



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 137**

Thursday, December 5, 2024

---

Chair: Mr. Ben Carr





## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, December 5, 2024

• (1100)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):** Good morning, colleagues.

I hope you have had a good week. Obviously, winter has come in earnest to Ottawa.

I am calling to order meeting 137 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Witnesses, welcome back.

I think you'll recall that should you not be using your earpieces, they are to be placed on the sticker in front of you in order to protect the health and well-being of our interpreters.

Colleagues, I'm not going to read the script again about why we're here. I think I did that last time, and we understand we are here to engage in a discussion on clause-by-clause of Bill C-65.

With that, colleagues, we are going to get into it. I've read the introductory notes already, colleagues.

The first order of business is that, pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of clause 1, the short title, is postponed.

(On clause 2)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** I'd like a clarification, Mr. Chair.

I understand that we're talking about adding something to clause 2 that is related to clause 124.

What exactly is the change in clause 2?

**The Chair:** Mr. Berthold, you can put the question to the officials here today.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** That's what I intended to do.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira (Director, Electoral and Senatorial Policy Unit, Privy Council Office):** Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chair, the change is that there's a reference added to the LTC polling stations that will now be created. There's a new LTC, long-term care, regime, so those polling stations are now added to the definition of "polling station" in the act.

**The Chair:** We have Mr. Calkins.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I just want some clarification on the long-term care.

During typical elections, mobile polling stations move into various facilities, various places.

What new is being added specifically with the change in Bill C-65? Is it increasing the scope of the long-term care facilities that would be potentially impacted? Are there limits on the number of residents per se? What flexibility will the returning officer have in ensuring that people in long-term care facilities actually get to participate in the electoral process? I've been in six federal elections, and inclement weather and other types of events in the past have been an obstacle as well.

Mrs. Pereira, can you specifically advise me and others here on what assurances we will have to make sure that those folks in long-term care facilities will actually be allowed to vote?

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** Through the chair, Bill C-65 introduces new permanent polling stations within long-term care facilities. This is in addition to options that people in long-term care have. If they're able to leave the facility, they could vote on polling day like other electors. They can also vote at advance polls if they're able to leave the facility.

For those who are unable to leave, there will be polling stations set up across the country for those long-term care residents to vote. All of the procedures will be governed by existing procedures in the act that cover advance polling stations, so the management of the boxes and the opening and closing of the stations will all be governed by those rules for the residents in the care facility.

The only change to facilitate voting for those electors is that they will not need to provide their proof of residence if they are a resident in the long-term care facility. They still need to provide their identity, but that will enable those residents to vote, because they often don't have that type of proof of residence on hand. It might be with their families or elsewhere.

• (1105)

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** If I may continue, Mr. Chair, I want to go back and touch on one of the things you said in your opening statement.

Would this clause, in certain circumstances, allow the returning officer to make an actual polling station, like on election day, for everyone to go to a long-term care facility to vote, or is it just for the residents of the facility? I wasn't clear on that. It sounded to me like long-term care facilities could be community polling stations.

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** They're not being established as community polling stations. They are intended for long-term care residents. It's possible that an elector could go in, but they wouldn't be a resident of the facility.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** It's not meant for community polling or for advance polls.

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** That's correct, and it won't be advertised as such.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Okay.

What's the threshold or typical practice, then? Is every long-term care facility in Canada usually afforded this opportunity for their residents, or is there some kind of threshold or minimum required number of electors in order to justify a long-term care polling station?

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** I will turn this question over to my colleagues at Elections Canada. They will be able to provide a response.

**Mr. Robert Sampson (General Counsel and Senior Director, Legal Services, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Calkins.

All long-term care facilities are offered a poll, although there can be rules or reasons why a particular facility does not want to welcome a polling station. For example, during the pandemic there were obvious reasons why that wasn't feasible.

The offer is there. It's part of the returning officer's job during the writ period to contact long-term care facilities and make arrangements for polls if they're desired.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Do you have any information on how many long-term care facilities actually refused or did not allow long-term care facility polling stations during the 2021 election?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Unfortunately, I don't have that number with me. We do have a colleague who has more operational information, so we may be able to get that. If not, we'll report back to you.

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Duncan next. Then I see Monsieur Berthold, and Mr. Cooper would like to lend his voice as well.

Mr. Duncan, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is just to get some clarification. I always like to use specific examples from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. For long-term care, perhaps it could be Dundas Manor.

Ms. Pereira, you mentioned that if an elector or a long-term care resident of, say, Dundas Manor was able to leave, and they wanted to go and vote by special ballot or at the advance poll, they would be able to go and do that. They would be on the list as part of that. On election day, though, when it comes to that one day, the big day,

would the only spot they could vote that day be at that long-term care home?

The reason I'm asking is so that we don't have an elector cast a ballot at a long-term care home and then go over to, say, the Joel Steele Community Centre, where there are polls 134 or 172 and so on. It's one spot on election day. They'll have the opportunity like everyone else.

Does that make sense?

• (1110)

**Mr. Trevor Knight (General Counsel, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer):** Yes, it makes sense. The answer is they're assigned to their polling station. They can only vote at their one polling station.

One thing I would say, though, is that with the proposed change to section 124, there would be a period of time when that polling day could be set up between day zero and day 13, or the 13th day before polling. That would be the polling day for that institution. They would still have the advance polling opportunities and the special ballot polling opportunities, but their polling day could be throughout that period.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I think the reason for doing that is that a team would go to perhaps different long-term care homes on different days, not necessarily on election day itself. They would rotate around. I'm assuming the reason that change is made, and I've highlighted this a bit before in some of the questions I've asked, is the human resource aspect. If you need two or three people per long-term care home, that starts to add up, and if they can't go and work on election day, or they're doing that...

I'm assuming this is done for HR purposes so that one or a couple of teams will go to multiple sites with one special ballot box or however they do it. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** I would just add that it is also fit for purpose, that extension of days, to give those residents flexibility, given the health conditions and other limitations they may have. The returning officer can work with some of the facilities to determine the best times within that period of 12 days.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** My last question on that, as a bit of a segue, is there might be multiple days. I'll go back to Dundas Manor. It may not be just one day or four days before. They may come two or three days between 9 a.m. and noon or for a full day. What flexibility is there? Could they come multiple times during that period to that long-term care home? As opposed to 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., is it maybe more of a 9 a.m. until noon or noon to 3 p.m.? They would have the flexibility to do that as well.

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** That's correct.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** If I understand correctly, it is the local returning officer who will determine the times, dates and periods during which there will be voting in seniors' residences.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Yes, that's right.

I would point out that this will be done in co-operation with the administrator of the institution in question. So it's not just decided according to the returning officer's wishes. It will depend on the activities taking place in the establishment at the time.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** In the bill, is there any provision for how these dates and times will be communicated to the various political parties to ensure that all parties are aware of the procedure?

Will there be specific periods so that each of the political parties can have the information?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** The manner in which the information is communicated is not specified, but it should be done at a meeting involving all candidates and the returning officer. The returning officer is in contact with the candidates throughout the election period. Information is therefore circulated as arrangements are made.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** So there are no specifics. How the information is communicated is left to the discretion of the local returning officer.

Ms. Ramalho, you seem to want to add a comment.

[English]

**Ms. Candice Ramalho (Senior Policy Officer, Privy Council Office):** Thank you, Chair.

To confirm, clause 21 of the bill would enact proposed subsection 124(3)—

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

There is a problem with the interpretation.

**The Chair:** All right.

Please be patient, Ms. Gaudreau.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** All right.

**The Chair:** It looks like that's settled.

So we'll continue.

[English]

Ms. Ramalho, go ahead.

**Ms. Candice Ramalho:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Clause 21 would enact proposed subsection 124(3). The returning officer is obligated to “give notice to the candidates of the days and hours that a polling station” established in a long-term care facility will be open in accordance with the instructions provided. There is a requirement to give notification.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** All right. There's enough time.

Is there a time limit in section 21 for notifying the parties, or is it left solely to the discretion of the returning officer?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** It's left to the discretion of the returning officer, but it's going to happen depending on the availability of information.

One of the tasks that the returning officer performs during the election period is to make all these arrangements. As soon as the information is known, it will be communicated.

• (1115)

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Have you done an analysis? We know that recruitment was very difficult during the last election campaign. It was a special time, of course; it was during the COVID-19 pandemic. I think it was a difficult situation for the whole democratic process.

Actually, people who are available are less and less available when it comes to working long hours.

The bill provides for extended hours. New working hours for poll workers will be determined.

Have you assessed the impact of these changes on staff?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** The framework that will be provided in the legislation will be the same as that put in place during the pandemic. It was a very special time, and it's a little difficult to draw conclusions about the process.

That said, it has been possible to offer voting services in several establishments. I can give you some figures, because your colleague Mr. Calkins asked the question. We were able to offer these services in 5,167 establishments.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** All right.

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Mr. Calkins wanted to know the number of establishments that did not want a polling station. This represented 3.5% of facilities, meaning that out of 5,167 facilities, 183 did not have voting services, because management did not want a polling station in their long-term care facility.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** All right.

I'll make sure Mr. Calkins has access to that data.

So, according to you, there will be roughly the same number of people as during the last election, given the special context at the time.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** There are always difficulties. However, they were greater during the pandemic.

So we hope it will be easier to recruit the people needed for the next election. If we were able to do that during the pandemic, we think we'll be able to do it again. There will be challenges, of course. An election is always a challenge for us, but we hope that everything will go well during the next election.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Berthold.  
[*English*]

Next is Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you.

I have a couple of points for clarification.

Ms. Ramalho, you mentioned clauses 21 to 23.

They are scrutineers. Mr. Berthold mentioned notification of what the hours are going to be. Again, for the Dundas Manor in my hometown, I'm trying to visualize. Scrutineers will be available at polling sites for long-term care like for every other regular polling station. There are no other changes coming to that.

I believe that further proposed sections get into this about the ability to assist an elector at a long-term care home. That's a different section that deals with this, my point being on the access for scrutineers to go and observe the voting on those up to 12 hours. That can be over the 13 days. That is the same scrutineer rule that other polling locations have.

**Ms. Candice Ramalho:** Clause 21, which establishes a new proposed subsection 124(4), provides that the provisions of the act that "relate to polling stations shall...apply to a polling station established" under this new section, so yes.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** My last point is perhaps for reflection.

I understand that we have to have a willingness from an administrator of a long-term care home for us to go there. COVID in the last election certainly did provide a scramble. The one concern I have though is, respectfully, what I'll call a veto. Influenza and different health issues happen, unfortunately, in long-term care, pandemic or not.

My concern is, does the returning officer have a "shall" if they deem a right to go in or provide some sort of...? I wonder if there's an administrator...or if there's any tracking of statistics. Going forward in the next election, is it going to be tracked as to how many long-term care homes a returning officer asked for that were denied? I'm curious, because I think that for an administrator to have a veto over whether a polling station goes there or not is a lot of influence for one individual to have in the democratic process.

• (1120)

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Mr. Chair, the returning officer does not have the ability to compel a facility administrator to open up their facility for a poll. The numbers we shared with your colleague Mr. Berthold were that of about 5,000 facilities that were served, there were about 3.5% that did not wish to have a poll in their institution, which is about 187 or so across the country.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** My last point is more of an Elections Canada returning officer piece.

In the event of an election being called and a long-term care home, for whatever reason, declines, it might be worthwhile for local candidates to know that proactively, to say that Dundas Manor decided they're not doing it because, say, they're undergoing construction. The point is just to be aware (a) that we have extra work to do to get electors to a different spot or—I'll be respectful in the

democratic process and the neutrality—(b) a pressure to say, really, there's no other way, that this could work.

That proactive communication and not getting to a final list being posted and, all of a sudden, there might be two or three long-term care homes that are under construction, there's something...and just to provide us ample time for our efforts to get out the vote for electors and to perhaps—I'll again be respectful of my wording—a reconfirmation or a pressure to say, really, there's no other way that this could work.

I'll leave that as more of a note for Elections Canada.

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** That's noted, and thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Cooper is next.

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I want to follow up with some of the questions that were posed to Elections Canada by my colleague Mr. Berthold. He asked the question about an analysis with respect to staffing at these additional polling stations. I think it's straightforward, but I just want to get it on the record that during the last election there were significant staffing challenges to see that all polling locations were properly staffed.

I recognize that it was a unique time. I don't believe ever in Canadian history have we had an election like the 2021 election in the midst of a pandemic. Hopefully, we won't have an election like that again.

Of course, it could have been avoided had the Prime Minister not decided to call an election to shut down the former Speaker of the House, the then Speaker of the House, whom he was taking to court to block the order of the House to produce all of the documents relating to the massive national security breach at the Winnipeg lab, but I can tell you that I sat on the committee—

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.):** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** I'm sorry, Chair. I'm just checking. We're on clause 2, and I'd ask that we stick to the relevance of the actual clause at hand. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** In clause 2, I don't see any reference to a Winnipeg lab. The member can talk as long as he likes, and I'm happy to listen or ask questions of officials, but it does have to be on the clause.

**The Chair:** I appreciate your intervention.

Unless the officials can tell me that there were or planned to be polling stations held at the laboratory in Winnipeg, I do agree that it's probably outside the scope of relevance.

Mr. Cooper, I'll ask you to be mindful of that.

Thank you.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Going back to my larger point, which is that there was no election like that, perhaps you could answer if there were significant challenges. Would that be a fair characterization?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Yes, I can confirm for the record that there were significant challenges in terms of staffing. There's more information available about that in Elections Canada's statutory report filed directly after the election.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** If you were to go back to the prior election in 2019, which was not in the midst of a pandemic, the challenges were not the same.

Were there challenges in that election with respect to recruitment and retaining people to staff polling stations?

• (1125)

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** It is always a challenge. We hire, and my colleagues will correct me if I don't have the number right, somewhere between 250,000 and more workers in about two weeks. These are people who are available to work on a Monday or maybe over the advance poll weekend.

It can be very difficult, pandemic or no pandemic. I will say that, in 2019, we faced those challenges. We met those challenges. The pandemic brought a whole new level of challenges, so I would say that the task of recruiting sufficient workers was more serious during the pandemic than it was in 2019, but it was certainly there in 2019.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Perhaps you could explain why that was the case, why it was so difficult in the 2019 election. Hiring 250,000 people in the span of a few weeks is a massive undertaking.

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** I'm not sure I have a complete answer for you except in terms of what you just mentioned.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sampson, I'm sorry; wait one moment.

I'm seeing some lights blinking. It can sometimes be a quorum call, but I just want to verify that members are not needed.

It's a quorum call, so we're good to continue.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** No, we don't consent.

**The Chair:** That's fair enough. We'll wait until the quorum call is done in about eight seconds.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** It's not a quorum call.

**The Chair:** It's a vote. Oh, I'm sorry.

Ms. Barron, it's not a quorum call.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** I was trying to be helpful.

**The Chair:** I understand. There was no malicious attempt here.

Colleagues, I don't have consent, so we will suspend, and we will vote.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** We got some good clips.

**The Chair:** To be very clear, colleagues, 10 minutes following the end of the vote, we will resume our discussion.

Thank you, colleagues.

We'll suspend.

• (1125) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, we are now more than 10 minutes after the results of the vote were read by the Speaker.

Mr. Cooper was speaking at the time we suspended.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** I'm sorry, Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. O'Connell.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** I didn't want to interrupt Mr. Cooper.

Given the interruption with the vote and given that the Conservatives seem to have a lot of questions on clause 2—I'm very happy for that—I would just ask if you could please look into additional resources, including additional resources up until midnight for future meetings, until we can finish clause-by-clause and give everyone the opportunity to ask all their questions. Perhaps you could then report back on what sort of resources we can have as a committee.

Thank you.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thanks, Ms. O'Connell.

I will confer with the clerk to find the answers to those questions. I'll report back to the committee.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll go back to where I had left off. I was raising questions about clause 2 of Bill C-65, which has implications with respect to polling stations and long-term care facilities during the writ period. I would make the general observation, based upon the response I received from Mr. Sampson, that Elections Canada....

I'll pose this to Elections Canada. It seems to me that Elections Canada is being asked to do more and more with fewer resources, at least fewer human resources, or is at least having difficulty in recruiting those resources. Is that a fair characterization?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] has been successively—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The interpreters cannot hear the witness. The microphone is probably a little too far away.

**The Chair:** All right, thank you.

Mr. Sampson, could you move your microphone?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I'm very sorry.

I was saying that as the Canada Elections Act has been successively amended a number of times over the years, the complexity of the electoral system has increased, so yes, that I can confirm.

In terms of the challenges in recruiting, we recruit a large number of workers in a very short period of time. The pay is modest and people need to be available to work on a Monday. The challenges remain more or less the same. They are stable challenges that are the same from election to election.

I don't know if that answers your question. I'm happy to say more, if you wish.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** If you were to look at this change, how many more...? Before I ask what I was just about to ask, which was how many more staff would be required—I'll ask you that momentarily—I want to go back to a question posed by Mr. Berthold. You may have answered this in full. If you did, I apologize.

What analysis has been done relative to the experience of COVID and the challenges of meeting staffing requirements with what will be an expansion of polling locations across the country?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Mr. Chair, I would draw Mr. Cooper's attention to the statutory report that Elections Canada produces after every election, where the numbers in terms of recruitment are stated, the challenges are described and so on.

I'm afraid I don't have an analysis available right now. We can certainly return to you, if that is your wish, but I believe that information is available publicly on the Elections Canada website in the report on the last election.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Can you comment now on what additional staffing or resources are going to be required? What is the projection with this change, with this expansion?

• (1225)

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Perhaps I can ask Mr. Cooper whether he's speaking specifically to the long-term care situation.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Yes, I'm speaking with respect to long-term care.

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** I'm afraid we don't have numbers for that right now. To some extent, it depends on the number of long-term care homes that accept to have polling stations in their institutions. We can perhaps get back to you in terms of the numbers of staff that are required to staff long-term care homes.

This is the same regime that was used during the pandemic. I was able to provide numbers to your colleagues a little bit earlier in the session. We were able to serve about 5,000 long-term care facilities. Typically, and it may differ from long-term care home to long-term care home, the staff is usually two or possibly three election workers per poll. We may have to confirm that with you, but those are the approximate numbers we're looking at. I hope that answers your question.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** You're estimating somewhere in the neighbourhood of 15,000 additional staff. Is that correct?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Mr. Cooper, we have a member of our operational team who is sitting behind us, so I could verify those numbers. She's probably in a better position to do so than I am.

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I will add that one of the effects of this change will be to expand the polling period from just polling day to day 13 to day zero, so that's a two-week period. As Mr. Duncan was pointing out, there will be a human resources benefit, potentially, from this change, because the same people could be used over the course of that period.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Do you have an estimated cost of this?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** I do not at this time, but that could be made available.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Okay. Thank you for that.

In terms of COVID, you indicated that there were approximately 5,000 long-term care facilities that had polling stations. I believe, if my recollection is correct, based upon the report of the Chief Electoral Officer, that, in the context of long-term care facilities, there were four different options or measures that were taken by Elections Canada, one of which was to have a polling station at the long-term care facility over a 12-hour period on election day.

Another provided for a polling location for a 12-hour period where the facility didn't request or wish that there would be a polling station. There were measures in place to provide for special ballot voting. There was one other measure that was taken. Am I correct on my recollection of what was in the report of Chief Electoral Officer?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Mr. Chair, I'm not sure if I can answer Mr. Cooper's question directly, but what I can say is that electors at long-term care homes had a variety of options allowing them to vote. They were able to vote at advance polls. They were able to vote with their special ballot. If the long-term care home where they resided had accepted a polling station, they had that option available as well. A variation on voting by special ballot is that they could also go to their returning officer's office in their electoral district and vote there using a special ballot, not by mail but in person.



**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Of the approximately 5,000 long-term care facilities that did request a polling location, how many would that be relative to total number of long-term care facilities in Canada? Do you have any idea of a ballpark figure? Was it that most long-term care facilities took Elections Canada up on that and made such a request?

• (1230)

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Mr. Cooper, the only numbers I have with me—thank you to my colleague—are that we served 5,167 facilities. There were 183 that declined.

I'm afraid I do not know with certainty whether that number represents all long-term care facilities in Canada. I can't say that with certainty at this moment, but I do know that the instruction to returning officers is, indeed, to reach out to the long-term care facilities in their electoral districts.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Were there any challenges with this or any problems that were identified, or on the whole, did it work relatively smoothly? I recognize that there are 5,000-plus locations. In any election, there are always going to be hiccups. Probably in every riding there are going to be some minor hiccups on election day. However, can you speak to the overall experience?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** What I can say is that, of course, that was a pandemic election. Long-term care homes were a very special circumstance during that election. There were hiccups in the sense that a long-term care home could have had a breakout of the virus, for example. They had perhaps indicated that such and such a day—say, day 12—was the appropriate day to allow Elections Canada in, and plans would change somewhat at the last moment, depending on the number of residents with COVID and the health protocols in place, etc.

I would say that it was quite difficult to administer but that it worked very well in the end. However, it required flexibility by both administrators and returning officers in working closely together to coordinate and collaborate. Yes, there were needs to adapt and to change an approach to respond to circumstances.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Have certain lessons been learned from the COVID experience moving forward, if this were to be implemented?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Specifically with respect to the legislative framework for serving long-term care homes, this was a framework that we felt worked very well, and it was recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer in his recommendations report. Elections Canada endorses and supports this framework for serving long-term care homes as a very useful, flexible tool and another channel of voting for electors.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I don't know if you can comment on this, and if you can't, that's fine.

What was the impact, if any, on turnout at long-term care facilities and of having a polling location at the facility?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** One thing the Chief Electoral Officer regularly says with respect to turnout is that it's a very complex thing, so it's not necessarily possible to speak to how one measure impacts turnout. It is usually an amalgam of different circumstances that impacts turnout. Most of those are outside the control of Elec-

tions Canada, so I can't speak to how this measure would have impacted turnout directly.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you.

I likely have some additional questions for witnesses, but I will add my name to the list. I think some of my other colleagues have questions on this clause.

**The Chair:** You are correct, Mr. Cooper. I believe they do.

Mr. Calkins, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Cooper did address a number of the questions that I had.

Just for clarification, could you give the committee an indication of, on average, how many electors are registered in...? You're not sure if you got every long-term care facility identified, but of the 5,000-some that you reached out to during the election, could you give the committee—just for my own edification, at least—what the average number of registered electors would be at a long-term care facility?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** This is a bit of a late-breaking answer. I don't have an average, but it varies from 10 to up to 1,000.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Okay.

I represented a large rural riding when I first got here in 2006; now it's an urban-rural split. I'm going to be returning, hopefully, to this place after the next election and representing a large rural constituency again.

On the ability for people who are in a long-term care facility to travel, the reason we go to them is it's easier than having them come to the election...for lack of a better way of expressing it. The ability to go to the returning office might be difficult. It might be several hundred kilometres away. It might even be 1,000 kilometres away. I'm not sure how that works. I'm a little bit concerned about the accessibility for people in a long-term care facility to be able to vote.

We have, like you said, 10 to 1,000. Most of the long-term care facilities in my constituency, I think, would have roughly 50 to 150 electors in them. I think that would be a reasonable approximation of most of these long-term care facilities.

You've stated that there are a number of other issues around voter turnout, but can you give me a rough average of participation? I would expect that the participation rate would be higher than the average participation rate in the election. I think in the last election it was a little bit lower because of the pandemic overall, but voter turnout is typically somewhere between 65% and 75%. Is that correct for a federal election?

• (1235)

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I think that is correct.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Did the long-term care facilities in the last three elections mirror that average, or would they be higher or lower of any significance?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** My understanding is that they would mirror that average.

One thing that also may be relevant to your question about this provision is that under the current act, of course, we can set up mobile polls in long-term care facilities, especially smaller long-term care facilities where they don't go for the full day, but there has to be two or more facilities. One of the changes in this provision is it will allow us to set those up in a single long-term care facility, which is especially helpful in more rural areas.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** That has been the practice, and I appreciate that.

Next, could you give some clarification? You said about 3.5% of the long-term care facilities declined in the last election to have this voting option available to them. Was that a decision made by the actual electors, or would that have been a decision made by whoever was in charge? As a follow-up to that, did you receive any complaints in long-term care facilities from electors who may not have had an option to vote in the last election?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** We would have to check in terms of complaints, but we can get back to you on that.

The decision to host a poll is usually taken by the administrator of the facility. We're not really privy to the governance model, shall we say, within there, so we don't know who makes the decisions, whether, if it's part of a chain, a regional manager makes them. We don't know that.

Typically, the returning officer engages directly with the administrator of a facility.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Thank you, Chair.

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** I should note very quickly that even though 3.5% did not have polls in the long-term care homes, the ability to vote by special ballot is nonetheless one that was there and one that we facilitate.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** However, it usually involves the elector going to the returning office. Is that correct?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** They could also apply for a special ballot kit and return it by mail.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Okay. How would that work today?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Special ballot kits today for the by-election you were referring to in Cloverdale, Langley City...

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** How are you circumventing the Canada Post issue?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** I wouldn't say we're circumventing the Canada Post issue, but we have found other ways of making sure that special ballot kits are received. In some cases it's door by door that we have distributed special ballot kits in the electoral district and, where possible, we have used other courier services to make sure they are returned to us on time.

We're confident that we've addressed the special ballot issue for that electoral district.

• (1240)

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Chair, I know I ceded the floor, but I have one quick follow-up based on one of the responses. I was going to ask and and I didn't get to it.

I did ask a question about voter turnout being relatively the same as the general voter turnout.

Did anybody do an analysis on the 3.5% of the long-term care facilities that declined the opportunity? Was there voter turnout? Did anybody do an analysis of the voter turnout in those that declined compared to the ones that did accept the polling stations?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Not that I know of.

**The Chair:** Mr. Duncan, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to our witnesses who are getting lots of questions today. I appreciate their insights and clarifications on this.

I want to follow up on a couple of things from my previous round. The exchanges have been helpful and have generated a couple more questions or angles to get some details on.

I'll get to scrutineers in a subsequent question. The first part of that is to get some background information or clarification.

For section 124, clauses 21 to 23 talk about the notification. Again, the returning officer has an obligation—it's outlined in there—to provide notice and information to the candidates. They will say where voting will take place, on which days and where the mobile polls are for long-term care polling stations.

Does any part say what the minimum notice period is? Is it a day? Is it a couple of days? Is it the time whenever advance polls are set?

Is there something that's tied to it that lets us know what the minimum notice period is for those polling locations, starting on day 13 down to day zero?

**Ms. Candice Ramalho:** I would direct your attention to the latter portion of proposed subsection 124(3), which refers to "in accordance with the instructions of the Chief Electoral Officer."

The expectation would be that this level of specificity is provided by the Chief Electoral Officer to the returning officers.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I'll ask Elections Canada if there has been any idea on there of what that time frame is. I say this because it's new in the way that this is going as well. I'll get into scrutineers as well. Maybe the detail there hasn't been thought about yet. I'm flagging this.

Has Elections Canada, through the instruction of the Chief Electoral Officer, given any idea of what that minimum notification period to candidates would be for the dates, times and locations of polling stations in long-term care residences?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** My understanding is that the instructions currently state that on the 24th day before the election, a list is provided. Subsequently, on every single day afterward, any updates are provided on a daily basis.

Obviously one of the most important provisions of the act is to allow the candidates to have as much notice as possible of where polling places are going to be. That's emphasized to the returning officers.

The only issue I would see with minimum times—and I'm not perfectly familiar with the instructions—is that there's always the possibility of a disaster of some sort or something where an immediate change has to happen. It would be more on an “as soon as possible” basis in those circumstances, obviously.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Again, common sense would say, too, that day 24 would give 11 days' notice, in theory. Outbreaks happen, and they very often happen in long-term care. It is reasonable that four days out, if an outbreak is declared in Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry at Woodland Villa in Long Sault—I won't say Dundas Manor again—then yes, you might need to delay it later on or come up with subsequent matters. It's helpful to know that right now it's on day 24.

Another thing to flag is scrutineers. I will acknowledge that later clauses deal with assisting the elector. The reason I'm passionate in asking some questions or for clarification in making sure we dot the i's and cross the t's here has to do with later changes that are proposed, which we may be discussing with some debate when that time comes, on the assisting of electors. That is a major change to how individuals may vote, particularly those in long-term care. Scrutineers in that process will be important, I think, to the integrity of that change.

It was already confirmed that scrutineers have the same rules to participate and observe as they would at a regular polling station, but then the question that comes about is whether that is in long-term care or just in the vicinity of polling. Part of where I'm going with this is not wanting the ability to wrongfully or inappropriately influence an elector while assisting them. There is some capping here a little bit of a scrutineer's role, and yet in terms of the importance of a scrutineer here, if it's a staff member who's assisting multiple people, they may be going room to room. They may be bringing certain electors there who....

What's the oversight? Is there anything different for scrutineers that's been thought of in maintaining the integrity of that process to ensure that any elector, while they may receive assistance from...? One person may assist more than one person. That's the big change. Scrutineers have the right and the ability to oversee this in the unique setting of long-term care.

• (1245)

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** It's a very important question and a very important issue. It obviously doesn't apply only in long-term care homes. It can apply anywhere, but it's particularly acute there.

The role of the scrutineer is essentially the same. There were differences during the COVID election, but I don't think there are any particularly different rules for scrutineers. The rules on assistance in this bill—I know that's not the direct question—don't change too

much from what is there now. There is a possibility to assist electors.

In terms of the role of scrutineers, it's something that I think people are aware of, but no particular instructions apply especially to long-term care homes.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** My comments on this are that it may be something for Elections Canada to consider in this new aspect of where one person can assist more than one elector and can help several. The reason I believe it's important in long-term care is that it's literally right in their home, right in a room in the home.

What are the interactions in terms of how a person is offered assistance and where? Is it where a staff member, a community member or a political party representative could go door to door in a seniors building or a long-term care setting and say they're going to help?

The reason it's a bit different to me is that if you were at, again, the Joel Steele Community Centre, a regular polling location, that could happen there, but generally an individual would make their way there. Frankly, in a long-term care setting, the population is a bit more vulnerable. It's easier in a good way, because they're in the elector's home in the building where they reside. They don't even need to leave the building, I'm going to assume, in 99% or more of cases.

It's just the extra provisions where we're getting into this. It's not just the assistance when they are crossed off the list, they sign their name and they go back to cast the ballot. It may be that in long-term care settings, where it's more unique, individuals are assisting multiple people. They engage with an elector and bring them down to cast the ballot and so forth. It's more than your average, regular polling location. This could be prone to abuse, frankly.

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** I'll turn it to my colleague, but I'll just add that the other element that's not changing if an elector requests assistance is the requirement that they make a solemn declaration that they will not influence that vote in any way or share that vote publicly. That is also an integrity measure that remains for any elector who requests that assistance from whomever they wish to have help them.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** My last part, if I could—just on scrutineers for now—is on the data collection of statistics: confirming a problem, debunking a myth, seeing a need for further clarification or looking into it. Is the keeping of statistics...? Now that this may be offered or is proposed, currently as is, when somebody signs and makes the attestation, the word you used there, to remain neutral and not influence the vote, are you keeping track or do you have the ability to keep track of not only how many were signed but also...?

For example, if I went into Dundas Manor or Woodland Villa and helped 45 people vote, are you keeping statistics in any way to see how well this was used or not used, to be able to say, "Wait a minute. We had one"? Is there any sort of data collection? I know you have to be very macro level, but I'm just wondering about statistics like, on average,  $x$  number of people signed or the average person in a long-term care facility helped 14 people, or two people, vote. Is there any way...or data collection that you're looking at keeping on this, confirming whether there's a problem, debunking a myth, or maybe seeing need for further change?

• (1250)

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Perhaps what I can say is that we have the documents in that a solemn declaration is made and that the document comes back to Elections Canada. I'm afraid that we don't have statistics for you available, but we do, indeed, have the documents available.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you.

My next couple of questions are regarding outbreaks.

I hope we don't have a pandemic-level election or a pandemic-level experience overall, no matter what, let alone around an election, but as I mentioned before, as did several others, outbreak is very common at long-term care facilities, particularly depending on the time of the year. It's a real and continuing concern and always will be. I think the pandemic taught us a lot of things from an elections perspective that could help ensure access to voting.

When we get back to a denial or a decline because a facility has an outbreak, are there any measures that Elections Canada is going to be taking to provide a reassurance to a long-term care administrator? I'll give you an example.

If a facility is in lockdown, you would not be having a voting station where you're going up...but one with plexiglass and things that were common during the pandemic. You would say, "We understand and are sorry to hear that you're in outbreak." However, even now, newer buildings have certain sections, and they're isolated by section so that residents aren't crossing over. There's the taking of temperatures of employees going in, which was done before, masking, providing plexiglass and doing extra things to provide distance or separation between an electorate and a poll worker. As opposed to its being a hard no and saying, "There's an outbreak. We're four days out. I'm sorry, but we have to cancel the poll at this long-term care facility," have you thought of being proactive and not only when they request it but if, all of a sudden, there's an outbreak? Have you thought of saying, "In the event that this happens, we believe that we have a protocol that could safely address this", allowing those people to vote, working with the health and safety protocols but having some best practices at Elections Canada?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** As you say, outbreaks obviously are part of what happens. In those circumstances, our returning officers are working with the administrators, and as my colleague said earlier, the administrator ultimately is the one who decides.

However, there are various activities we can take, including having the facility staff work as the election workers. We can also work with the facility to coordinate special ballot rules in many cases to help facilitate voting by mail, which can be done in a faster way

than just voting by mail. We can obviously pick up the ballots. There are protocols that we can do.

We have a certain amount of PPE that we can work with the administrator.... As you say, there might be circumstances, such as the set-up, where we can work with the administrator to find a way that can deal with their concerns. If, ultimately, their concerns can't be solved, then that is their choice, and we work with them through helping with special ballots.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** The reason I say that it should be done proactively is that it's going to happen. With 5,000 locations, regardless of the time of the year, it's going to be a legitimate concern and an issue that happens.

The line I probably overused was how you get to yes in terms of making sure that more places—even though outbreak does happen, where the health and safety of the staff and residents is paramount, but so is having ease in the democratic process. Proactively have that policy in place to say, "Here are some protocols we are developing with extra measures such as procurement that the returning office may proactively have in the event of something happening." Again, the plexiglass shields, masking and having that stuff available, particularly in long-term care settings, might be something that gets more people to say yes at the end of the day.

The last question that I have for now is on list revision.

Could you provide clarification on when an administrator may provide a list of residents currently residing at the polling site? Can you talk about how changes are made to the electors list of people being added and those being removed and what that process is?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** Are you asking about the list provided by the facility administrator to the returning officer?

• (1255)

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Yes, that's correct.

We have an electors list right now. We get one every few months from Elections Canada. During the writ period, my understanding is that the returning officer asks for an updated list. Obviously, it's easy to add to say all of a sudden, "I'm there in long-term care now, but I wasn't on the list to be added." Are people removed from the list? For example, say there are 75 people residing there, and you put them on the voters list, but there are seven or eight names that are currently at that long-term care home that were not provided on this list. Are they removed or are they kept on there? Is clarification sought when these seven individuals are currently on the list, but they're not on your list? Are they deceased? Have they moved? Are they at a hospital? How does that work?

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** The short answer is they're removed.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Okay.

Those are my questions for now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Calkins, you raised your hand.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Yes. I have one quick comment.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Just a moment, please.

Mr. Berthold, I don't have your name on my list.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** You had agreed to let me speak.

**The Chair:** You said you might have something to add. Are you sure now?

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** So I will yield the floor to Mr. Calkins and then to you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not expressing any frustration with your answer, but we're in the context of a current by-election, and I don't know what the context of the strike is with the Canada Post situation. Elections Canada has relied tremendously on Canada Post to be able to deliver not only special ballots but mail-in ballots.

You said that you had other manners of finding a way to resolve the fact that you no longer have the use of Canada Post. For my benefit, could you be a little more specific? Doing this in a by-election is one thing when all you have is one.

I'd be curious to see how that would manifest itself if there was a Canada Post strike during a general election.

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** I think it's dangerous to say how this would manifest itself in a general election, because it's a very different matter to administer a by-election and a general election, both with respect to—

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Yes, that's my point.

**Mr. Robert Sampson:** —geography but also the number of electors participating.

There are two areas that are a challenge for Elections Canada that have arisen because of the postal strike. There is the issue of mail-in ballots, and that is being addressed through other courier services and by direct delivery and direct pickup.

The other issue is voter information cards. The information that is normally supplied on voter information cards will be supplied and available on our website. We have an intensive communication campaign to drive electors to the voter information service on the website, and they will receive the information there.

**The Chair:** Mr. Calkins, I have a few things I have to say before the meeting ends here.

Colleagues, I am going to seriously inquire with the clerk about whether or not resources until midnight tonight are available. I will remind the committee that it is the chair's prerogative as to when we meet or not. The sense that I have taken away from today's meeting is that this is a long bill. There are serious inquiries being made on the part of members. That means we have to dedicate time to make sure that we can hear those inquiries.

This is a reminder that I will be consulting with the clerk and that at any moment, meetings can be called at the prerogative of the chair, should I feel it's necessary. Right now, I will reflect on this. My belief at the moment is that it may very well be necessary.

At this time, I do want to thank our witnesses very much for what was a very impressive and sophisticated set of responses.

We do have a speaking order that remains.

Mr. Berthold, you're on that list.

For that reason, we'll be suspending.

Have a great day, everyone.

[*The meeting was suspended at 12:59 p.m., Thursday, December 5*]

[*The meeting resumed at 11:02 a.m., Tuesday, December 10*]

• (13100)

**The Chair:** Good morning, everybody.

[*Translation*]

We'll start the meeting immediately.

[*English*]

I call this meeting to order.

This is a resumption of meeting 137 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

This is a reminder to witnesses and others that if you're not using your earpiece, please place it on the sticker in front of you in order to avoid harmful audio feedback that can jeopardize the health and well-being of our translators.

Colleagues, we are here to resume clause-by-clause on Bill C-65.

We do have a couple of witnesses back with us today.

From the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, we welcome back Mr. Knight, the general counsel.

From the Privy Council Office, we have with us Candice Ramalho, senior policy adviser. Joining us virtually is Rachel Pereira, director, electoral and senatorial policy unit.

Mr. Blois, welcome to PROC. It's nice to see you here today.

Colleagues, with that, we are going to resume.

Mr. Cooper, the last time I checked my list, you maintained the floor, so I'm going to give you the floor, sir.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Is this on clause 2?

**The Chair:** That is correct, Mr. Cooper. Yes.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I'm fine for now.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, seeing no further speakers, we're going to go to a vote.

Is this you indicating that you would like to speak? I didn't see any indication of that.

[*Translation*]

I yield the floor to you.

[*English*]

Mr. Duncan, did you want to speak?

[*Translation*]

All right. I understand that's not the case.

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I have no questions.

I'll yield the floor to my colleague.

• (13105)

**The Chair:** That's precisely what I was going to propose, Mr. Berthold.

[*English*]

Mr. Duncan or Mr. Calkins, are you prepared?

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I'm prepared.

**The Chair:** Mr. Duncan, the floor is yours, followed by Mr. Calkins.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you. I have my book open here first. We're right at it here.

Mr. Chair, through you, thank you to our witnesses for being back today.

As we talk about clause 2, I don't know if there's been a chance for reflection on Elections Canada's behalf.

Last week, I asked several questions about the new nature of this, particularly with the role of scrutineers in the interactions, the uniqueness of polling stations in long-term care settings and the assistance of electors in casting their ballot. This is of particular concern and a major change.

Has there been any more thought from Elections Canada? I know it's only been a few days, but I do think this is important for us to perhaps have some assurances on.

Is there collection of data or statistics on the number of individuals in long-term care settings who were assisted and the number of individuals who did help? For an example, one staff member assisted 34 electors to cast their ballot at a long-term care home.

Is there a way or a commitment of some sort that when we're looking at this.... The reason I ask is, after every general election—

actually after every by-election, I believe—we get a report from Elections Canada. It is very insightful and helps us with legislative and policy changes.

Is there an ability or a way that Elections Canada can tell us that it will be able to collect that information and share that in something like the report that comes back to us?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I don't have further information from what was shared on Tuesday other than to say that while there is a newness element to this provision, it is something that happens right now, but I understand you're saying that you would like better reporting.

That is something I will take back and we'll have a chance to reflect on it before the next election.

I don't see any operational difficulties at this point for that. In fact, I suspect that information is already collected, but to be honest, I don't have an answer on the operational aspects of that right now.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I appreciate that.

The reason I keep mentioning it proactively is that I think some sort of instruction has to be set up so that this is a statistic that those working at a poll in a long-term care setting will need to track in one way.

The individual who assists an elector has to do an oath or a declaration. Is it for each individual they assist? How does that work? For example, if I were a dietary aide at long-term care residence and I was asked that day if I could go around and see who would like help voting, would I do a declaration for each individual? Would that be logged?

I want to give a bit more context as to why I am so adamant in asking about this. I just don't want to be seen as not wanting to ensure that every elector in a long-term care residence is afforded the opportunity to vote. That is key. It is important. But I want to make sure that it's not prone to abuse and that we don't all of a sudden see individuals helping 20, 30, 40 or 50 people at a polling station where last time around 14 people voted. That's not to say that it wouldn't be a success—they were asked to do it—but I want to make sure we have some guardrails and statistics on that and to perhaps raise any concerns on that.

Maybe to summarize my question, is there a written oath or written documentation for each time one person helps? Is there a way to log that through the paperwork you have at a long-term care polling station?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** There is a written document that is signed by the elector who's assisting another elector. The only circumstance right now where an elector can assist another elector is if it's their relative or family member. In other cases, which, as we have talked about, right now is limited to people who are referred to as friends, they are only permitted to assist a single other elector.

If a person came in as a family member at two different times, they would, I am sure, be asked to fill out two different forms as an assistant. If it was a person at a polling place with two elderly parents, for example, I suspect that they may only be asked to fill out one form. I don't have a certain answer on that. I am just sort of responding in a practical sense.

If these amendments were to change, you're correct that a person at a long-term care home facility could potentially assist more than one elector. We would have to ensure that proper controls and records were maintained. I take your question to be along those lines, emphasizing the need for those controls and records. Absolutely that would be something we would do. How specifically we would achieve that, I'm hesitant to say at this stage.

• (13110)

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I appreciate that.

I'll malign myself here a little bit, if I could, not to give an example but to use myself as a party representative candidate on the ballot. In theory, the way the rules change in long-term care homes is that it's not just a staff member at a long-term care home. Any elector can assist someone at a poll, and multiple electors. In theory, I as a campaign representative could go to the long-term care home and go door to door in the building up to 12 hours before at a polling location and be there on a certain day or days. I have 14 people who would like to vote. If I sign 14 pieces of paper, I can go back and help those 14 people. It's not just in long-term care settings where it is staff who are within a polling station or at a long-term care home. In theory, anyone in this room could go in and help multiple electors.

That's quite a guardrail removal, correct?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** It is.... Any person could, you are correct. In the particular instance of a long-term care home, I see your point about scrutineers. It is true that this would allow any person to assist multiple electors.

Again, I think you're absolutely right to raise the need for record-keeping and other guardrails around that.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** As a follow-up to that, are there any restrictions on a candidate or a campaign's representative from doing that?

Let's say I signed in and Mr. Calkins came out to help me in Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. He would always be appreciated and welcome—thank you—although he may be busy as well in Red Deer. If he went as a scrutineer at the polling location at a long-term care location, are there any restrictions on candidates or campaign representatives from using that and doing that at either a long-term care setting or a regular or advance poll location?

This is where I'm going with this. As you look at this, it could be prone to abuse. Campaign representatives could go in and say they're there to assist 15 electors, walk in, sign the oath and go into the back with them, right by the ballot box. I as Mr. Duncan could make sure that Mr. Knight, who needs help, casts the right ballot, "Yep, you've cast the right ballot at the right spot," and off you go in an unlimited number.

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** Thank you for allowing me to take the time to check.

There is no restriction on somebody, whether they're a candidate representative or someone else, assisting more than one elector. Although, obviously, under the current law, it's only family members.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I would suggest that this needs further clarification or perhaps oversight. For political party representatives to be eligible to assist multiple people in a long-term care setting, frankly, I believe—and you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I will keep to clause 2—that this could be prone to abuse where a representative is a scrutineer, a campaign volunteer, who could be going door to door and assisting electors in a way.

Are there any safeguards that you can provide, some assurances, or is that something perhaps we should be looking at to provide further oversight and clarification, or perhaps a reasonable guardrail to ensure that this is not abused?

**The Chair:** Mr. Duncan, I'm going to interrupt briefly, because I see Mrs. Pereira has her hand up.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I apologize.

• (13115)

**The Chair:** That's okay, but she may want to speak to your question.

Mr. Knight, we're just going to pause and go to Mrs. Pereira, at which point, if you feel you have something to add, certainly the floor will be yours at that point.

Mrs. Pereira, go ahead.

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to add to Mr. Duncan's question that it is at the request of the elector, who does need to ask, typically their friend or relative, or, in this case, a long-term care health worker in the facility. There is that measure.

I do understand the point that Mr. Duncan is making, and it's a good one, but it is at the request of the elector, not just someone who can go in and offer to help electors.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Okay, I see the point and the clarification there, Mrs. Pereira. I appreciate that.

I don't want to split hairs, but I just want to get a clarification. If I'm going door to door in a long-term care setting or even in a community where there is an advance poll, either-or, the broader context or issue here is that I could say at the door of the resident, "I'll come down with you, and you just tell them that you've requested some help and I'm here to help you." Would that not suffice as asking for help?

I'll use my name and I'll malign myself here, so I'm not maligning anybody else's intentions. The interaction that I would have is that I knock on the door, and say, "I can actually help you vote. When I bring you to the table, you just tell them that you need some help and that Mr. Duncan is going to help you." Is that considered enough for requesting assistance?

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** Typically, and my colleague may be able to confirm, the elector asks their immediate relative or their friend that they would like their help, because they are a trusted person. The elector is assured that that person is not going to share how they voted in the ballot box or influence them in any way. They do seek the person close to them to have that assistance at the ballot box. It is possible that someone goes and proactively asks, "Would you like my help?", but the elector would likely have someone in mind close to them, like their personal support worker or a friend or relative to help them mark their ballot if needed.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I get more questions about this and more concern. I understand the intent and the well meaning, perhaps. I won't suggest in this section that's not something that's trying to get more people to cast a ballot. However, I also think this is opening the door significantly to abuse.

It may not be the intention, but that's what we have to do in the policy work that we do. We have to acknowledge this. I think a political party representative can say they're friends with everybody.

In my riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, I'm very fortunate to know lots of people and be friends with lots of them. I was a mayor in a community before, so "everyone is my friend"—quote, unquote—during an election particularly when they're eager to go and cast a ballot. There is a relationship there.

I'll cede the floor here, but one thing I will say is perhaps to cap that as opposed to having an unlimited number. Right now there are specific restrictions, but even capping it to say "assisting up to five people", or something like, does give some flexibility, but doesn't have somebody going and assisting 50 people. I'm very worried about the open-endedness of this, the connection that there are no restrictions on political candidates or political party representatives or scrutineers.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We have a point of order from Ms. Barron.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Chair, I'm noticing that there's some repetition, and so I thought it might be a good opportunity for me to bring forward a unanimous consent motion.

Clearly, the Conservatives have very important questions that have nothing to do with stalling this bill. The Conservatives have brought up their concerns about the part of the bill that benefits MP pensions, which I've also brought forward—

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** No, you can't do a UC during—

**The Chair:** Guys, I know.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** You're going to allow a UC during a point of order when they're not allowed,

**The Chair:** I said, I know. Give me a moment to speak, please, Mr. Duncan.

Ms. Barron, the rules do not permit for a motion to be moved on a point of order, so, unfortunately, we can't entertain that at this point in time. If you had the floor, it would be different. I would be happy to add you to the speaking list, if you'd like me to.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Chair, I was merely trying to resolve an issue that they had and trying to get creative with it. Thank you for clarifying.

**The Chair:** I understand. Thank you.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Certainly, I'll try to find other ways to bring forward getting the Conservatives to support removing the portion of the bill that takes out the pensions.

Thank you.

• (13120)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

Mr. Duncan, the floor remains yours.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you, and thanks to Ms. Barron for trying to bring forward her issue, which the NDP and Liberals certainly have. Nice try.

I'll just wrap up and ask for a comment about capping. Could it be a reasonable compromise to cap the number of individuals one elector could help to make sure that we don't have 40 or 50 people to do that?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** From the perspective of Elections Canada, that's a policy choice that absolutely is within the scope of this committee's work. I don't think we would have a comment on that.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Would it be doable to permit this committee to consider that? Would it be permissible and manageable from an Elections Canada perspective? I'm not putting you formally on the spot, but are there any red flags that are raised from being able to enforce this or manage that?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I don't see any concerns with that.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Calkins, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to be asking a question about the costs of the election starting in 2009 and going up to 2021, so if you don't have that information handy with you, you can find somebody who can get me what the final costs or the total costs were for the general elections for those five years.

The question I do have right now is a follow along.



My spouse is an immigrant to Canada. She is part of a diaspora community here. I know that in her diaspora community, there are long-term care facilities that are pretty much exclusively utilized by members of that diaspora, not exclusively, but pretty much. I'm assuming that's the case for numerous other diaspora communities.

This committee has been seized with questions of foreign interference in particular diasporas in Canada. My assumption would be, and I'd like to see if my assumption is correct, that there would be some long-term care facilities that would largely have in it residents from certain diasporas that might be under a potential threat of foreign interference.

Is that true?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** Is the question whether there are some diaspora communities that have...or long-term care homes that focus on certain diaspora communities?

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** There are certain long-term care facilities that might be established by diaspora community groups, for example.

I know that in Edmonton and Red Deer and other places in Alberta, you would have Catholic long-term care facilities. There's a Polish long-term care facility. My wife is a Polish immigrant to Canada in Edmonton as well.

I'm assuming that this would be happening in other parts of Canada. There would be Chinese cultural community long-term care facilities that run and manage these things, largely to the benefit of Chinese Canadians, for example. The same would be happening in other cultural communities. I'm just making an assumption, and I'm asking if my assumption is true.

**The Chair:** Mr. Calkins, I'm going to interrupt because, again, I see that Mrs. Pereira has her hand up and perhaps would like to speak to this.

Mrs. Pereira, moving forward, it's not the usual practice, but I don't mind if you just unmute and say, "I can speak to this" just in case we miss your hand.

We'll go to you, and then we'll go to Mr. Knight, should he feel there's something to add.

Go ahead, Mrs. Pereira.

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the questions from the members on this. This relates to clause 2 of Bill C-65. The witnesses may not be in a position to speak to potential foreign interference at long-term care facilities. We just wouldn't be in a position to speak to this, but we're happy to respond to any sort of technical questions related to the bill. It's just something for the committee's consideration.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Well, I'm a little confused as to why there wouldn't be somebody here who could speak to it. I'm not suggesting that somebody here speak directly to the issue of foreign interference, but if we are changing or relaxing some of the provisions that would enable electors to vote, I would submit to you that those who are in the business of clandestine foreign interference would use whatever vehicles or tools made available to them.

I've been here a long time. We've done studies on elder abuse and on a number of different issues. I would submit to you, and this is just my opinion, that the population in a long-term care facility could be subjected to potential threats or abuse from a variety of sources, and one of those sources could be those who are engaged in clandestine foreign interference. I'm wondering whether the relaxing of these provisions is going to make that better or worse. I can see this potentially being abused. I'm not saying it's going to be, but does that potential for that kind of abuse exist?

• (13125)

**The Chair:** I am seeing Mrs. Pereira's hand again, or is that from before?

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** I'm sorry. That was from before.

I can add that, yes, the member is correct. These risks always exist, and potentially exist under the current regime, under the Canada Elections Act, where you have friends who can assist at the request of the elector, and friends could be, as Mr. Duncan had mentioned, quite general.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** That was a change that was made since the 2015 election. Is that not correct?

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** I will defer to my colleague, Mr. Knight, on when that might have been introduced.

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I think the friend provision has been there since 2000.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Do we have a cost for administering the general elections from 2009 to 2021?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I don't have that information with me, no.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** I think I did ask this question. Should this clause pass, what are the expected increases to the costs to deliver a general election?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I'm sorry, but I don't have that information. Of course, I will endeavour to answer to the best of my ability, but I am here to speak to the legal ramifications of the changes to the bill. It's difficult to answer questions on operational or administrative matters.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** I would entertain an answer from anybody who might know.

**The Chair:** Mr. Calkins, I am going to submit here that I think our officials are doing the best that they can. It's not that your questions are out of line, by any means, but perhaps we can ask for written submissions from other officials who are capable of presenting that so that we're not asking our officials who happen to be here today to comment on things that they're not capable of providing insight on.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Yes, perhaps somebody could get that information for me.

**The Chair:** If you want, we'll make a note to the clerk that you would like to have a written submission from witnesses on that point.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Is there an actual budget that's set aside? I know there's a budget for the department to maintain annual operations and so on. I'm just wondering, is there an actual budget for an election, or is it just that, whatever it costs to deliver the election, it's what it costs? How does it work? I'm not talking about maintaining department operations on an annual basis but about the budget proportion for an election. Is it just that we spend the money because it costs what it costs, it is what it is, and we just pay the bill when the bills come in, or is there actually any effort to maintain a general election within a certain budget parameter?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** Again, it's not really my area of expertise. However, there is pretty extensive...my understanding is there is a budget. There is quite a bit of budgeting that happens, and there is quite a bit of information about this on our website and in our annual reports to Treasury Board, in terms of the plans and the results. I think that would be a good source for a lot of that information.

**The Chair:** I am going to interject here again.

Are you done, Mr. Calkins?

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'd just like colleagues to note that part of the reason we read the titles of the witnesses is so that we can help those watching and ourselves understand their roles. Mr. Knight is general counsel for the Chief Electoral Officer's office. He is here, as are others from the Privy Council Office, to provide technical guidance on the legislation before us. This does not mean that we are not within our right to ask for further information, but I would just ask, out of respect for our witnesses and the hats that they are wearing as they occupy these chairs here today, that we try our best to save questions for them that relate to the things that they are well-versed in.

With that, I go to Mr. Berthold, followed by Mr. Cooper, followed by Mr. Turnbull.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've managed to get my notes in order, so I can ask the question I wanted to ask at the beginning.

There's a lot of talk about long-term care facilities, because section 2 adds clarification on the subject.

What is the definition of a long-term care facility, and what facilities might fit that definition?

I'll tell you why I want to know that. We also have people from Elections Canada walking around seniors' residences collecting their votes. It's not the same process as long-term care facilities, but more and more of these seniors' residences now have a care wing that's set aside for people who need long-term care.

Can you give us your exact definition of "long-term care facility", which we've been talking about all along, so that we have a good grasp of what we're talking about?

To what extent can this definition be extended to seniors' residences?

• (13130)

[*English*]

**Ms. Candice Ramalho:** There is not a strict definition provided in the technical sense of a definition provision. However, I would direct the honourable member's attention to clause 107. I know that we have to jump around the bill, given the technical nature of the Canada Elections Act, but it provides that it would be a place where seniors or persons with a disability reside.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** You talked about a number of long-term care facilities that are recognized by the various provincial authorities, but, if I go by this definition in clause 107, it can extend to any residence where there is at least one resident receiving long-term care.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I think, as in the previous answer, it would be a place where seniors or persons with disabilities reside. Long-term care is, I think, used as a shorthand when we're talking about the bill. However, an institution where seniors reside could be broader, as you've suggested, and my understanding from an operational perspective—again, that's not really my area—is that it is up to the returning officers to contact the local institutions where seniors reside and discuss with them if it would be an appropriate method of polling for them. You are correct in that there is potential for some flexibility in terms of the definition.

I will quickly add that, if only part of the institution has seniors or people with disabilities, it would be the part that was served by the specified polling places.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Would everyone in a residence be able to vote?

Let's take the following case. The returning officer's team goes to a facility where 2 of the 40 beds are occupied by people receiving long-term care. Does the bill contain a provision that would prohibit the other 38 people from taking advantage of the returning officer's team's presence to vote, or could all these people vote?

Is this limited to people receiving long-term care? We're talking about facilities, not people.

[*English*]

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I think that the bill does refer to a part of an institution as well, but I think it's difficult to say in a particular hypothetical example how it would play out. The intention of the act is clearly to provide an opportunity for seniors or persons with disabilities to vote where they reside.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** During the last election, I noticed that, in several seniors' residences, management had exerted pressure on the various candidates to have the opportunity to have their residents vote on site. Could we use this addition we're talking about right now to call for on-site voting in all seniors' residences that house people receiving long-term care? That's what concerns me.

By the way, the definition of "long-term care" can be very broad. It can be as simple as administering medication once a day. However, even if a person has no other medical needs, that's considered long-term care.

I'm a little concerned about how this provision might be used. I understand from your comments that you haven't foreseen the possibility of residences other than provincially recognized long-term care facilities asking to have this option.

• (13135)

[English]

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I think it is possible that it would extend beyond provincially regulated long-term care institutions, because the act does speak to institutions where seniors or persons with disabilities reside. Simply being a senior does not necessarily mean one needs long-term care. Both the bill and the existing act have that possibility.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Okay. Thank you.

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Mr. Chair, can I interrupt? I have a unanimous consent motion I'd like to bring forward.

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, you will have the ability to do that once you have the floor.

I do have Mr. Turnbull at the moment. I will add your name to the speaking order following him.

Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thanks, Chair.

I think we're 2.5 hours into Bill C-65. We've had many, many questions from the Conservatives on clause 2 of this bill. I want to put it in context here. As far as I know, in our package of amendments, and we have many, this clause has no amendments.

Could we check that with the legislative clerk? Were any amendments submitted for this clause?

I'm seeing a no.

**The Chair:** They certainly can speak if they'd like to, but no was the answer.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** There's another thing I want to clarify. My understanding is that in many previous elections, seniors in long-term care facilities have been able to vote due to mobile polling stations. Is that not the case?

Could someone clarify that?

**Ms. Candice Ramalho:** Yes. That is currently the approach.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** For how long has that been the case, or for how many elections, roughly speaking? I know that it's been the last two elections. I can verify that, because I was in those elections, but prior to that, I wouldn't know.

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** It's certainly been since 2000. I don't know if it goes back further than that.

One difference between the current law and the bill is that right now, such a mobile poll can be set up to consist of only two or more institutions. In locales where there may be only one institution, the mobile poll for long-term care homes hasn't been available to those electors.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** The relative change, put in the context of the last 24 years of Elections Canada being able to do mobile polling stations at long-term care facilities, is to really formalize and make permanent this program, which essentially has been working, to my knowledge, quite well. This is to change the definition of "polling station" to include long-term care facilities.

Am I understanding that correctly?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** Clause 2 does that, yes. Yes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** You seem hesitant there. Do you want to explain? Is there something else you're leaving out?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** Well, no. There are various changes to the rules around long-term care voting throughout the act, which we have been discussing throughout the bill. In terms of establishing a polling place in an institution, the current act allows for it to happen, and has allowed for it to happen since 2000, in two or more institutions. This bill would change this so that it could be permitted in a single institution or a part of an institution.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Great. I'm in support of that. I'm in support of that, because I think what we want to be able to achieve here is a permanence to having polling stations at long-term care facilities reliably so that seniors who might have mobility challenges who live in those facilities can vote and not be disenfranchised. I think the program has been working quite well.

To me, it achieves a policy objective that I hope at least all of us share, which is to increase the participation and the likelihood of enfranchisement and not disenfranchisement of our seniors who live in long-term care. Is that not the policy objective we're trying to achieve here?

Again, I'll take comments from any of the panellists, even the ones who are joining remotely.

Mr. Knight, you're de facto becoming the default person for answers.

• (13140)

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I shouldn't comment. I have no comment on the policy.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Maybe I'll go to Mrs. Pereira.

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** I can jump in here.

That is exactly the policy objective. It's to remove barriers from electors who want to vote and are able to vote and to facilitate the vote to ensure they're not disenfranchised. This bill, through the long-term care regime, makes voting more accessible to electors with disabilities and electors in care. The existing measures that are available to them, such as a mobile polls, will remain in place, but this establishes those permanent polls with the returning officer working with the administrators of those facilities to enable those individuals to vote.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you for that clarification.

I really think that puts this particular clause, clause 2, which is the first clause we're considering in these committee proceedings on clause-by-clause, in context. Perhaps we can get past this and move toward other clauses.

I'll give up the floor now to Ms. Barron.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Ms. Barron, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Chair. I thought I was being added at the very end. This is a nice surprise.

I want to bring forward a unanimous consent motion. I have heard the Conservatives speak quite loudly, over and over, on the concern around the component of this bill that provides pensions to members of Parliament who would otherwise not receive them. I share this concern, as I have made very clear. I have said this from the onset. For that reason, I'm trying to find a path forward here.

Now, I can't even begin to pretend to know what the intentions of the Conservatives are. I will not imply any such intentions, but it does perhaps feel like there is a desire to delay the important work we have in front of us today. I was hoping to bring forward this unanimous consent motion. That way, we could have a path forward as a committee to be able to resolve the issue that was brought forward.

Mr. Chair, the unanimous consent motion I'd like to bring forward—

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** Colleagues, one moment.

Ms. Barron has the floor. Even if a member has the intention to not give consent to a UC motion, we have to hear the motion first. She has the floor. She'll continue to have the floor until she relinquishes it.

Ms. Barron, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Chair, when it is clear that there is a lack of consent, that ends the matter. That should end the matter.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on that point of order, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** My understanding is that in the House when you move a unanimous consent motion, that's possibly the rule, such as after question period. In this particular case, Ms. Barron has the floor, which means she's allowed to speak until she cedes the floor, right? That's the rule in committee.

She could have not mentioned that she needed unanimous consent. She could have just spoken to this and then asked for that at the end. To be honest, I think—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Colleagues, no advice that I'm being given is inconsistent with my judgment here, which is that until Ms. Barron relinquishes the floor, the floor is hers.

Ms. Barron, I'll return the floor to you.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the clarification around the important processes we take.

The resolution I'm wanting to bring forward is an opportunity. I hope my Conservative colleagues really consider this before shutting it down. They haven't even heard the unanimous consent motion I'd like to bring forward. The one I'm hoping to bring forward today actually resolves the exact issues they have brought forward as a concern which, again, I share. This resolution is seeking the committee to move to the clause of this bill that benefits MP pensions and to see it resolved by bringing us directly to a vote on amendment NDP-2 to clause 5.

If we went to a vote on this clause directly—

● (13145)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** —we would be able to see, as a committee—

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, just one moment. I'm sorry. There's a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Chair, we are currently studying clause 2. I question the relevance of my colleague's proposal.

**The Chair:** Mr. Berthold, with all due respect, the fact that we are currently considering clause 2 makes no difference, since a committee member can propose a motion at any time. This is what Ms. Barron has chosen to do. She can continue.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm listening, Mr. Berthold.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** In that case, we need to have the motion that Ms. Barron wants to propose. We don't have it at the moment. So we can't discuss it.

**The Chair:** It's true that we must have the motion after it has been presented.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** No, Mr. Chair. The member has to present the motion and then there's a debate on the motion.

**The Chair:** I don't totally agree, Mr. Berthold.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I would invite you, please, to consult the experts on this subject.

**The Chair:** One moment, please, I'll do that.

Mr. Berthold, as you requested, I have consulted the experts who are here today. They agree with my decision that Ms. Barron can present her motion. In fact, a week ago, you also made a motion before it was distributed. This is no different.

So I'm going to give the floor back to Ms. Barron.

[*English*]

Colleagues and, Mr. Berthold, of course you are welcome to challenge the chair's decision on this. It's a dilatory motion, which is non-debatable. If you'd like to challenge the chair's ruling, I'd encourage you to do it now. If not, I'm not going to recognize the same point of order. Would you like to challenge it?

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I am challenging the chair.

**The Chair:** We have a challenge to the chair.

Madam Clerk, if you could please explain what this means, we'd appreciate that.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Holke):** We will vote on the motion that the chair's decision be sustained.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** What's the decision?

**The Chair:** Colleagues, for clarity, my ruling affirms the right for Ms. Barron to continue speaking prior to a vote occurring on the UC motion, because the language is yet to be presented. In the view of Monsieur Berthold my ruling is out of order. He's challenging that particular ruling. I'm seeing him nod, which means I'm not putting words in his mouth and there's agreement on that, so I am going to ask the clerk to call the question.

The question is whether or not you agree with my ruling that Ms. Barron should be allowed to continue to speak prior to the introduction of her motion.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, I return the floor to you, and there will be no further points of order on this matter as we've dealt with it.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Chair.

Just to clarify, I look forward to our going through this process of debating this important unanimous consent motion, if that is, in fact, the process, and bringing it to a vote, because this is an opportunity for all members of Parliament to clearly state how they feel, to actually have solutions to their concerns and to actually see where all members stand on this.

The unanimous consent motion that I was seeking to put forward is to see a resolution of the clause of this bill that benefits MP pensions by bringing NDP-2 and clause 5 to a vote. By bringing this to a vote, this is an opportunity for us to resolve the issue that was

brought forward by the Conservatives as a concern, which is the same issue that I and the Bloc Québécois brought forward as a concern, and the same issue that the Liberals have agreed—

• (13150)

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** No. Let's get to the motion. We're not giving consent.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** —is something that they will also be voting to see removed.

I am hearing the Conservatives, for lack of a better word, heckling me as I speak here. I am not quite certain why, because this is an opportunity for us to unite, to show Canadians that we hear their concerns and that we wish to move forward with a solution to this problem.

It's quite reasonable to me that we take the time to bring this to a vote so that we can show Canadians that we hear them and that we are going to be moving forward with this.

Perhaps I can share a little bit more around some of the background of this unanimous consent motion. It's been quite the process, and I've been sitting here listening to the Conservatives speak at length about their concerns and their many attacks on the intentions behind the NDP. I'm happy to be able to speak a little bit more about this.

I was newly elected in 2021. Upon getting elected, I made a commitment to constituents and to those I represent that I come to the House of Commons, that I represent them, that I speak on their behalf on concerns and that I keep my values intact. That is exactly what I have done.

When it was brought to my attention that there was a clause in this bill that would inadvertently provide members of Parliament with pensions that they would not have received otherwise, I did exactly what any parliamentarian should do, which is to stand in the House of Commons to propose a solution to this problem. The solution that I proposed was that we remove this entire part of the clause so that the date is no longer changed.

I stood in the House of Commons. I made this very clear. I made this clear to my constituents. I made this clear to Canadians across the country. Instead of looking for a resolution, Mr. Chair, the Conservatives stood up and basically said that they were no longer going to support this entire bill. Why? It's because there are some catchy slogans that they can attach to it.

The Conservatives found catchy slogans, and with their incredible fundraising efforts based on misinformation—I will commend them; they are quite successful in their fundraising efforts—they pushed out this information to Canadians that this bill had nothing to do with anything other than MP pensions.

This is disheartening, to say the least. We know there are many components of this bill that move us forward in strengthening our democracy, increasing representation, making sure that many of the issues in previous elections that were barriers to people fully participating in the election process are brought forward. Unfortunately, the Conservatives, in true Conservative fashion, which I've seen over and over since I've been elected, decided to oversimplify, find some catchy slogans and push this out over and over again.

I would like to highlight something that I brought forward in a previous meeting because it does contradict some of the things that I heard from the Conservatives. Specifically, on May 30, 2024, an article came out from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I like this particular article. Let's be honest. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation doesn't spend a lot of time saying nice things about the NDP, so let's just take a moment to celebrate that they acknowledged the important work the NDP is doing. I want to quote from it.

I asked Mr. Terrazzano about this. He was a previous witness here on this exact matter.

The article says:

Today the New Democrats announced they would oppose the government's amendment to delay the next election. "All MPs must vote against pushing back the federal election and the NDP deserves credit for announcing plans to amend the legislation and scrap the delay," said Franco Terrazzano, CTF Federal Director. "Canadians are struggling, so there's no way MPs should rig the system so more politicians can collect lucrative, taxpayer-funded pensions."

● (13155)

You know, as expected, there is some pretty strong criticism against this being in the bill. To be clear, it's not that I don't think MP pensions are an important discussion. It's that I feel that if we're going to talk about MP pensions, we need to make it clear that we're talking about MP pensions and not see it added into a bill in a behind-the-scenes way. Canadians need transparency. Canadians deserve to know what it is we are debating in the House of Commons and to know our rationale for the decisions we are making. They need to know that the information is made available to them. That's not what we saw in the addition to this bill.

I think this is a reasonable solution for us to move forward with. I would also like to speak to the fact that throughout this time debating Bill C-65 and my short time on this committee, we have heard from the Conservatives many attacks on the fact that this work was done through a supply and confidence agreement with the Liberals and the NDP to be able to bring forward some ways for us to be able to strengthen our democracy. As is the process, it's here at committee for us to debate, to get various opinions and to understand the concerns and ultimately come together with an improved bill. I believe strongly that the key to our democratic processes is to ensure that we are hearing different perspectives. We may not agree, but I believe strongly that our coming together to hear these different perspectives allows for a stronger bill.

I was, however, a little taken aback, for lack of a better word, by the comments that were made as a result of the track record we have seen of the Conservatives. I was not here, but I did hear firsthand about Harper's.... What was it called again? Was it the "unfair elections act"? I believe that was its name.

I did have the chance to ask some of our witnesses about the unfair elections act and to also speak with the Minister of Democratic Institutions, because he was here—I was not fortunate enough to be here during that time—and find out if the Conservative government at that time spent any time at all consulting with the other parties who were elected at that time about this elections act they brought forward. In fact, the answer to that was "no". We did not see any consultation happening at the time when the Conservatives brought forward this act, so it seems a little rich to be making this criticism.

I would argue that, fair enough, if the Conservatives wanted to bring forward a new elections act, the work would happen at this table. This is the process we have in place to make sure we have all opinions expressed, to bring in experts in the field who can clarify any questions we have, and to bring forward a bill that is stronger and meets the needs of Canadians.

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, I'm sorry to interrupt.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Many of us had long committee hours this morning as well. Something I've tried to do is provide opportunities for members to run to the washroom. I understand that a few need to do this.

I will suspend very briefly. Then we'll come back.

● (13155)

(Pause)

● (1208)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, we are resuming.

We were on a discussion presented by Ms. Barron, so I return the floor to her.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the moment to reflect, because I realize I might not have been 100% clear about the intention of what I'm speaking to today. I want to make sure that everybody around the table is very clear that the intention is that we the election date moved back. This is something that has been brought up as a concern. The reason I want to see this date moved back is so that we don't see the unintentional benefits to members of Parliament receiving pensions who would not have received them otherwise.

The funny thing about this is that everybody around this table says that they agree, and so I'm unclear as to why this is a problematic or a contentious issue for me to bring forward. I cannot stress more that the NDP stood up immediately to put forward a solution to this issue. We heard the Bloc make it very clear that they do not want to see that clause in this bill, and don't want to see the benefits to pensions of members of Parliament as a result. The Conservatives made it very clear that they are not in support as well. The Liberals, by golly, also said that they are in support of our removing this portion of the bill.

I'm going to get to the point of this, but I just need to reiterate that, instead of our moving forward with the solution that can be so easily done, we have seen the Conservatives use this as a fundraising opportunity and as an opportunity to use quick catchy slogans that are spreading misinformation to Canadians about the intentions of parliamentarians. It's a very tragic series of events when Conservatives are spreading misinformation, because we are at a time, right now, when Canadians need to have faith in those they elect. They need to have faith in the people who are there to represent them, that we are standing by the values that we have and are doing what is in the best interest of Canadians, not just spreading misinformation to increase division and to use it for fundraising efforts.

To be clear, the amendment that I'm speaking of was put forward on June 18, 2024. I'll read it, but I'm going to clarify what this means. It's not in language that is very easy to understand because there are so many moving pieces. The amendment is that Bill C-65, in clause 5, be amended by replacing lines 29 to 32 on page 2 with the following, and it has, just to make it a little more confusing, the letters:

tion.

To clarify for Canadians who are wondering, this amendment would remove the portion of the bill that benefits MP pensions. It would remove that completely. It would take it out so that it's no longer an issue.

I can't think of a better solution to the problem than for us to support this amendment, have this completely taken out of the bill and move forward. This is an opportunity for all of us to stand by our words and, by this very simple solution to this problem, show Canadians that we hear them, and that, today, at a time when so many are struggling to make ends meet, we are not here to benefit our own pensions.

We are here to represent Canadians, to strengthen our democracy, to see legislation being put forward that hears concerns, to come together and to put something forward that ultimately benefits Canadians and not members of Parliament. That is not what I got elected to do, and so I will make clear that, today, I'm moving a unanimous consent motion to immediately move to a vote on NDP-2 so that we can see this issue resolved, once and for all, and so that all members of Parliament around this table can make their stance clear.

With that, I hope that makes it clear that this is a unanimous consent motion. If there's any further information you need from me, Mr. Chair, please let me know.

• (13210)

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, I'm sorry. Simultaneously, I'm just confirming with my clerks here to make sure that everything is in order. Can you repeat, please, the motion that you've just moved for unanimous consent?

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Mr. Chair, I'm moving a unanimous consent motion to immediately move to a vote on NDP-2, which is the amendment I'm referring to, to see the election date moved back to the original date.

The unanimous consent motion is very clear. It's to immediately move to a vote on NDP-2 because that, ultimately, would resolve the issue.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** One moment, please.

[*English*]

Colleagues, just to be very clear here, Ms. Barron is asking the committee to grant unanimous consent for us to immediately vote on adopting NDP-2. I'll remind you that what NDP-2 does is in relation to whether or not there's a move to the election date.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** That's what we're voting on, and it is in order.

Wait one second, colleagues. I see we have some blinking lights from the chamber.

Colleagues, it looks like it's been dealt with.

Ms. Barron, you've moved your unanimous consent motion.

Colleagues, the question is put to the committee.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, I have you next on the speaking list.

• (13215)

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I think Mr. Duncan is—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I have you next on the speaking list, should Ms. Barron want to cede the floor. She still maintains the floor.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I still have more things I would like to say.

**The Chair:** Okay. The floor continues to be yours, Ms. Barron.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I absolutely want to hear what my colleague has to say, but I do have more that I would like to say on this, so I will continue.

I found the outcome of the unanimous motion that was brought forward to be interesting but also not surprising. It's quite clear, and once again today it's been made clear, that the Conservatives are not actually interested in seeing solutions to this problem. They're not actually interested in us moving forward with solutions that Canadians are asking for. The reason is that, unfortunately, much to my dismay and to the dismay of constituents in Nanaimo—Lady-smith and Canadians across the country, the Conservatives are using this as a fundraising tactic. They're using this to spread misinformation in order to divide Canadians and in order to convince Canadians that they can't have trust in the people who have been elected. I have concerns that today we've seen once again that the Conservatives want to burn the place down instead of actually see true solutions be put into place to resolve this issue.

I can say with 100% certainty that my colleagues and I did not know that this particular change would result in this. It's frustrating that we're in this position. As soon as the information was brought forward that this was a problem, as soon as that was brought to our attention, we stood up to put forward a solution. To see the Conservatives express this so-called concern over the issue and yet continue to deny this committee the ability to resolve the issue is just.... I don't know how this could possibly be explained to Canadians across the country. I just don't know.

As I have said many times now, I've been sitting in this chair for I don't know how many hours. I wish I had kept track, because I'm certain Canadians would be interested. I can find this out. We've been sitting in these chairs listening to the Conservatives ask the same question 25 different ways in order to delay us moving forward on this important work.

I've also heard the Conservatives talking about things that are completely false. It has been so challenging for me to not call a point of order every 10 seconds to correct it, but do you know what? That's exactly what the Conservatives want me to do. The second I try to call out the misinformation that's being spread, before we even leave this committee, it's clipped and posted on social media. It's spread around completely out of context in order to pad their own pockets with more fundraising efforts to show how "corrupt" all members of Parliament are. It's completely frustrating, and Canadians are paying attention.

Canadians are paying attention today to what's occurring at this committee. Canadians are paying attention to the fact that once again the Conservatives have voted to not see solutions be put into place in order to benefit MP pensions.

I have just another thought on that. It's so interesting to me that when you actually look at the breakdown of the pensions of who would benefit from the particular clause in this bill, the Conservative members of Parliament are actually those who would benefit the most from this particular clause. I don't know if I can personally believe on one side telling Canadians that this cannot be in the bill and that they're not supporting it, and yet here we are in a position where we can resolve the issue and they are not. They are not choosing to resolve this issue.

I really do question the fact that we have the majority of Conservative members of Parliament who would benefit from this remaining in this bill who are today voting against a unanimous consent motion to resolve this issue. What does that mean? Again, I would never begin to pretend that I know the intentions of Conservative members of Parliament, but I do think Canadians should pay attention to those facts. The Conservatives are refusing to resolve this issue and they are in the fact the ones who benefit the most. That's just an interesting piece of information that Canadians should be aware of.

● (13220)

There are many reasons why I'm pushing to see this bill move forward for Canadians.

One piece of information the Conservatives are certainly not talking about is the recommendations that came forward from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. I know that in the

"unfair elections act" the voice of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada was something that they most definitely did not want to hear more of.

If members of Parliament took a moment to read these recommendations in here, they would see direct connections between the information that is in Bill C-65 and the information that was put forward and proposed by the Chief Electoral Officer, which is interesting because many of the questions the Conservatives are asking, they're asking as if these were just constructed behind closed doors with.... They're right here. They're in the actual recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer.

A few of the recommendations that are in here relate directly to Bill C-65. I hear the member of parliament from the Conservatives who's heckling me. Perhaps I could provide him with a copy of this information if he'd like to look more closely at it. Perhaps I'm not presenting it as clearly as he would like, but it is quite clear here.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** It's not clear at all.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I'm not the Chief Electoral Officer. I won't pretend to have the same level of knowledge. That's why I lean on experts in the field to provide recommendations to me. It's so I can figure out the best path forward.

One of the recommendations is around flexible voting services. The recommendation says:

To reduce barriers to voting for residents of long-term care facilities, amend the Act as follows:

Authorize additional flexibility for voting days and times in such facilities.

Allow electors residing in long-term care facilities to vote with proof of identity only when voting in the facility.

I thought this was an interesting point the Chief Electoral Officer put in this report, since many of the questions the Conservatives asked our witnesses, who have incredible skill and expertise, today were around long-term care facilities. How many hours has it been? I wish I'd had documented the time. They were asking questions about supports for people living with disabilities.

I don't think I'm allowed to talk about amendments that have been put forward, but it's interesting to see the ways in which the Conservatives try to diminish any movement forward to provide additional supports for people living with disabilities, so residents in long-term care homes can access voting in a way that is reflective of barrier-free voting. That's what I'm trying to say.

This is not something that happens just in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith. I'm certain Conservative members around this table have heard directly from Canadians and constituents in their ridings about the barriers they have faced for a long time now, in particular by those living with disabilities.



There is work that needs to be done to reduce barriers so people living with disabilities can cast their ballot and be assured their vote is counted and clear. We've heard from witnesses about this, in particular. There were problems around one of our witnesses, who, unfortunately—because of another Conservative filibuster—was unable to provide testimony in person. This particular witness has visual impairments and was speaking, alongside a legal expert, about the importance of having telephone voting in place. We know there are many reasons why telephone voting is a positive way for those living with disabilities to vote on their own and do so in a way that does not increase barriers to voting.

These are the types of things we need to be talking about as a committee, and not just talking about them but also implementing them in a bill. Then we should move forward with the bill so people living with disabilities can see the benefits and the solutions required for what it is we're talking about.

I don't know about everybody around this table, but I'm quite tired of our talking about the same thing 10 different ways. I'm hearing from Canadians across the country that they want to see solutions put in place. They want to see the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations, which are right here in front of us, being implemented, in order to ensure people can access the polls in a barrier-free way.

Regarding the long-term care facilities, my goodness, we've heard from constituents who are facing barriers because of the fact that they need to show certain types of evidence. We know that many people moving into these facilities don't have the documentation required. To see those barriers reduced would be a huge positive for so many Canadians.

Actually, this is something the Conservatives may be interested in, because I've heard this question asked today, as well, about six different ways. Recommendation 7.4.1 on page 51 of this report says:

To remove barriers, amend the Act to allow an elector to request assistance to mark their ballot from any individual of the elector's choosing, providing the individual makes the solemn declaration required.

● (13225)

This recommendation makes it very clear. A point was brought forward and a solution was recommended that was one of the components of Bill C-65 as it moved forward.

There are other pieces in here that I want to point out. Recommendation 9.2.1 on page 60 is a good one:

To protect the privacy and safety of returning officers, the requirement to publish the name, home address and occupation of returning officers in the Canada Gazette should be removed from the Act.

This is something that I don't think we've talked about too much at this table. I do want to point this one out.

I will tell you that in 2014, I was a single parent with two children. I still am, but my children were significantly younger at that time. I had decided that I wanted to get involved in our local politics. I wanted to see people in lower socio-economic families be able to have their voices heard. I was considering putting my name forward to run in that 2014 election.

I'll bring it around to why this is important. This is important because of the reason I decided not to run: I found out that my home address would have to be made public for everyone to see. Now, I had spoken to those who were in these positions prior about the human feces they'd had delivered to their door and about the level of harassment they'd received because their home addresses had been made public.

I had two young children, and at the time, there were certain instances after school where my children were home alone—at age-appropriate times—for half an hour here or an hour there. The thought that my children might be presented with a not-welcomed gift of human feces at the door was enough for me to make the decision to not run in that municipal election. It's so unfortunate. This is a barrier.

The reason I am talking about this is that it links directly to what is being talked about here around the privacy and safety of returning officers. We need returning officers in order for our democracy to run efficiently and effectively. We need them there to ensure that our democracy is strong. Publishing their home addresses and occupations in the Canada Gazette is just unnecessary. It's putting these people who have decided to do this important work in a position where they are unfairly placed in unsafe circumstances.

These are tangible items that we could put forward to make a real difference in seeing true participation in our electoral systems.

I am almost done here, Mr. Chair. I do want to bring forward a couple more in here. I think it is important that we are reminded of why we are here, that we are reminded of how important many of the components of this bill are and that we are not continuing to sit here and listen to Conservative misinformation and slogans for the rest of these meetings. I feel that it is important.

This is not my own opinion, to be clear. Again, these are recommendations from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. If we take a moment to remind ourselves of what those recommendations are, and perhaps reflect on how those recommendations are seen directly in Bill C-65, maybe that will allow us the opportunity to process and to realize that these recommendations were not just created out of thin air. These recommendations were brought forward by those who are experts in the field.

Another area brought forward in this report is around prohibiting certain false communications. Recommendation 4.1.1., which I hope the Conservatives are paying close attention to, reads as follows:

To protect against inaccurate information that is intended to disrupt the conduct of an election or undermine its legitimacy, amend the Act to prohibit a person or entity, including foreign persons and entities, from knowingly making false statements about the voting process, including about voting and counting procedures, in order to disrupt the conduct of the election or to undermine the legitimacy of the election or its results.

● (13230)

As much as I would like to say that it's not something we need to put into an act and that it's not something we ever need to worry about, well, by golly, we have evidence that that is not the case. We have seen first-hand what happens when Conservatives feel that they can spread misinformation.

There was a former member of Parliament, and I can't find the member's name or remember the story right now, but this can be fact-checked. There was a member of the Conservative Party who shared that he had seen ballots in the garbage can. I'm trying to remember the story.

I wish this could be more of a conversation, because I think more conversations are what we need to have around this table to move forward in the right direction. That Conservative had falsely claimed that ballots were.... I can't remember the exact wording, but basically, he said that people's ballots were not being used appropriately and that he saw them in a garbage can. Later, when evidence came out that this was not true, he took it back. I'd like to argue that a lot of damage had already been done by the time he decided that this was no longer a factual comment.

This is an example of somebody who was trying to purposely manipulate voters to think that something was untrue in order to influence the outcome of an election.

I also would like to point out what's so famously called the robo-call scandal in 2011. I was not the member of Parliament for Nanaimo—Ladysmith at that time. In 2011, my goodness, I was working in the school system making sure that children were accessing school food programs, but I won't go down that road right now.

• (13235)

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Ms. Barron. I have a point of order from Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Unless Ms. Barron was living in a long-term care home in 2011, I don't think that pertains to clause 2. We're talking about adding long-term care homes as polling locations. She's talked about herself. Now, she's talking about her past employment in 2011.

I'll just check relevance. We are on clause 2, and I think what she's talking about is not clause 2. I'm always happy to listen, but I think clause 2 is what we're on.

**The Chair:** There is no disagreement from me, Mr. Duncan. I agree with your interpretation.

Ms. Barron, in order to remain relevant here, you're going to have to bring this back to clause 2.

Thank you.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague. I appreciate that there's a lot of information that I want to bring forward, and my goodness, it's not hard to be able to bring it back to long-term care homes. The robo-call scandal of course applies to long-term care homes. The robo-call scandal phoned many, many humans across Canada, including those in long-term care homes, with information.

Let's see here; I have some points around this robocall scandal that was put forward. Robocalls and human calls were originating from the Conservative Party campaign office in Guelph. We know that these were designed specifically to suppress the vote by misleading electors about the location of their polling stations. In 2011,

again bringing it back, I don't know if the long-term care homes were being provided with polling stations at that time. I don't believe they were. Perhaps I can get some clarification on that.

Certainly, when we have people who are residing in long-term care homes receiving phone calls that are providing them with a location of their polling station that isn't in fact the location of their polling station, I don't know about everybody around this table, but I would imagine that there would be consensus that this is a big problem.

We know that there are provisions within Bill C-65 that specifically touch on.... Oh, there are no provisions. Excuse me. Again, this speaks to something that needs to be addressed and that needs to be talked about at more length. Those in long-term care homes deserve to know where they are voting and how they can do so. They deserve to have that clarity in place. Again, it's a given that we would support legislation that ensures that people in long-term care homes have access to polling stations in the most barrier-free way possible and that they are able to do so in an effective manner.

We hear from seniors across the country who have contributed to our country for generations. The work they did is the reason we are able to enjoy so much that we enjoy today. To sit here and to have Conservatives purposely not wanting to see legislation moving forward that would in fact help seniors who are in long-term care homes, that would make sure people understand clearly how to vote, and that would reduce barriers so that we see a strengthened democracy is just....

I can't even bring to words the level of frustration there is in being in this position—representing the good people of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, sitting at this table, and knowing that we have legislation that can move us forward in sound ways, with movement in the right direction to have fewer barriers to showing up at the voting station, but instead having the Conservatives use this as a fundraising effort and seeing Conservatives use this as an opportunity to spread misinformation and division amongst Canadians. It's beyond me.

When I first got elected, call me naive, but I was optimistic that this would be an opportunity for us to be able to have these really important discussions. This is what we were elected to do. Instead—I don't even know if this is parliamentary or not—my soul gets sucked every day I have to come in here and listen to the Conservatives spreading misinformation, and the hate that it is fuelling in our communities, because of the fact that fundraising is more important than the rights of Canadians to pass their ballots at the polling stations barrier-free.

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** The interesting thing is that I'm talking about the impacts of Conservative misinformation and they're heckling me. As to why they're heckling me—

• (13240)

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, I'm going to interrupt you briefly.

Colleagues, I do have resources, which I will exercise, for us to continue sitting until two. Out of fairness to members who may need to find substitutes, because the meeting notice was until one, I will grant a couple of minutes out of courtesy for them to be able to do that. This applies to members from all parties

Just to clarify, we will suspend for a couple of minutes and continue sitting until two. When we come back, Ms. Barron will maintain the floor.

We are suspended.

• (13240) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1245)

**The Chair:** We're back.

I trust that gave everyone sufficient time to find a substitute, if necessary, in order for us to continue the affair of clause-by-clause.

Ms. Barron, the floor remains yours.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My goal here today is to see us move forward on the work required on this bill, and to make sure Canadians have the facts when it comes to the work that's been put into this bill, and the content of the bill. This is the reason I was reading recommendations and justifications behind much of the information in Bill C-65. That was found directly in the report from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer.

I brought forward a unanimous consent motion for us to all come together and immediately vote on the amendment that would resolve the issue of the MP pensions. Of course, I was not successful with that, as the Conservatives voted against that. For that reason, I'm going to see if I can find a reasonable alternative solution that I hope my Conservative colleagues will stand behind. We know Canadians are asking for solutions to be put forward. Therefore, I have a potential alternative here. I would love it if we could get to the debate and vote on the amendment that would resolve the pension issue currently in place.

With that, I'm seeking unanimous consent, Mr. Chair, for the committee to stand on clause 2, clause 3 and clause 4, so we can immediately move to clause 5 and debate the important issues the Conservatives are bringing forward over and over again, and see solutions put forward so Canadians can have peace of mind.

• (13250)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, this is a dilatory motion, meaning we need unanimous consent. There's no debate on it.

For clarity, Ms. Barron is asking that we press pause on clause 2, clause 3 and clause 4, and get to clause 5.

Mr. Cooper, unless it's a point of order, I have to go immediately to asking the committee whether there is unanimous consent.

I'm seeing yes from the Conservatives, who are agreeing. I'm seeing nothing from the Bloc.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay, colleagues. The committee has adopted that motion.

(Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive allowed to stand)

(On clause 5)

**The Chair:** We will now move immediately to clause 5.

Ms. Barron maintains the floor, at this point.

I see you guys.

Ms. Barron, the floor remains yours. We are now on clause 5. Go ahead.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I had no idea that reading from the Chief Electoral Officer's report would have such an impact on the Conservatives. It is great news that this is happening.

Mr. Chair, first, I want to thank all members around this table for agreeing to provide unanimous consent for us to move directly to the amendment that will finally resolve the issue of the benefit to MP pensions. This is something Canadians have made clear is an issue. It is something everyone around the table has said is an issue. I'm grateful that we finally have the Conservatives agreeing to debate this. My hope is that we'll be hearing some facts and actual debate on the issue. If they are against us removing it, perhaps they could some rationale for Canadians as to why they are.

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron, I'm sorry to interrupt.

It's my mistake, because we moved so quickly. I didn't ask, now that we are on clause 5, whether you would like to move your amendment. Yours is the first amendment we have, NDP-2. I need you to officially move that if you intend to. If you do, it has some implications for other aspects of the bill that I have to read out.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Chair. I apologize.

**The Chair:** Let me know, please, if you intend to move your amendment.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Yes, I absolutely would like to move NDP-2.

**The Chair:** NDP-2 has been moved, so I'm going to read the following, colleagues, and please pay close attention.

As NDP-2 has been moved, CPC-3, PV-1 and BQ-0.1 cannot be moved because they are identical.

If NDP-2 is adopted, the following, in addition to what I just read, cannot be moved because of conflicts: CPC-4, CPC-5, CPC-6, CPC-7, CPC-8, CPC-9, CPC-10, CPC-11, CPC-12, CPC-13, CPC-14, CPC-15, CPC-16, CPC-17, CPC-18, CPC-19, CPC-20, CPC-21, CPC-22, CPC-23, CPC-24, CPC-25, CPC-26, CPC-27, CPC-28, CPC-29, CPC-30, CPC-31, CPC-32, CPC-33, CPC-34, CPC-35, CPC-36, CPC-37 and CPC-38. If the amendment we are about to embark upon debating is adopted, then those I just read will not be eligible to be moved.

I apologize for that interjection.

Ms. Barron, we are now debating the amendment you have moved, NDP-2, in relation to clause 5.

• (13255)

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for highlighting the other components.

I guess it is worthwhile mentioning that the reason the other amendments, which are actually identical, are no longer able to be moved is that the NDP brought forward this amendment first. That's something for Canadians to be aware of: that there were other amendments that were put forward by other members of Parliament which said exactly the same thing as this amendment.

I don't know what else speaks to a consensus other than what just occurred. We're seeing there is agreement around the table that this is important and that we need to be moving forward on this.

I could not think of anything that would be a better gift for Canadians today, so close to Christmas and in the holiday season, than for them to have the reassurance that this part of the bill, which provides pensions to members of Parliament who would not otherwise receive them, would be removed. This is an issue I have brought up many times now.

For anybody who may be just beginning to pay attention to this meeting now, I want to reiterate that there's a part of the bill where moving the election date would actually end up benefiting the pensions of members of Parliament. This is not at all what I signed up for. This is not at all what the NDP wants to see happen through this bill. Therefore, immediately, I stood in the House of Commons to highlight this issue and to propose a solution.

Unfortunately, the response of the Conservatives has not been to look at the solutions but to try to burn down the entire bill. I'm happy that today we have support from everybody around this table to debate this important amendment to see that MP pensions are not what we are talking about. My hope is that, once we have voted on this and have what we expect would be support around this table, we will be able to truly talk about the issues at hand and move forward with a bill in which Canadians' best interests are put at the forefront, not Conservative slogans and fundraising efforts.

Again, the reason I bring forward this amendment is to see the portion that benefits MP pensions removed so that we can talk about the important content in this bill. I will make clear again that if we're going to talk about MP pensions, we need to do so in a transparent way and not tucked into a bill that is not at all about MP pensions.

I hope my colleagues will agree that this is a reasonable solution. I hope that the vote comes soon so that Canadians can have the reassurance they need and deserve and that we can talk about strengthening our electoral systems.

With that, Mr. Chair, I look forward to hearing my colleagues' stance on this particular amendment.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be—

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

For the record, we're supportive of this amendment, so we're looking forward to getting to a vote.

**The Chair:** It's not a point of order. Thanks, Mr. Turnbull.

We have Mr. Cooper.

• (13300)

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be moving the following subamendment to NDP-2, which is proposing to amend clause 5 of Bill C-65 by replacing lines 29 to 32 on page 2 with the following: "tion." I move to add, after "tion." the following: "However the first general election after this section comes into force is to be held on Monday, February 24, 2025."

**The Chair:** Colleagues, we're going to get this circulated in both official languages. Just hold tight.

• (13300)

(Pause)

• (13300)

**The Chair:** I have a speaking list. Mr. Cooper retains the floor. I have Mr. Turnbull, followed by Mr. Blois. I now see Mr. Kurek is here.

It's a different amendment that we're on now, Mr. Redekopp, so if you want to be added to the list, I'm happy to do that.

Colleagues, this is just a reminder of where we are. We have a subamendment, which we are now about to begin debate on. Mr. Cooper has the floor, followed by Mr. Turnbull, followed by Mr. Blois, followed by Mr. Kurek, followed by Mr. Redekopp, and I think Mr. Calkins indicated that he, too, wanted to speak. We are good to go.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Mr. Chair, the leader of the NDP, Jagmeet Singh, will do anything to secure his pension and the pension of soon-to-be-defeated NDP MPs. The leader of the NDP got caught going behind closed doors to concoct a scheme to push the date of the next federal election back by one week so that he and his soon-to-be-defeated NDP MPs would secure their pensions.

Now, they represented, or at least the Minister of Democratic Institutions represented, that the reason for pushing the date of the next election back was twofold—to avoid conflict with Diwali and to avoid conflict with the Alberta municipal election. Okay—except for the fact that the date of the election could easily have been moved forward rather than back. According to the representative from the PCO, moving the date ahead by one week would conflict with Thanksgiving, and moving yet a week ahead from that might conflict with summer and the Labour Day weekend, even though these Liberals had no problem calling an election in 2021 in the middle of August that conflicted with the Labour Day weekend. That doesn't make sense.

As far as pushing the date back by one week to avoid conflict with Alberta municipal elections, well, in fact, by pushing it back by one week, it conflicts with territorial elections in Nunavut.

They tried to misrepresent the reason that this election date was pushed back. Ms. Barron, in her submissions earlier today, said that this was just inadvertent. It was inadvertent that NDP and Liberal MPs who soon face defeat would qualify for their pensions when they wouldn't qualify if the election were held on the current fixed date. I would submit that it wasn't inadvertent. It was very clear. It was very calculated. It was designed to secure their pensions and they got caught.

Now, the bottom line is that Canadians just want this government to stop. They want this government to stop the inflationary spending that is driving up the cost of living. They want this government to stop job-killing tax hikes. They want this government to stop putting Canadians in debt. They want this government simply to stop. Canadians are tired of the disastrous record of this costly and corrupt NDP government. Canadians want a carbon tax election. They want a carbon tax election now.

The leader of the NDP has, on the one hand, criticized the Liberals. He has, on the other hand, seized every opportunity available to prop this Liberal government up. The leader of the NDP entered into the coalition agreement with the Liberals more than two years ago. For the past two years, NDP MPs have carried water for this Liberal government, including working hand in glove with the Liberals to cover up Liberal scandals and corruption.

• (13305)

In September, the leader of the NDP said he'd finally had enough and that he was ripping up the coalition agreement with the Liberals. The timing of the announcement was interesting insofar as it happened to be on the eve of the by-election in Winnipeg.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, I'm going to stop you.

I'm going to suspend very briefly and I'll explain why.

• (13305)

(Pause)

• (1310)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Michael Cooper):** I call the meeting back to order.

I will, as chair, use my prerogative to continue where I left off before the meeting was suspended.

The leader of the NDP said he was ripping up the agreement on the eve of the by-election in Winnipeg. It turns out that he didn't mean it. It was nothing more than a stunt to scam voters on the eve of a by-election, because no sooner did the leader of the NDP rip up the coalition agreement than he proceeded to tape the agreement back together. Within a week of ripping up the agreement, the leader of the NDP was back to propping up the Liberals. They have done so repeatedly.

The leader of the NDP still says he doesn't have confidence in the Liberal government, even though he repeatedly propped the Liberals up. Indeed, it was on two Conservative non-confidence motions.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I have a point of order.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Michael Cooper):** Go ahead on a point of order, Ms. Barron.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I have to admit that part of me is curious about how this is going to work. If I'm calling a point of order and you're in the chair—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Michael Cooper):** Well, I see the chair is about to return, so I will...

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I apologize. Without getting into too much detail, I inherited some of my mother's DNA that I could have done without. It requires me sometimes to step out of the chair.

Colleagues, I realize there was a point of order.

Ms. Barron, I'll speak to that, at which point I'll go to Mr. Cooper.

It might be difficult for me to rule on that point of order, as I wasn't here. Therefore, unless you feel it's incredibly pertinent, perhaps we can go back to Mr. Cooper and, if you hear something that concerns you, you can certainly raise it again, at which point I'll have the ability to be a bit more in the loop.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** That sounds fair.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The NDP leader was given an opportunity yesterday to demonstrate that he stood by his principles. As I noted, he ripped up the agreement, but then he voted to back the government up repeatedly. He said, "the Liberals are too weak, too selfish and too beholden to corporate interests to fight for people". He said, "The Liberal government will always cave to corporate greed, and always step in to make sure the unions have no power." Yesterday he was given an opportunity to stand by those words and to stand by his principles.

Conservatives agree that the Liberals are too weak, too selfish and too beholden to corporate interests, so Conservatives put forward another motion of non-confidence in this costly and corrupt Liberal government. The best part of the motion of non-confidence was that it contained entirely, in terms of the text of the motion, those very words—the words of the leader of the NDP. Incredibly, the leader of the NDP, along with NDP MPs, voted against the non-confidence motion.

In so doing, the leader of the NDP demonstrated that his words mean absolutely nothing. He sold out yet again to Justin Trudeau. In so doing, he sold out workers, he sold out Canadians and he sold out his purported principles—principles that evidently mean nothing. When he had an opportunity to stand by them, he ran to the rescue of Justin Trudeau yet again.

Why would he do that? Very simply, he wants his \$2.3-million pension. He has now come up with new terms to the NDP coalition agreement whereby the leader of the NDP gets his pension, Justin Trudeau gets his power and Canadians get the bill.

If I am in any way wrong about that, then there's a very good way to clear it all up. The NDP have an opportunity to clear it all up right here, right now. If it's not about Jagmeet Singh's \$2.3-million pension, if it's all one big misunderstanding—

• (13315)

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Cooper.

Ms. Barron, go ahead on your point of order.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry. I just wanted to provide a point of clarification.

I think the member is confused by his own leader's pension. He might have gotten them switched up. I just want to make sure that—

**The Chair:** I appreciate your insight, but that's verging on debate.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Okay.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** If it's all one big misunderstanding, if Jagmeet Singh isn't continually selling out and propping up Justin Trudeau to secure his \$2.3-million pension, then I would hope that the NDP would support this common-sense subamendment so that the election will be held on—

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Cooper. I do have to hear the point of order before I can rule on it.

Ms. Barron.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Now the member is running interference.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very open to hearing numbers and the facts behind where they come from. I'm just curious to know where this number came from and what information—

**The Chair:** Yet again, Ms. Barron, this is veering into debate and doesn't serve as a point of order that I can speak to legitimately.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** If it's all one big misunderstanding, if Jagmeet Singh isn't selling out Canadians to secure his pension, then I

would hope the NDP would support this common-sense Conservative subamendment that would set the date of the next election—the fixed election date of February 24, 2025. The best part about that date is that it's the day before Jagmeet Singh qualifies for his pension. Realistically, looking at the calendar, it is about as early as a fixed election date could be incorporated into a piece of legislation.

I hope that the NDP will prove me wrong, that it's not about renegotiated terms to a coalition deal where Jagmeet Singh gets his pension, Justin Trudeau gets his power and Canadians pay the bill, and that they will instead support this common-sense amendment. We'll see what the NDP does in a few moments.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Turnbull, the floor is yours, sir.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Wonderful. I've been waiting quite a long time to weigh in on this debate. I'm glad to have the chance to get to speak about this.

What we have witnessed today is the Conservatives first blocking a unanimous consent motion put forward by MP Barron. I really appreciated her intervention earlier saying let's move to a vote on NDP-2. It removes the change the Conservatives have made a lot of interventions about. They have made their views known about this since day one.

What's interesting to me is that the Conservatives blocked that unanimous consent motion. They were the ones who wouldn't allow us to get to a vote on NDP-2, which our members, and I think all members of this committee, supported. It was to move the fixed election date back to where it was previously. I think that's a good amendment.

We see that the Conservatives aren't really interested in fixing the problems they bring up. They're more interested in pushing a partisan slant and assuming the motivations behind... I think, quite rightfully, that there were conversations about the objectives of this piece of legislation, Bill C-65, which has multiple policy objectives that are quite legitimate. The Conservatives have blown up one feature of this particular bill and used it to fuel misinformation campaigns, fundraise and invent and push out more stale slogans. That has been their play for many months now. They don't actually want to resolve the issues they're bringing up. They seem to want to continue that false narrative. That, to me, is deeply concerning. I think Canadians should know about that. Canadians should know the Conservatives are not willing to address the issues they're bringing up. It's disingenuous. It's hypocritical, because they don't want to deal with those particular amendments.

We also know the Conservative Party, in looking at that change, would have been the party that gets the most benefit. We know that's been said on the record multiple times. There are 32 Conservative members whose pensions would have been impacted positively by that change, so it's no wonder they don't want to change that.

Now they have put forward a subamendment to move the fixed election date to way before, despite the fact that they've been saying forever that they want an election right now. They've been wailing and screaming for many months that they want an election immediately. They're saying that now they want it fixed in a piece of legislation to the date of February 24.

I would like to ask for a point of clarification from the legislative clerks.

I'm not ceding the floor, by the way, so don't get excited over there.

I want to ask for clarification from the legislative clerks on whether that's an actual legitimate change—fixing the election date to February 2025.

• (13320)

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull, that would not be a question for the clerks. It would be a technical question for our colleagues at Elections Canada or in the Privy Council Office. Perhaps I can, on your behalf, redirect that question to them.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Yes, I wonder if there is a statutory limitation that would prevent an amendment like that, or a subamendment, in this case, from being moved in committee.

**The Chair:** Give me a moment to consult with the clerks, please.

Mr. Turnbull, for clarity here, in terms of whether this is procedurally sound, the answer from the legislative clerks is yes.

Regarding what the impact of a change to the election date would be on the administration of the election, that's a question we would have to pose to Elections Canada.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Chair, I wasn't asking procedurally whether it was legitimate.

I think that procedurally I get that the members can move a subamendment on the floor of a committee proceeding that's in clause-by-clause. I've seen that happen before. I've done it myself. That's fine, but I wondered from a legal perspective whether there are actually any implications of that. On that, I'd love to hear from—

**The Chair:** I think we need our colleagues, probably from Elections Canada, to speak to that first.

Mr. Knight, if you're not capable of providing that answer for one reason or another, we'll probably seek it from your office.

Thank you.

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** Well, I mean, Elections Canada is always ready to hold an election, and even with a fixed election date, there is always the possibility of an early election. I don't see any specific concern from Elections Canada's perspective.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Turnbull, you maintain the floor.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

There's no legal limitation. Essentially, you can embed in legislation a fixed date of any date that members of Parliament choose. Is that correct, Mr. Knight?

• (13325)

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** As far as I know now, I mean, the only restriction is that the writ period has to be 36 days, of course, and we don't know when this bill will receive royal assent. That would be relevant to that question, but in theory, yes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay. That's interesting. I didn't know that. That's news to me, but that's the point of having committee proceedings: to be able to clarify these things and to understand the implications of subamendments and amendments that are brought forward by members of Parliament. I appreciate that testimony.

Is this particular change consistent with the overall objectives, the policy objectives, of this bill?

Mr. Knight, that would not go to you. That would be for your colleague, Ms. Pereira.

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** Yes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This wouldn't have implications for the policy objectives, other than perhaps restricting the ability of the Chief Electoral Officer at Elections Canada to implement the proposals in the bill, depending on when the bill received royal assent.

Typically for implementation of measures to the Canada Elections Act, the Chief Electoral Officer requires a certain number of months to implement all of the new measures. Some can be implemented earlier. There's a provision in the bill that allows the Chief Electoral Officer up to six months. It's possible that some measures wouldn't be implemented in time for an election date that's earlier.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Based on what you just said, are there specific things you could point to that would not be implementable, given Mr. Cooper's subamendment here? That would be deeply concerning.

It would undermine the other aspects of this piece of legislation, I would think: to increase voter participation, to limit disenfranchisement, to ensure the maximum number of electors in many segments of the population can participate fully and, also, to prevent foreign interference.

Those are some of the other policy objectives that are incorporated into Bill C-65, as I understand it. Are there specific examples you can point to of things that would not be implementable within the time frame that Mr. Cooper's subamendment would handcuff us to?

**Mrs. Rachel Pereira:** That is more a question for Elections Canada, because it relates to operationalizing the policy objectives in the bill. I'm not sure if my colleague, Mr. Knight, might be able to speak to what measures might be more challenging to implement in a short amount of time.

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** Yes. There is a provision in the Canada Elections Act, section 554, which provides that no amendment to the law applies in any election that happens within six months of royal assent, unless the Chief Electoral Officer has stated that he is prepared otherwise.

There is a clause in the bill, clause 119, which provides that, despite that section, there are various provisions that would come into force immediately upon royal assent. All the provisions would come into force on royal assent, but they would not apply in an election. There are some that would apply during an election. Those relate to regulated fundraisers and, I believe, the privacy provisions.

In terms of the other substantive amendments that would apply in an election, those would apply in an election only if the Chief Electoral Officer could say, before that election, that he was ready and had undertaken the activities. If the election happens within six months of royal assent...obviously, if there were to be royal assent and then a February 24 election, that would be the scenario we would be operating in.

I'm sorry for the lengthy answer. I hope that was clear enough.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I understand that Elections Canada wants to be prepared at any time, which they should be, especially during a minority Parliament.

Help me understand your response, Mr. Knight, in the simplest terms, without getting into all the legalese.

I understand what you're saying, but what's the message we should give to Canadians? Would Elections Canada be able to hold an election on February 24 with all the provisions in this bill—implementing the campus vote and all of the long-term care facility stuff? Are all of those aspects of this bill implementable between now and February 24?

I find that hard to believe.

• (13330)

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** I want to distinguish between the theoretical question of putting holding an election on February 24 in the bill, which I think was the earlier discussion and which Parliament clearly has the authority to do, and our being ready.

In that respect, I'd point back to the Chief Electoral Officer's appearance before this committee. He has certain concerns about our capacity to be ready, even under the existing bill. That was why he recommended changes to the coming-into-force provisions. I think it is fair to say that much of what is in the bill would be difficult to implement on that timeline. We would, of course, want to ensure we've made the necessary preparations.

Those are two slightly different questions.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay.

Essentially, I hear that more runway is needed, given the implications of what is included in Bill C-65. Although, at the rate of the Conservatives' questioning on clause 2 regarding long-term care facilities.... They spent two and a half hours filibustering on a clause that has no amendments. They quickly abandoned that in order to move to this particular clause when they realized they had an opportunity to move a silly subamendment that makes no sense. Ultimately, are they really that concerned about any aspect of Bill C-65, or is this just another opportunity for political games and partisanship? It certainly seems to me like it's only about that. I've only been here for five years, but I have been on PROC for quite a number of those. I've seen a lot of this from the Conservatives over the years. It's not really that big of a surprise, to be honest.

It's interesting that dealing with the very issue we discussed—moving to the NDP-2 amendment—would have corrected the problem the Conservatives have cited over and over again. Yet, they would not give unanimous consent for that. However, they eventually gave unanimous consent to move to clause 5, only to move a subamendment that would create a whole number of other issues, mostly around inclusion and voter participation. Those are clearly things they have a track record of not demonstrating they care about. What's interesting to me is that we're sitting here now and going to debate a subamendment that causes a whole other number of issues for Elections Canada in terms of accomplishing the things in the bill.

What's also interesting to me is that we've had so much debate on a clause with no amendments. If you look at how long the Conservatives are drawing out Bill C-65, we might not even get it passed through Parliament so it can receive royal assent by the date they're now suggesting.

The other thing that occurs to me is that I thought there was an entrenched rule in our parliamentary system and a tradition that there is a four-year maximum term for any elected government of the day.

Isn't that a tradition that goes back quite a long way?

Mr. Knight, maybe I could pose that question to you, just to help me understand. I don't mean to put.... I mean, I am putting you on the spot, but that's what you're here for. I shouldn't apologize for asking you a question.

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** No. Hopefully, I won't go into too much legalese. I live for that, of course.

The Constitution provides for a five-year period within which an election has to happen. The fixed election date legislation has always had, essentially, a four-year period.

I guess that's what I would add to that.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Essentially, the Conservatives are suggesting that we shorten by much more than four years the fixed election date of any government in the future. Even in a minority Parliament, no government would be able to be in power for up to four years, which has been the tradition.

Without commenting on the Conservatives putting it forward, Mr. Knight, is that really the implication of this subamendment? I know that you wouldn't comment on their motivations for that. I can comment on that politically. I wouldn't ask you to do that. This is just in terms of what's implied here. Would this bind us to changing essentially a tradition of the House of Commons?



Just for context, I sat here and listened for two years to the Conservatives telling me that we couldn't operate virtually, in the middle of the pandemic, because they cared more about parliamentary tradition than they did about getting things done during the pandemic. They lectured me on that for two bloody years—excuse me, for two years—and fought us tooth and nail every step of the way for making a change to the Standing Orders that would allow us to actually get work done for Canadians during the pandemic. I find it hard to believe that they would be so willing to abandon a tradition, a set of rules in Parliament, that has been around for quite some time with regard to a four-year term.

Mr. Knight, can you clarify that this is the implication here, that it would be shortening that four-year term?

• (13335)

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** My understanding of the subamendment is that the next general election would be held on February 24, 2025, and then it would revert to being held on the third Monday of October in the fourth calendar year following the last general election.

The fixed election date for the following general election, assuming that this subamendment was put forward and the election happened, would be in October of 2029.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Are you saying that it would revert to being four years?

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** That's right.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** It would just be an arbitrary change to the tradition of having four years.

**Mr. Trevor Knight:** That's my understanding of the amendment, yes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** The Conservatives propose that they should have the ability to change a four-year cycle for each general election because they want an election on February 24. That's what I'm hearing. They've said they want it now, but now they're saying that they want it on the 24th of February, which is interesting too.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Well, we want one now.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** The number of idiosyncrasies and contradictions in the Conservative Party is just appalling. It's hard to fathom and understand—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** It's pretty straightforward.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** —any semblance of logical thinking over there, I have to say, because I don't think there is. There is just political strategy to cause mayhem and chaos in the House of Commons. As I think Ms. Barron talked about, burning the House down is sort of their general mentality these days. Disrupting all aspects of Parliament seems to be their motive.

I think my position is clear. This doesn't make sense for a number of different reasons that I've tried to outline. I think it's appalling that the Conservatives wouldn't allow us to move to NDP-2 and actually dispense with that important amendment to deal with the very issue that they have ranted and raved about, even despite the fact that their members benefit the most from the change that was proposed.

It's interesting that they're now pulling these procedural tricks to move a subamendment that obviously makes no sense, given the

objectives of the bill and given the traditions of Parliament. It's pretty appalling to watch the partisan antics that go on at this committee. It's too bad for us and it's too bad for the people of Canada. I wish they could bear witness to the games we see every day in the House of Commons. I guess we just need to get better at showcasing just how disruptive and irresponsible the Conservative members are.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Blois.

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, you'll know I'm not a regular member of this committee, so it has been intriguing to sit in and watch the second meeting on Bill C-65. For Canadians at home to understand it concerns a number of important legislative changes to the election process. I heard on clause 2—which we're no longer on; we're on a subamendment—important elements about how we make sure that seniors are able to vote, particularly those who need assistance, and make sure that we can update the election laws so that there's a proper process in place.

We are here today talking about a subamendment that has been moved by Mr. Cooper, and I think it's important to give a bit of context. Bill C-65 proposes to move the fixed election date from October 20, 2025, to October 27, 2025. The rationale for that is there's already an existing municipal election happening in Alberta at that time, along with Diwali.

Ms. Barron has correctly identified that, although it is well intentioned to try to avoid those situations, it brings in a situation whereby those MPs who were elected in 2019 could, by virtue of that change, qualify for a pension. She has gone through that at great length and is proposing to bring the date back to October 20, which I fully support. I think it's extremely important.

I want to highlight and express the concern I have about the way we're politicizing the reason why members of Parliament serve. I just listened to Mr. Cooper go on quite a treatise about why this subamendment was important and why it should be moved to, I think, February 24, 2025.

Is that correct, Mr. Cooper? Yes.

He went on to say it's because Mr. Singh wants to qualify for a pension, calling into question, in some ways, the integrity of why that member of Parliament serves and the decisions he makes. I think that is unfortunate, because it starts to call into question why any of us come to this place to serve.

I asked ChatGPT what the value of Michael Cooper's pension would be as a member of Parliament and what the liabilities would be. ChatGPT is pretty good. It gets lots of good information. I would like to read what it said. It said that the "specific value of Michael Cooper's potential pension as a member of Parliament"—I'll note that he has one, because he's been serving since 2015—"when he qualifies is not publicly disclosed on an individual basis; however, Canadian MPs who qualify for a pension through the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act after serving at least six years can receive a defined benefit based on their years of service and contribution."

Mr. Cooper talked to a great extent about the benefits Mr. Singh will qualify for if the election happens after February 25, 2025, yet what he missed out in that part of his testimony is that he actually has a larger pension obligation than Mr. Singh by far, certainly in his years of service.

I don't know if there is an ability to permit me to ask a question of Mr. Cooper, Mr. Chair, and still retain the floor. What are the procedural rules on that?

• (13340)

**The Chair:** If Mr. Cooper accepted the opportunity to answer the question, he could. It's a bit unconventional, but if Mr. Cooper would like to entertain that, I'm willing to see where it goes for a bit.

To be clear, that's not Mr. Blois ceding the floor to Mr. Cooper; that's Mr. Cooper now assuming the role, effectively, of a witness. To be clear, Mr. Cooper, this would not give you the floor. It would simply allow you the opportunity to engage in an exchange.

This is extremely unconventional, colleagues, but I'm not—

**Mr. Kody Blois:** He has moved this subamendment.

**The Chair:** I'm not closing the door to it just yet, but Mr. Cooper, I certainly cannot force you to answer the question.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I don't know if he has put his question, but—

**The Chair:** Mr. Blois, do you...?

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** —it certainly seems to me, based on the submissions Mr. Blois has made up until now, that he misses the point entirely that Mr. Singh went behind closed doors—

**Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Chair.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** —to secure pensions for NDP MPs by pushing back the date of the next election. That is what is at issue.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** I was just going to ask, given the fact that we're talking a lot about pensions, and the Conservative Party wants to make this about pensions and the value of pensions, if Mr. Cooper would like to divulge to this committee and to the good people of Canada if he knows what the value of his pension is for serving as the member of Parliament for St. Albert since 2015.

Does he know that, and would he be willing to give that number?

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, if you would like to respond, I'll give you the floor.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** I don't know the number offhand. I would reiterate that it misses the point that I didn't go behind closed doors to move the date of the next election back so that I would qualify for a pension. I also am not a member of Parliament who goes out and says that he has ripped up an agreement; says that the Liberals are too weak, too selfish and too beholden to corporate interests; and then, when given the opportunity to stand by those words, abandons those words and sells Canadians out, sells out to Justin Trudeau.

Further, if it is all one big misunderstanding about pensions with respect to Mr. Singh, then the NDP should welcome this subamendment because it would absolutely clear the air. It would prove that I'm wrong in my submissions about why it is that Mr. Singh is propping up Justin Trudeau's costly and corrupt government. I would say that Canadians shouldn't hold their breaths. It's pretty obvious what the NDP are going to do. They're going to defeat the subamendment and continue to prop up Justin Trudeau's government so that Jagmeet Singh can get his pension on February 25.

• (13345)

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing that for the good people of St. Albert—Edmonton.

By the way, I actually quite like Mr. Cooper. He's a nice enough guy, but I think it is problematic in this place when we start...

Mr. Cooper, by the way, is trying to circumvent the process, which of course is in the House. It is that, at any point, if a majority of members of Parliament in the House have lost confidence in the government—and the Conservatives have failed three times to establish that—then eventually there will be an election in 2025. It could go the distance, and we would have to actually ask ourselves if it should be October 20, which I think it should be, if that's the case and if parties want that. Of course, there is a budget coming in 2025. There are a number of confidence votes where perhaps a majority of MPs will actually bring it down.

However, I think it is problematic when you have members of Parliament calling into question the reason MPs serve and the reason MPs do their work here in this place. It is a very corrosive and slippery slope, especially when the person who is moving the subamendment—I'm quite confident—has the same entitlement or has a larger entitlement to a pension than the person he is trying to call into question and play political games on. That is the problem I have.

If we start to do this kind of stuff, we get into the provincial situation. In Nova Scotia, they have politicized the pay packet of MLAs so poorly that the contribution amount now is such that it's very difficult to find people who want to do the work because of the realities of the difficulty of the job and because of the stress it puts on their families. I understand there hasn't been any type of remuneration increase in almost 15 years. I want to highlight that.

I do want to apologize to the witnesses. Thank you for the work you do. There is important work happening here before the committee, and we get stuck into this ridiculous stuff.

I want to highlight for the record that, again, if we're going to go into the ditch, we might as well go right into it, Mr. Chair. It was interesting. I was at a celebration of life this weekend, and we were talking politics with some young men. There was a young constituent in my riding who was talking about politics, about the Prime Minister and about the leader of the official opposition. He asked how long the leader of the official opposition has been an MP and when he got into this. I said that he has been doing this his entire adult life. He was elected at 24, with no work experience outside of this place.

By the way, the member for Carleton has served Canada for 20 years. I don't begrudge that fact. What I begrudge is that the Conservative Party members come to this place, start throwing rocks when they live in glass houses and start calling into question the integrity of MPs who serve. I have said in the House that Pierre Poilievre is the biggest fat cat here in Ottawa. He lives in Stornoway and represents a riding 30 minutes away.

By the way, I have no problem with that, but if you're going to call into question the reason MPs are serving, then that's the problem I have, that there is the audacity to do that. I am playing a bit of that game with Mr. Cooper here right now, where he moves a sub-amendment on a pension entitlement that he has, which is larger than Mr. Singh's.

The people of St. Albert—Edmonton should be asking themselves if that's the way they want to see their member of Parliament act in here. I hope not. I know it's part of the political games that we play here.

I also want to highlight that Mr. Poilievre qualified for a pension at 31. If we're going to play this game, then maybe we should actually be having conversations about retroactively changing the contributions and the pensions of MPs who are serving, including those back to 2015. That's good. Mr. Cooper seems to be in favour of that type of conversation. Maybe we need to start having that one as well.

I just think that when you look at this, it is very clear that there is a clear consensus to support what Ms. Barron said. If there is a will in the House of Commons to actually bring down the government, that will happen on its own in 2025, or based on this legislation—if it can ever get through and if the Conservatives aren't going to filibuster clauses about trying to help seniors in long-term care facilities have the ability to access the vote—we'll have a fixed election date, and by law, we will have an election in 2025.

Let's be careful not to throw rocks when you live in glass houses. Let's be careful not to call into question the integrity of MPs who serve. We are very privileged, as members of Parliament, to have the ability to serve our constituents. We have the privilege to have resources, to have people on our staff and in our constituency offices. While I have the floor, I'd like to recognize my staff at home, who do tremendous work for Canadians.

• (13350)

However, when we start calling into question why MPs are voting the way they do, or why they're supporting.... You can call into...why are you doing this, but if it's all around that insinuation, it is a damn slippery slope, and I don't think we should be doing it.

I support Ms. Barron's motion to move the election from the 27th inadvertently back to the 20th so we don't bring into disrepute the reason that MPs serve. There's a clear consensus to move on that. Let's not waste any more time. Let's not see any more filibustering. Let's go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kurek, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair. As always, it's good to be at PROC.

It's interesting, as I reflect. I will be supporting the sub-amendment Mr. Cooper brought forward. As those who are watching might not know, when a bill is tabled in the House of Commons, paper copies are brought to MPs. There have been many discussions and suggestions that there were negotiations behind closed doors between the governing Liberals and their coalition partners in the NDP.

I started flipping through this bill, and I saw the changes to the election day. At first, I thought it was a joke. How in the world would someone suggest so overtly, in their own self-interest, pushing the election date back one week? I tweeted a picture of it with no specific allegation. It was simply a picture of that paragraph of the bill. Over the course of the next number of hours, hundreds of thousands of Canadians saw it. While I didn't ascribe any motive, I would certainly suggest today that there seems to be a clear motive. Certainly, Canadians saw through the facade of what that amendment meant.

Here is the reality: Conservatives vote no confidence in the government all the time. It seems as if my friends in other political parties should familiarize themselves with this Westminster parliamentary system we have. The fact is that it is self-serving political manoeuvring the government is undertaking in secret negotiations with the NDP. That is why Canadians, and people more generally, do not trust politicians.

This is an opportunity for members of this committee to make a statement saying that it's not about pensions. Rather, it's about accountability. Let's move the fixed election day. As we heard very clearly today, it can be adjusted. That's why we have an independent elections regulator and authority in this country. That's a proud part of our democratic tradition. Let's move it to the day before Mr. Singh qualifies for his pension and see where his loyalties are—whether he's in it for his pension or for Canadians.

Mr. Chair, I cede the floor with this final word: Let's get to a vote. Let's see where MPs are at.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Redekopp, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Very quickly, I want to add a couple of things.

I'm new to this committee. I've just been observing here for the last little while. What I find interesting is that the coalition is very strong between the Liberals and the NDP. It's very clear, from what I've observed here, that the support is going back and forth.

I also want to point out that the NDP apparently.... I think the situation here is that they got caught in this. They tried to say they wanted to roll this back to the original date, as if to say, "Oops, this was a mistake." I'm looking at a picture of when Dominic LeBlanc was announcing this. I believe Daniel Blaikie from the NDP was there. The NDP wrote this legislation with the Liberals. This was not a mistake. This was a case of someone getting caught. It was the NDP that got caught. For them to all of a sudden fess up and say, "Oops, you know, it was just an honest mistake" is quite preposterous.

I just wanted to make that very clear. I don't buy it. I don't think Canadians buy it. Canadians want an election. If the NDP were serious about this, quite frankly, they would vote against the government tonight when we have some bills, and we would be in an election as of tomorrow.

• (13355)

I just wanted to point that out to the committee. I think it's important that we recognize it.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, we have no additional speakers. We're going right to a vote on the subamendment.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, this means we now resume debate on the amendment.

Is there a point of order somewhere?

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Mr. Chair, I just listened to the Conservatives talk about the importance of pensions and not bringing into dispute why people serve in Parliament. Ms. Barron's amendment right now would make sure that MPs who served in 2019 aren't inadvertently getting a pension, so let's just bring this....

**The Chair:** I appreciate what you're asking for, but you don't have the floor, Mr. Blois.

Mr. Cooper does have the floor.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Please let us do this right now.

**The Chair:** Is there a point of order, Mr. Turnbull?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Yes, on a point of order, I want to clarify something, Chair. Mr. Cooper had the floor when he moved his subamendment. After that subamendment was debated and voted on—

**The Chair:** He retains the floor.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay.

**The Chair:** However, Mr. Turnbull, I do have you next on that speaking list.

I have Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I have a point of order, Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Kurek.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I'd like to be put on the speaking list.

**The Chair:** You don't need to raise a point of order for that, but thank you. You could just give me a nudge, nudge, wink, wink next time.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to be moving a subamendment that amendment NDP-2 proposing to amend clause 5 of Bill C-65 be amended by adding the following after "tion": "However, the first general election after this section comes into force is to be held"—

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, I'm going to interrupt you briefly. The clerk doesn't have this. I'm going to ask your team, as you're reading this into the record, to please have this translated into both official languages and sent to the clerk for distribution. This is a point that members on this side were upset with me about earlier, and I want to make sure that we're consistent.

Mr. Cooper, continue.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** We will be sure to get that to the clerk as soon as possible.

Let me read that again. It is that amendment NDP-2, proposing to amend clause 5 of Bill C-65, be amended by adding the following after "tion":

However, the first general election after this section comes into force is to be held on the later of (a) Monday, February 24, 2025, and (b) subject to subsection (3), the Monday following the 50th day after the day on which this section comes into force.

(3) For the purpose of paragraph (2)(b), if the Monday referred to in that paragraph is a holiday, the polling day shall be held on the Tuesday after that Monday and any time specified under this Act before or after polling day is to be calculated as if polling day were the Monday.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** I have Mr. McKinnon.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** It seems to me that this subamendment basically replicates the subamendment that we just defeated. I would suggest that on that basis it's out of order.

**The Chair:** I'm just in the process of discussing that. Because I don't have a physical copy, I was trying to keep one ear open to Mr. Cooper and another ear open to a discussion with my legislative clerk.

Nonetheless, I'm going to suspend temporarily because (a) it needs to be distributed and (b) I need a judgment call on this. I'm keeping an eye on the clock as well.

I'm suspending very briefly, colleagues. Don't go anywhere.

• (1400)

(Pause)

• (1400)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, upon consultation, it is an admissible amendment.

However, resources have now expired, colleagues, and the meeting is adjourned.

---





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

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

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

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

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

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

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

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

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

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

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

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>