. Why was no action taken on this second part of the motion?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That is an excellent question.

I salute Mr. Therrien, who is also an experienced politician with good judgment. I can see that in the way he asks his questions. He is trying to back me into a corner. I accept that and the lawyer in me even admires it. I was so poor in math and science that I decided to study law, and did not even study tax law.

That said, Mr. Therrien is right, we interpreted the motion in order to protect Quebec's political weight. If the number of seats had dropped from 78 to 77, that would not in our view have protected Quebec's political weight.

Obviously, we are not going to start discussing amending the Constitution or go before the courts to determine whether a bill passed by the House of Commons is unconstitutional.

Mr. Alain Therrien: The representation level is higher if we have 78 seats out of 338, as opposed to 78 out of 343. So we can agree that this decreases Quebec's political weight.

There are certain clauses, such as the senatorial clause, the grandfather clause, and the territorial clause. In 2011, the Constitution was significantly changed by the Fair Representation Act. This type of thing is possible. I could read out a list of things that prove that we do not need constitutional reform to adopt these kinds of clauses. That is established in section 44 of the Constitution Act, 1982. The constitutional expert Mr. Taillon confirmed earlier that, barring a major change, the Constitution does not have to be reopened to make a minor change such as the Quebec clause that we are proposing, namely, to increase Quebec's minimum representation from 23% to 25%.

I will ask my question again, now that we know that we do not have to reopen the Constitution to adopt such a clause and that this argument cannot be used as an excuse. Why did you not accept this clause?

• (1230)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Perhaps because we were inspired by the remarks of Benoît Pelletier, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Ottawa and a former minister in the Quebec government. Allow me to read out the following remarks by him:

[English]

...guaranteeing Quebec a specific share of seats in the [House of] Commons, regardless of its share of the population, would clearly go beyond what Parliament can do on its own.

“That's a 7-50 amendment [of the Constitution]”....

[Translation]

Many other experts said the same thing.

I like Mr. Therrien, but I do not agree that we have that much leeway in a bill of the House of Commons or the Senate. He might have different views and I recognize that.

Mr. Alain Therrien: We have never had to reopen the Constitution for the senatorial clause, the grandfather clause or the territorial clause, nor to make changes to the Constitution as was the case in 2011. Now you are quoting Mr. Pelletier. The difference between Mr. Taillon and Mr. Pelletier is that Mr. Taillon was present and we were able to ask him questions. I would have liked to ask Mr. Pelletier questions about that as well, so he could convince me that we need to amend the Constitution, because I do not agree. History is stubborn and shows that we have changed the level of representation four times, for various reasons, without ever having to reopen the Constitution. I cannot see why we would have to do so now.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: We can spend a lot of time quoting other experts. Emmett Macfarlane, for example, a political science professor at Waterloo University and constitutional law expert, made the same remarks as Mr. Pelletier.

The important thing is not to reduce the number of seats Quebec has. We have been very clear about that. As to guaranteeing a set

percentage, regardless of demographic change, I will leave that for my friends from the other provinces to discuss.

I would have been very happy for New Brunswick to be facing the problem of a growing population, as is the case in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. Unfortunately, that is not the case. As Mr. Therrien said, we are protected by the senatorial clause in any case.

In short, we consider this a surgical and appropriate way of maintaining Quebec's 78 seats.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a very interesting conversation today, and I thank the witnesses for being here with us.

The bill is important in terms of ensuring that Quebec and other provinces don't lose representation in the House of Commons.

Given the reality of Quebec's unique history, culture, language and role in Confederation, is the government contemplating changes that would also protect Quebec's share of seats in the House of Commons?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: No, we're not contemplating changes other than what's proposed in Bill C-14 to maintain Quebec's 78 seats, as was the case in the previous Parliament. We have no plans to go further in terms of the representation in different provinces.

We're also conscious, as I said in my opening comments, of the work that the commissions are doing and the importance of allowing the commissions to have as much certainty as possible in terms of what number of seats they'll be dividing up per province. We're conscious that doing that at this particular moment doesn't allow them to fulfill their legislative responsibilities in a way that we think would be respectful.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that, Madam Chair, through you.

The next question I have is around the reality that the format we're talking about is very colonial. We have a long-standing history here in Canada of colonialism and often extinguishing the voices of indigenous communities. We know that some other countries have explored expanding their electoral processes to make sure that the voices of indigenous communities are heard.

We also know that, statistically, if you look at elections that happen within indigenous communities, the voter turnout is extremely high, but we don't see that reflected in the other elections that happen in our country. Is there any discussion at this point about how we can amplify the voices of indigenous communities? Is there any sort of goal towards having representation in both places in this Parliament to amplify those voices and make sure that those voices are represented?

I look at New Zealand as a specific example. We know that this is incredibly important. If we're going to talk about reconciliation in a meaningful way, it has to happen at all levels. Of course, having those voices represented here, the first voices of this country, would make a more wholesome and collaborative process. Is there any work being done exploring that and looking at systems that are working in other countries and how they may work in Canada?

• (1235)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, Ms. Blaney, I think, correctly identifies a challenge that all of us need to reflect on. She mentioned both places, the House of Commons, obviously, and our friends in the other chamber, in the Senate.

We have tried through the Senate appointment process to appoint a number of indigenous persons to the Senate. In talking to my colleagues in the Senate, I think they have contributed enormously to the conversations and to the work of that legislative chamber, but we can always do more.

Ms. Blaney correctly identified other jurisdictions. New Zealand—you're absolutely right—is in many ways a leader in this domain. I'm going by memory that some provinces in Canada, in the case of indigenous persons or even other minority groups—I'm thinking of the francophone communities in Nova Scotia—have decided deliberately in their legislatures to ensure that the electoral map reflects a way to hear those voices, as Ms. Blaney properly said, that are often not adequately or easily heard in a typical electoral redistribution cycle.

We have no plans, no legislation, in that regard at the moment, but I take note that the Chief Electoral Officer—I was in the cabinet meeting this morning—released a report or his recommendations on a number of elements of the two previous general elections.

Obviously, Madam Chair, if this committee or other committees of the House had ideas or wanted to pursue that, then we would be interested in those conversations, but I don't want to pretend that we have legislation pending or cabinet decisions around anything in that regard at this moment.

As I say, we're conscious that we're at the front end of an electoral boundary redistribution process, so we want to, out of respect for the legislated timelines in that process, not widen the conversation to the point where the electoral boundaries commissions won't be able to do their work. Perhaps, following that process, again, if colleagues wanted to bring those kinds of issues forward, we would be more than happy to work with colleagues, because we do recognize exactly the challenge that Ms. Blaney properly pointed out.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Those are all my questions today.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

We will now proceed with five minutes for Mr. Vis, followed by five minutes for Mr. Turnbull.

[*Translation*]

Then Mr. Therrien will have the floor for two and a half minutes, followed by Ms. Blaney, who will also have two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you to Mr. Sutherland, former clerk-at-the-table of the House of Commons David Gussow submitted testimony to this committee. He talked about the challenge of dealing with increased disproportionality. He wrote, “The current bill will increase that disproportionality from 44 to 46 seats for three of the provinces. For proportionality Alberta should have 8 more seats...British Columbia should have 10 more seats...and Ontario should have 28 more seats...for a total of 46 seats.”

Based on the commentary I've already heard from the minister, I acknowledge the challenging position any government is in dealing with changes to the representation in the House of Commons and avoiding a constitutional amendment.

What type of advice did the Privy Council Office provide the government in respect of the structural under-representation of the three provinces referenced?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Madam Chair, I thank the honourable member for his question.

You have seen this in the earlier commentary by Professor Tailon. There is in the development of this legislation an attempt to balance and reconcile different aspects of our federation.

The first is the issue of what is sometimes called “representation by population” and sometimes called “proportionate representation”. That is clearly a defining feature of the legislation, but the other feature of the legislation is to provide protections to small and slower-growing provinces to make sure they get adequate representation.

When we developed the advice for the minister, we considered options that attempted to balance those two things. I only looked at it briefly so the honourable member will forgive me if I have it slightly wrong, but I think he was providing an illustrative example that if those provinces had the same representation as Quebec, that would be the number of seats they would have.

• (1240)

Mr. Brad Vis: I believe that's correct, yes. Thank you.

Madam Chair, all of the other committee members posed my questions to this great panel.

If you will indulge me, Madam Chair, because we have a minister before us, I will kindly thank the minister for approving the Dominic LeBlanc centre for aquatic excellence in the district of Kent. I would like to ask the minister if we could have a quick comment on the challenges that small communities like the District of Kent are facing with respect to inflation.

This is a good faith question, through you, Madam Chair.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, through you, thank you to Mr. Vis for the question. Naming an aquatic centre after me seems a bit counterintuitive. I don't look like somebody who's spent a lot of time swimming laps in a pool. I'm flattered by your enthusiasm.

You're absolutely right. I represent a series of small, rural communities in New Brunswick. It is a challenge. We've talked about this with respect to projects in your riding, Mr. Vis, on the infrastructure space. It is a challenge to have smaller communities develop or have the capacity to apply to federal programs. In many cases, they're very technical and complicated. A net-zero attestation clause ensured that many small communities, at least in the initial rounds, weren't able to benefit from these programs. I'm happy that ones that are important to you did, but I think we have a lot of work to do as a government to ensure that the infrastructure investments are shared with communities big and small across the country.

I had this conversation at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities meeting in Regina with a series of mayors from small, rural communities last week, on Friday.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Minister, through you, Madam Chair.

Following up on MP Romanado's point, do you foresee the Parliament of Canada in 10 years going through the exact same exercise that we're going through today?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: If the current law is maintained, there will be a redistribution process after every decennial census, so in 10 years, yes.

I'm going by memory, but I was surprised. If you take the projected population increases in the current... If you look at the last 10 years and project the same population movements over the next 10, I would have instinctively thought that the number of seats in the House of Commons 10 years from now would dramatically increase. It was a surprisingly small number, assuming—as I say—that some future Parliament doesn't, in its wisdom, change those formulas.

This is a conversation that Parliament will have every 10 years. We think that's the proper thing to reflect the movements of populations across the country.

It was six seats. The projections would say,

[*Translation*]

if the trend continues, as Bernard Derome used to say on election night,

[*English*]

we would expect there to be six more seats 10 years from now. Of course, that would depend on a whole series of demographic factors.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I know we're not here to talk about infrastructure, but when you make that announcement in Kent, we welcome one in Waterloo as well. I do not need a response at this time, but you should definitely ponder it.

Mr. Turnbull, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I echo your sentiments with regard to my riding of Whitby. We look forward to projects being approved in Whitby as well.

Back to the matter at hand, Minister, I want to thank you and members of the Privy Council for being here today to testify. It's an important conversation.

It's clear to me that, at this moment in time, Quebec is going to benefit from these changes by not losing a seat, but what was revealing to me about some of your opening remarks was that the surgical—I think you used that word—changes that are being proposed in Bill C-14 are going to benefit all other provinces and territories as well.

Is there any downside for the other provinces and territories, as you see it, Minister, through you, Madam Chair?

• (1245)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Obviously, Madam Chair, I look forward to announcing a number of important infrastructure investments in both Waterloo and Whitby. Mr. Turnbull and I have talked about some priority projects in his riding, and I look forward to being there this summer with him, hopefully, to announce them.

However, Mr. Turnbull properly identifies the fact that, under the current legislative proposal, Bill C-14, British Columbia would increase by one seat, the province of Alberta by three and his province of Ontario by one. That is by operation of the formula the Chief Electoral Officer has applied following the last decennial census. We take the position that this was a corrective measure to preserve Quebec's 78 seats, but in no way did we want to, as I think you were referring to, Mr. Turnbull, take away from the importance of recognizing the growing populations in those three provinces I mentioned.

You could make the argument that adding one more seat to what had been the formula in Quebec dilutes the seats in those provinces. We don't think that's significant. If you look at a total of 342 seats, one seat in one particular province doesn't, I think, represent a dramatic diminution with respect to the growing populations in those provinces I mentioned, including your own, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair, to the minister, for that response.

I want to quote Emmett Macfarlane again. I know our chair will be happy. He is an associate professor of political science at the University of Waterloo and a constitutional law expert. He said that the seat allocation formula can be adjusted unilaterally by Parliament “but it has to stay within a reasonable margin for ensuring proportionality.”

I'm wondering, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, whether Bill C-14, being “minimalist” and “surgical”, as you described it, is in fact within that reasonable margin.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, we believe it absolutely is.

The legal advice we have indicates it is entirely within Parliament's purview to make this sort of reasonable, modest adjustment, which previous Parliaments have made. Professor Macfarlane and others, in their wisdom and based on their experience, have confirmed this. A scholar from the University of Waterloo, Madam Chair, is obviously somebody we'd want to listen to. He's not from the University of New Brunswick—I'll concede that. In spite of that, I think his opinion carries considerable weight.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

Madam Chair, through you, I now want to refer to the private member's bill, Bill C-246, and quote Emmett Macfarlane again. He said, "Once you start violating representation by population and you are actually enacting policy or constitutional change to protect one province over the interests of the others"—these are Mr. Macfarlane's words—"I think that's when constitutional amendment becomes required and it would be more than just Parliament unilaterally doing it".

I think what we've heard here is that, going by the census, Quebec currently represents just under 23% of Canada's population, yet, what's being proposed in Bill C-246 would guarantee Quebec no less than 25%, regardless of the population decline.

Would that require and trigger the amending formula? I guess what I really want to ask is, what challenges do you foresee holding up this process, if that were the case? It seems that doing this through a private member's bill could create quite a few challenges. Could you speak to that, Minister, through the chair?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The chair is indicating that I should be very brief. I will be.

We believe that legislated floor.... I think it would take Quebec seats to 89 from the 78 with Bill C-14. They would go to 89. We believe that would be ultra vires of Parliament. It would be outside the legislative scope of Parliament. It would probably trigger a series of legal challenges. It would, in our view, be counterproductive to allowing the commissions to do the work they have to do. We expect, as Professor Macfarlane and a number of others have indicated, the courts would conclude that this is, more properly, a constitution-amending formula issue. For the reasons we discussed with Ms. Romanado, we don't think this is the most efficient and effective way to resolve these issues in the very short term.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister LeBlanc. That was excellent vocabulary—impressive.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Therrien, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I too would like to speak to the minister about some projects in my constituency, but not now. I can do that later.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You may want to talk about the La Prairie youth centre. Good news is coming on that front.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Yes, and there are also the banks of the St. Regis River, my friend. I'm waiting. We'll talk about it again.

Let's get back to our topic.

A constitutional scholar appeared before us earlier. The question was clear. I think it was Ms. Romanado who asked it. On our proposal to have 25% representation as suggested in the Charlottetown accord, he said it was possible. Should it be 25% or 24%? He said that's where it could become moot.

There were references to some constitutional experts, but I am a little disappointed, because I would have liked to hear them. I know that the minister cannot invite them. That said, Mr. Turnbull followed up on that earlier by quoting one of those constitutionalists. Mr. Turnbull is always insightful when he speaks; I like him a lot. I would have liked to talk to this constitutional expert and ask him questions. That's what I think is a shame. There are now balls coming out of left field. On the other hand, the only constitutional expert we heard from told us that this amendment was possible.

If I may, Madam Chair, I will quote some facts to the minister.

Since 1987, the courts have recognized that exceptions exist to ensure effective representation and that the federal Parliament has the power to enact measures to do so. So we are not talking about getting the agreement of seven provinces representing 50% of the population. The Supreme Court has recognized the fundamental principle of effective representation as a charter right of the elector. This principle includes two conditions. First, there must be relative equality, that is, the weight of one voter's vote must not be disproportionate to that of another voter. Mr. Vis rightly mentioned this earlier, wondering why his vote would be less important than that of another voter elsewhere. We must therefore respect the idea that a voter is a voter, regardless of where he or she is. However, there is a second condition to the principle of effective representation: there must also be respect for natural communities. It is specified that factors such as geographical characteristics, history and community interests must be taken into account. This is what it says.

It is this second condition, which I mention to the minister, that gives the federal Parliament the ability to change the law, as it did with the minimum threshold. But strangely enough, when we propose to set a minimum proportion of 23%, 24% or 25%, it would not work. I would like to know why it wouldn't work, when here it seems to say quite clearly that it can.

I would like to hear the minister's comments on that.

The Chair: Minister, you have one minute to answer the question without interruption.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I, too, look forward to announcing the good news about the La Prairie youth centre, which is located in my friend's riding.

Mr. Alain Therrien: There are also the banks of the St. Regis River.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: We will also continue to work on the waterfront issue and discuss it at length with the mayor of the Magdalen Islands.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'm talking about Sainte-Catherine; it's not the same thing.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, Mr. Therrien raises some interesting points about constitutional law, including Supreme Court precedents. He has explained them well. However, I am not familiar with the specific precedent to which he referred. In any event, I would venture to guess that factors such as geographic representation, communities of interest, and linguistic communities, which are subject to judicial review, are normally taken into account by the electoral boundaries commissions when discussing how to apportion the number of seats according to the formula the Chief Electoral Officer gives them.

I don't think you can extrapolate and establish that this applies, for example, to a minimum threshold of representation that far exceeds demographic weight, as Mr. Turnbull has said.

As I said earlier in response to Mr. Vis's question, Parliament will have this discussion again in 10 years' time, and I suspect they will discuss exactly the same issues.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I didn't really get an answer to my question, but I would like to end with the words of—

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Therrien.

Mr. Alain Therrien: That's a shame, I was going to talk about Bernard Derome.

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

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have no questions. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Alain Therrien: In that case, may I use his speaking time?

The Chair: No, not this time.

We have a few minutes left. So Mr. Vis and Mr. Fergus can each ask a question.

[English]

Go ahead, Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, again, Madam Chair.

I'm enjoying this discussion so much today. It got me thinking of one of my favourite New Brunswick scholars, Donald Savoie, the former Canada research chair, if not the current one, in public administration.

In his book from a few years ago, *Democracy in Canada*, he referenced the Laurentian elite and talked about the concentration of both Ontarians and Quebecers in the public service, and that the

public service culture in Ottawa isn't very representative of the culture of western Canada.

This is something I know the minister is somewhat aware of, but it is true that in certain parts of British Columbia, and much throughout Alberta, people do feel disconnected from our institutions here in Ottawa.

My wife is from Ottawa, and she moved to British Columbia. When she first came there, she said, "Brad, I had no idea about the wealth discrepancies that exist, or how far away or that every neighbourhood just doesn't have a nice ice rink like in the national capital region, which is funded by taxpayers."

Maybe I'll ask my question of our public servants. What do you think the public service of Canada can do to ensure better and adequate representation of western Canadian values, including value for taxpayer dollars?

The Chair: I'll just remind us that we are here to talk about Bill C-14 with a side of infrastructure, so—

Mr. Brad Vis: I'll just add to that. This is completely related to Bill C-14, because at the heart of Bill C-14, we know as a fact that British Columbia and Alberta especially, and Ontario, do not receive.... It does not live up to the principle of representation by population. It matters to people. The election of members to this House of Commons has an impact on our institutions.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Chair, very briefly, I know we're running out of time, but Mr. Vis referenced Dr. Donald Savoie, whom I am very fortunate to count as a friend. He was a dear friend of my father. He is somebody I see regularly in New Brunswick.

You're right, Mr. Vis, he has published, I think, north of 30 books. My favourite one is *I'm from Bouctouche, Me*, which is a community in my riding where he grew up.

He has correctly identified a challenge—it's in the public service, and I would argue it's in other national institutions as well—to ensure that regions are properly represented. I worry about francophone minorities outside Quebec. We worry, obviously, about indigenous peoples. Across the country, the diversity of our country is often not reflected. The regional diversity but other diversities as well are not properly reflected in institutions like the public service and you could argue other national institutions.

It's a constant effort that our government is trying to undertake, and we would obviously welcome thoughtful suggestions. Like your wife, I grew up in Ottawa and moved to New Brunswick. I went to another coast, but I totally understand the perspective that Mr. Vis properly brought up at this table.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to ask one last question.

The temptation is great, if not immense—

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You want to talk about the Gatineau tram, don't you?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Actually, you anticipated my question. It's tempting to talk about the Gatineau tramway, but I'm going to limit myself to asking a question about Bill C-14.

That said, if the minister would like to comment on the Gatineau tramway, I would be more than happy to hear him.

I would like to talk about the electoral boundaries commissions. We have heard about several options that are not part of Bill C-14. I would like to hear more from the minister on this issue. If a decision were made to change his mind at this point and not support the path advocated by the government, what effect would that decision have on the work of the Quebec Electoral Boundaries Commission?

• (1300)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I thank my colleague for his question.

Mr. Fergus, I understand the importance you place on the Gatineau tram project. We have spoken about it several times and I have also had discussions with ministers of the Quebec government. I believe that an environmental engineering study is preferred. I was surprised, because it is quite expensive. I am confident that we will be able to talk to the citizens of your riding about this very soon.

I will conclude on the issue of the electoral boundaries commissions. As I said in my opening remarks, in accordance with federal law, independent, non-partisan commissions have been established. I respectfully submit to colleagues that we need to be aware of the important work that these people do. I think Mr. Fergus has made that point. I personally discussed this with Mr. Perrault, the Chief Electoral Officer, a few weeks ago.

I am therefore banking on the wisdom of the committee and our colleagues in the House of Commons to ensure that Bill C-14 passes third reading and then the Senate. I hope so, as there was a strong consensus at second reading. Mr. Kmiec and other members have referred to this. If it is the will of Parliament to pass the bill, I hope there will be a concern about the need to avoid unreasonable delay in the commission, especially in your province, Mr. Fergus. As has been said, it would not be ideal to have a situation where there are two timelines. It would not be respectful to the members of the commission. In addition, I think it would not produce the important results that the residents of Quebec expect with respect to their new electoral map.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I also thank Ms. Pereira and Mr. Sutherland.

It is at the next sitting of the Procedure and House Affairs Committee this Thursday that we will be doing clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. We would like to see this bill come back to the House very quickly.

I wish you a good day. I hope you stay healthy and safe.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Before we continue, I'll give the floor to Mr. Therrien for a moment.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Chair, after listening to the minister's testimony, I would like to ask the committee to invite one, if not both, of the constitutional scholars to whom the minister referred. That would help us understand the guiding principle behind the minister's position on the bill and the amendment that we are going to propose.

Since the constitutional expert who appeared before the committee today told us something else, I am being a good sport and I think it would be important to invite that other constitutional expert or those other two constitutional experts so that we can ask them questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, I would like to clarify for my colleague that, while I like his idea, you have just announced the committee's work plan for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-14.

We could reach a compromise by inviting these two constitutional scholars to submit a written brief to the committee which would then be circulated to all committee members.

Mr. Alain Therrien: That doesn't suit me, because I would have liked to ask them questions, naturally.

• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair: What I am going to suggest is that the subcommittee of PROC, which determines the agenda, has advanced our way forward. We saw Mr. Vis refer to a document that was presented. The public is well aware of this legislation and has been providing briefs. I don't know that we need to impose on witnesses. We did have an opportunity to invite witnesses, and we provided leniency to ensure that.... Actually, the witness we had today was after the deadline, and we also invited another one, whom Mr. Vis had recommended, who declined. On that point, then, I would like to say that we are going to continue.

I know that many people are watching this testimony and this committee—I understand that we have the highest ratings—so I'm sure that the two people whose names were mentioned will be able to consider if they want to submit documents. I would say to anyone watching that the clerk would love to have any documents presented to committee for members to consider, but on Thursday we have committed to starting clause-by-clause, and that is how we will proceed.

Mr. Therrien, I always enjoy your suggestions and the fact that we can always find compromise in the way we move forward.

Have a good day, everyone. Thank you.

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