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Chair

The Honourable Don Boudria

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.)): Pursuant to what was said at our last meeting, when we agreed to ask the staff to start preparing material in order to give us a briefing, Mr. Robertson has worked on one, along with others, and this morning he and Ms. Furi are going to share with us both documentation and an oral briefing on the material they have prepared.

[Translation]

So, Mr. Robertson, go ahead. Please let us know how you wish to proceed.

[English]

You may proceed.

[Translation]

Mr. James Robertson (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Talking about elections to a bunch of MPs is always a daunting task, but I shall start.

The idea today was to provide an introductory briefing on the issue of electoral reform. We will be reviewing a number of documents in the course of our presentation, which I don't think should take terribly long, and we can then get into discussion, comments, or questions.

At the end of last week we circulated to your offices electronically a document entitled *Progress Report on Electoral Reform Initiatives in Canadian Provinces*, which highlights what is happening at the provincial level in Canada in terms of reviewing the democratic processes in different provinces. The most well-known example is that of the British Columbia citizens' assembly, which recently opted to recommend the single transferable vote.

I believe yesterday afternoon we circulated electronically to your offices through the clerk's office some preliminary notes on the process of electoral reform in selected jurisdictions. There is also an excerpt from the Law Commission's report on electoral reform, which was circulated to you at this meeting.

To situate the committee's work generally in this area, one of the mandates of the procedure and House affairs committee is to review and report on all matters relating to the election of members of the House of Commons. In addition, the address in reply to the Speech

from the Throne, as adopted by the House on October 20, indicated there should be:

an Order of Reference to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs instructing the committee to recommend a process that engages citizens and parliamentarians in an examination of our electoral system with a review of all options.

What that part of the address implies is that the committee will be asked to look at a process for engaging Canadians, and also, I suppose, to look at the system itself. The discussions last week implied that the committee members were interested in reviewing what the options for electoral reform are. The briefing materials are directed at both of these issues: how different jurisdictions are approaching or have approached electoral reform and exactly what reforms they have both considered and adopted.

Briefly, electoral reform in Canada since 1867 has generally focused on the issue of extending the franchise, the right to vote. Initially it was provided only to men, and only to men who owned real property. Since 1867 the right to vote has been extended gradually, through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to include a basically universal franchise: it was extended to all men regardless of a property qualification; it was later extended to women—in 1919, I believe, federally—and later it was extended to people who were 18 or older.

Once the Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect there were a number of challenges regarding the denial of the right to vote to judges, to the mentally disabled, and more recently to inmates. Those court challenges have basically extended it to the point where we have universal suffrage.

There have been periodic attempts and efforts to change the basic thrust of our electoral system, which is a first-past-the-post system. In the period from the 1920s to the 1950s there were certain provisions in the western provinces that permitted some form of proportionality, and this issue has come up at the federal level and in various other provinces at various times, particularly after lopsided election results have come in where the proportional share and the proportion of seats do not work the same way.

The first-past-the-post system is the one that is used in the United Kingdom and the United States. The United Kingdom government is committed to bringing in an element of proportionality. It does not appear to be imminent, but it is part of their electoral platform, and they have brought it in within Scotland and Wales, where they've had devolution. In the United States, this does not appear to be a major issue, in part because they are essentially a two-party system.

•(1110)

Most other countries in the world, particularly the countries that have achieved independence or devised constitutions in the post-Second World War period, have adopted some form of electoral system that is different from first past the post. First past the post is a simple system. It's very easy to understand. It basically means you have any number of candidates in a particular riding, and the person who wins the most number of votes in that riding—they don't have to win a majority; they just need to win a plurality and they are elected—represents that riding, that constituency, in the legislature. There is therefore a very close connection between the person who is elected and his or her electors.

The criticisms of the first-past-the-post system are numerous, I suppose. Various commentators have argued that it means a member can be elected, and a party can form a government, with far less than 50% of the vote; that there is not an opportunity for the people who voted for other parties, other candidates, to have their views represented; that it often means certain groups in society—women, minority groups, aboriginal Canadians—are not well represented in the legislature; and that it creates mammoth swings one way or the other because people vote against a particular party or in favour of another one.

There are a couple of issues to look at. One is whether we want to or should consider changing our electoral system, and if so, how we go about doing so. Aligned with this are the questions of what the values or criteria are we should be using to consider an answer to this question and what kind of electoral system we want to move towards.

There are a few considerations that must be kept in mind. One is the constitutional one. It appears the Law Reform Commission of Canada feels electoral reform can be done without having to amend the Constitution. There is under the Constitution, as you know, an allocation of seats between provinces based on the decennial census—that's set out in section 51—and a provision that the number of seats a province is entitled to will not go below the number of senators that province has.

There have been various changes to that formula over the years, and they have been made by the federal Parliament acting alone, so long as they're not fundamentally changing it. Under the amending formula, an amendment requires unanimity if it's going to affect the right of a province to a number of members in the Commons that is less than the number of senators they have, and an amendment would require the regular amending formula of two-thirds of provinces representing 50% of the population if it were to affect the principle of proportional representation, or the powers of the Senate, or the number of members a province is entitled to in the Senate.

One of the proposals that was made by the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada back in the 1980s was that the Senate be elected by proportional representation. The House of Commons would continue to be elected by a first-past-the-post system. That is an option a number of bicameral legislatures in other countries have sometimes had: different methods of election for their two chambers.

The excerpt from the Law Commission's report that was circulated is headed "Families of Electoral Systems". They've basically divided the types of electoral systems into nine and grouped them into three broad families. I'm sure different political scientists will come up with slightly different lists, but this is a fairly simple summary of the types of systems that are in existence and could be considered.

The first family is the plurality-majority system, which is the traditional one used in Canada, and the first one listed is the first-past-the-post system. The other options there are the alternative vote system, where you can rank candidates but you still have one MP per riding. This is what is done in the House of Representatives in Australia. The idea would be that you take off the person at the bottom of the list.... I'm sorry.

•(1115)

At the end of the counting, if one candidate has received 50% or more, they are elected. If no one candidate has 50% or more of the votes cast, you take off the person at the bottom and go to the second choices on those ballots and top up the other ones. You wait until one candidate receives at least 50% of the votes cast, and that candidate, of course, may not be the person who is leading on the first count.

The second system is a block vote system, which is a first-past-the-post but multi-member constituency. Unlike our system, in which you have one MP in a riding, you would have a larger riding and you would have three or four representatives for that riding.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Or more, right, up to seven or nine?

Mr. James Robertson: I think so, yes. There's no limit on the number.

•(1120)

Mr. Scott Reid: In Australia it would be twelve Senate seats.

Mr. James Robertson: In their Senate seats, that's right. I think it's slightly more complicated, but essentially the idea is that twelve senators for each state in Australia are elected by the entire population.

I suppose the advantage of this is that it preserves the first-past-the-post concept, but it also means you can vote for representatives of different parties and/or that the results may well reflect the fact that the population is supporting different parties and different candidates.

The two-round system is most often associated with France, where you have an election first past the post. If somebody wins 50%, they're elected; if not, then the two leading candidates go head to head in a runoff, which is usually held a week or two later. All of these are based, though, on a plurality of votes.

There are three proportional representation systems. The first one is a list PR system, in which you are voting for a party. If the party receives 30% of the votes, then the top 30% of the names on their list of people put forward are elected to the chamber. This would be a pure system and it could be based on a national or a subnational level.

The single transferrable vote system is what the citizens' assembly in British Columbia has adopted. It's a slightly more sophisticated or complex system. It involves a multi-member constituency and it involves two levels. In one, they work out a quota per candidate, and any candidate who receives that number of votes can be elected. Otherwise, they go to the ranking, and the people at the bottom fall off and their votes are reallocated. As well, if you receive a quota of votes and you have additional votes, those votes are taken away from that candidate and reallocated to your second or third choices, the idea being to try to be as proportional as possible to the wishes of the voters.

The mixed member proportional system is most famously associated with Germany. It has been adopted in New Zealand and basically in Scotland and other countries, and it seems to be one of the most popular at present. Basically, a certain percentage of the seats are done on a straight first-past-the-post system, but you also get a second vote for a party or for candidates, depending on whether it's an open or closed list. At the end of the election, if party X is entitled to 40% of the seats in the legislature, they get forty seats, let's say. On a first-past-the-post system, if they've elected thirty MPs, the additional ten MPs are made up by taking them from the list. The idea is that the overall result, the overall composition of the legislature, will be reflective of the proportional support that each party receives in the election.

On semi-PR systems, there are basically two of them, and they haven't been seriously considered in many countries. Ten percent of the countries have this kind of system. The first one is a single, non-transferrable vote system. You again have a number of candidates representing a region—rather than just one MP, you would have more than one—but you only get one vote. In the example given here, if you had a hundred voters, you could have as many candidates for each party, but it's really the top four candidates who would be elected for that region or that multi-member constituency.

The other system is a parallel or mixed member majority system, which is what Japan brought in, in 1993. Basically, you have two sets of elections going on that have no real relation to each other. One is a first-past-the-post system and the second one is pure proportional representation. You vote for the party, and those seats are allocated on the basis of the results, without any attention paid to who has actually been elected on the first-past-the-post system.

Ms. Megan Furi (Analyst, Parliamentary Information and Research Service): I'm just going to briefly outline the information that's in the briefing notes you received earlier, and I'll start with the international jurisdictions.

One of the things that's important to emphasize is that when you're considering electoral reform, it's important to understand that the circumstances must also be right for electoral reform. In several of the jurisdictions that have achieved reform, there has usually been an interested group, whether that was a political party, an interest group, or a civic organization, willing to carry the torch for reform, so to speak.

There also has to be the desire for reform, and this is often triggered by a specific event. In New Zealand, for example, the motivation was a number of elections that seemed to continually produce disproportionate results under first past the post. In Japan,

the electoral system seemed to be the scapegoat for a lot of corruption scandals.

I'll just start with New Zealand.

As in most jurisdictions, the process of reform was several years in the making. In 1978, after another election under first past the post produced disproportionate results, a parliamentary committee was established to inquire into various aspects of electoral law and administration. Despite proposals from the Labour members of this committee—who were the opposition members at the time—for proposals for reform, they specifically recommended that a royal commission be formed to study in more detail the electoral system. This proposal wasn't accepted and reform of the voting system was dismissed. The Labour Party then campaigned on promising to appoint a royal commission to study the electoral system.

In New Zealand, I think you could say reform was eventually achieved for a number of reasons. First, the public and politicians were dissatisfied with the disproportional results. There were political parties who campaigned on behalf of electoral reform. When the Labour Party failed to hold a referendum that they promised after the royal commission, the National Party then stood up and campaigned on holding a referendum on electoral reform.

You have the recommendations on the independent royal commission that recommended electoral reform. An organized lobby group known as the Electoral Reform Coalition seemed to keep electoral reform on the political agenda.

Around all this there was also the fact that the public was becoming more and more discontented with politicians on the political process because of what they saw as an unresponsive government and legislative process.

So in New Zealand you could say that the process was: royal commissions, recommendations, parties agreeing to hold a referendum, and then letting the citizens decide.

I included Japan. I didn't get to read as much of it as I would have liked before today, but I wanted to give you another example outside the Westminster-based systems. As I understand it, the switch to a mixed member system was driven mainly by scandals. I'm not exactly clear on what role the public played, but it's clear that the desire to clean up the electoral system was what motivated the reforms.

It's also important to note that there was a lot of discontent among the politicians and the parties themselves that helped to drive the reform. A number of commissions known as electoral system advisory councils were established, although it didn't seem that reforms under these councils were really genuine until the politicians were really motivated to recommend change.

In the United Kingdom, as Jamie mentioned, the Labour Party talks about electoral reform. Most recently, they appointed a royal commission, known as the Jenkins commission, and I believe that was in 1997. That commission came back with recommendations for a mixed system, with the majority of members still being elected by first past the post, but then with a top-up of proportional representation. The Labour government has yet to act on their promise to hold a referendum.

In Scotland and Wales the situation is a little bit more complicated. It wasn't as much a process of electoral reform as it was the selection of an electoral system. As well, this was all caught up in the proposals for devolution, so it wasn't as though they were looking specifically at electoral reform; they were looking at it in a grander scheme.

In Scotland, the decision to go with an MMP system—additional member system is how they refer to it—was pushed by a civic organization called the Scottish Constitutional Convention. It was an organization that was brought together by interested members of the public and politicians who were interested in developing proposals for a possible independent Scottish Parliament.

• (1125)

Initially the group wasn't sold specifically on MMP, but everyone agreed that first past the post wasn't working. They agreed that something had to be done, and they could all agree on the mixed member proportional system.

In Wales, as I understand it, the drive behind devolution and electoral reform wasn't as strong as in Scotland. Basically, it was an internal drive from the party, and they borrowed heavily from the recommendations in Scotland.

In the Canadian provinces, there are five jurisdictions in Canada that are currently looking at, or have recently completed a study on, electoral reform. I'll just go through them quickly.

In Quebec, a commission was established to look at reform of the democratic institutions, including the electoral system. After extensive public consultation, the commission recommended some form of proportional system. I think they list it as a territorial compensatory system, so basically an MMP system as well. As I understand it, public consultation is planned for a draft bill that will be introduced at the National Assembly.

In Prince Edward Island there was an independent commission, a one-person commission, that reported to the legislature last December, I believe. They recommended changing their system in Prince Edward Island to a mixed member system based on the one that's currently used in New Zealand. But the report also recommended further study and consultation with Islanders in a form similar to the B.C. citizens' assembly. The premier commented that the reform options would be pursued, but to the best of my knowledge no formal action has taken place.

In Ontario, there is a ministry secretariat within the Ministry of the Attorney General. I don't think a lot of action has taken place at this level either.

New Brunswick has a commission—

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Madam Picard, do you want to interrupt her right now?

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Yes, because the researcher is speaking a little too fast for the interpreter.

The Chair: Yes, this is an important point. I thank you for raising it. As I do not listen to the interpretation, I am less aware of the problem.

Could you slow down a bit, Madam. There is no hurry. Take all your time. It is important that we understand your briefing thoroughly rather than just getting an overview, because I think there is a lot substance in your work.

Ms. Pauline Picard: I have another small comment. Would it be possible to give the interpreters a copy of that document?

The Chair: Do they have a copy of the speech in the booth?

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Furi: I have just this one. I'm almost done.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc): They do have copies of the briefing notes, though, which is what these are based on.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: OK.

Ms. Pauline Picard: In that case, it would be helpful if they had a copy of the documents that are being used...

The Chair: I am told that the interpreters have received the documentation, but may not have her own personal notes since she only has one copy. Anyway, she says she is almost finished. Maybe it would be easier if she slows down.

Ms. Pauline Picard: Thank you.

The Chair: Take your time, we are in no hurry.

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Furi: In New Brunswick they have established the Commission on Legislative Democracy. It's made up of a number of people in the community. They are expected to report by the end of this year. They have held public consultations. They've asked for submissions and have had academic references. As I understand it, they are currently considering a mixed member system as well.

Then, of course, we have the B.C. citizens' assembly. As Jamie mentioned, they've recently announced their intention to recommend the single transferable vote. They say their assembly is the first of its kind in the world. It's made up strictly of citizens, 160 drawn at random from the voters list. People got invitations and were asked to attend. If they were interested, they could say so, or not, and then their names were simply drawn from a hat.

As far as I know, their final report, with the specifics of how to implement the new system, will be—

Mr. Scott Reid: Could I ask a question regarding the selection process?

A larger pool of people than the number finally chosen were asked initially if they'd be interested, and then the names of interested people were put in the hat, is that right?

Ms. Megan Furi: Yes. They got the letter, they could show up at a meeting, and then it went from there.

The Chair: That's an important distinction. Thank you for raising that.

We will have a number of questions, but I for one am hopelessly unfamiliar with the single transferable vote concept. I don't know if others are totally familiar with that. Perhaps we could use a little bit more of an explanation on that concept, or I certainly could; MPs can ask whatever they like.

Why don't we start with Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): I understand it's the same thing as a preferential transferable ballot. All the candidates are listed on the ballot, you rank them in order of your preference, and then after the ballots are counted, whoever gets the least number is dropped off. Whatever votes were put on that ballot as second, third, or fourth choices are apportioned to those candidates. Is that how it works?

The Chair: Is it like the Australian model then?

Mr. James Robertson: No, this is an intermediary step.

The Chair: Explain that to some of us.

Mr. James Robertson: As many candidates as want can run, including more than one candidate for each political party.

An hon. member: Oh, God.

Mr. James Robertson: A quota is established based on the number of seats available in the riding, because there is more than one seat in the constituency. If a candidate wins more votes than this quota, they are declared elected. The surplus votes they receive are allocated to the second place choices of the people who voted. This is where it gets fairly complex.

In addition, at the next stage, there is the dropping off of the bottom candidates and the reallocation of their second, or even third, choices to the other candidates, until you get enough elected candidates who receive over the required quota.

• (1135)

The Chair: Would you like to add something to that, Megan? No?

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Just on the quota, the quota is determined by dividing the total number by the number of seats to be elected, plus one.

Mr. James Robertson: Right.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: You take the total number of votes, divide it by the number of seats in that constituency, add one, and that's the quota. So if someone gets that, they're automatically in. Then you do the dropping off of others by redistributing the votes, along the lines you mentioned.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: So that would mean in Tasmania, where you have five members per seat, you have to get 20% plus one of the votes to get elected on the first round. What happens to your balance at that point? How do they remain in play for people who voted for...?

Presumably you've marked off up to five candidates. How is that dealt with? Some of your preferences may have dropped off the ballot; other people may have been elected. How is that done?

Mr. James Robertson: I'm not sure, offhand. There is also reference in the Law Commission to the fact that if you receive more

than 20% plus one, the surplus votes are reallocated to other people too.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: That's the way it's done.

Mr. James Robertson: Basically, it would mean your support would be given to people who need it as opposed to the person who has already been elected.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's to avoid a situation in which, say, Mr. Broadbent is running and I'm running, and he gets 40% but only needs 20% to get elected; people won't just sit there and say, if I give my vote to Ed I might wind up wasting it. So it avoids that kind of calculation.

Mr. James Robertson: Yes, exactly.

The Chair: All right. That sounds very easy to explain to Mrs. Jones at Wal-Mart on a Saturday morning, although I don't think I'd want to try it. It sounds very complicated. Surely one of the criteria in the democratic process is that when people show up at the ballot box, they must feel comfortable with the exercise they're participating in. But that's just a remark on my part.

Mr. Broadbent, you had a question?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: No, not at this point. Are we doing rounds, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: People were just asking questions about the briefing we were getting. There's not exactly a rush of people wishing to participate, so why don't you ask your question now, Mr. Broadbent?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I was just going to add that if the introductory comments, which I appreciated, were a sketch of Canadian history and what's going on elsewhere, I think probably the record should show that not only were women and non-property-owning males excluded historically, but Japanese Canadians—

The Chair: And Indians.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: —and first nations people, and Chinese Canadians were excluded too, until after the war.

I'd make an additional point about New Brunswick. They have a preliminary report, and the preliminary report is the mixed member PR system. In fact, two provinces from Atlantic Canada are going in that direction.

The other point concerns a bit of factual information that I think we should know. The citizens' assembly process in B.C., for better or worse, depending on one's judgment, is not only providing a consultative mechanism for the government but it's in fact writing the referendum question that will go directly from the citizens' assembly to the electorate, without, for example, going through a committee process or undergoing any change from the government. This is really what makes it unique in the world.

The Chair: Are there any remarks on that?

Mr. James Robertson: The referendum will be held on May 17 of next year. That's the date fixed for the next provincial election, and the government has committed to putting the referendum at the same time.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm not sure who I would be asking this of, and it might very well be to Ed or possibly our researchers. I think it's good the way British Columbia is trying to exclude the politicians from getting involved in writing the question, but presumably there actually has to be legislation to make this happen. Let me do a little editorial and then I'll ask the question.

I was in Australia when they had a referendum on abolishing the monarchy and putting in place a republic. About a year before the referendum took place, I was also in attendance when they had a very lengthy, what they called, constitutional convention, somewhat like the citizens' assembly, specially elected in order to come up with the model for the republic. Then it went off to the legislative drafters, and what had been a reasonably clear model of a republic became a convoluted system that effectively meant the Prime Minister assumed quasi-dictatorial powers. People quite rightly rejected it.

What I'm getting at is, is there the possibility in the British Columbia model that something similar could happen when you go from the wording of the question to the wording of the legislation, or does the citizens' assembly also control that?

• (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Broadbent, from your experience—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, through you, I was out there and I consulted with the people running the assembly. They've been assured by the government that the government will provide simply technical, legal help in drafting the question exactly as the citizens' assembly wants it. So it's of course true that the government at some point gets involved, but they've undertaken to simply replicate in the right legal language for the referendum what the citizens' assembly has recommended.

The Chair: I have two questions for Mr. Robertson. We've had a period in Canada, haven't we, where P.E.I. had two-member constituencies?

Mr. James Robertson: I believe so, yes.

The Chair: I remember campaigning, actually, in provincial elections in P.E.I. when in each riding you elected two MLAs. I don't know if we know anything about how that worked. Of course, I suppose if you only have two, there is no element of proportionality there. You'd have to have three in order to affect anything.

If I understand it correctly, under the system they had there were two-member constituencies and you voted for the members individually. In other words, you could vote one Liberal and one Conservative, if that's what you happened to wish. At least that's what I recall. Perhaps I can be corrected.

The other question I had is that I also seem to remember... We keep saying we've always had single-member constituencies in Canada federally, but is that not erroneous? Did we not have a case for a period of time where the riding of Halifax elected two MPs simultaneously to sit in Ottawa?

Mr. James Robertson: That may well be. I'll check into that.

I know that in Great Britain it was not uncommon for there to be dual-member constituencies. It was how the House of Commons evolved. I think the difference would be whether the two MPs are elected, as you say, by voting on two first-past-the-post systems, or whether you get two votes and the people who get the two highest

amounts would be the ones elected, which would be a more proportional system than if you vote for two individual ballots and those people represent the same constituency.

The Chair: I know those are two micro examples in Canada of doing things differently, but for my part anyway I'd like us to get a little bit more research on how that worked out, and maybe it doesn't mean anything.

Mr. Broadbent was perhaps in the House when we had two-member—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I've been around a long time but not quite that long, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I think I was a House of Commons staffer and we had them, but of course that's a long time ago too.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: But B.C., provincially, had dual members, I know in recent history too.

The Chair: I think on that note we'll hear from Mr. Reynolds, because obviously not only did he serve in the legislature but he was the Speaker in British Columbia. Perhaps he would have some interesting things to share, as well as anything else he would like to raise.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): I was there from 1983 to 1986. That was changed in the 1989 election, but we had dual-member ridings. And that's one of the recommendations they have now, to go back to something similar to that. So if you had a riding with two members, you had two votes. It wasn't unusual to elect an NDP member and a Socred member. It didn't happen all the time, but certain ridings could possibly do that.

The negative side of it is that you have what's called the "first member for" and the "second member for". The "second member for" could even be a cabinet minister, if he was in the government, but he would always be the second member, so it was a little derogatory to recognize them as the "first member for" and the "second member for". It was based on the votes you received.

The Chair: Yes, it's a little bit like the U.S. Senate system, where you are always the first senator or the junior senator, even though you have been representing the state for 39 years, just because someone else was there two years before you.

• (1145)

Mr. Scott Reid: The famous example is from South Carolina, where the junior senator had to wait till he was in his eighties before he finally became the senior senator, because of course the senior senator was over a hundred years old.

The Chair: Mr. Reynolds.

Mr. John Reynolds: A negative side also of ridings where you elect one, two, three, or in this recommendation in B.C. it could be as many as seven in the downtown area, is that if you get, say, two members out of seven in the cabinet, the other five may as well just pack up and go home and show up for meetings, because you don't get any calls from anybody. I used to hear that all the time from the members in my party, who would sit in the Speaker's office and chat to me and say, "I have nothing to do. The minister has his staff in the riding, we have a joint constituency office. There's nothing for me to do."

It really downgrades your life and your ability as a member if you don't have a specific area that you represent and that you can be held liable to. You are really dependent on the party then to get you a nomination to keep you going.

The Chair: Thank you.

As a matter of fact, I have been told that's already the case with the New Zealand model. The list members, because they don't have constituency work, are basically looking for things to do all the time.

Anyway, it's an interesting element.

[Translation]

Ms. Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Being a new MP, and not

[English]

junior MP, though. I don't consider myself junior any time. But that being said,

[Translation]

this is obviously a truly fascinating book. I have started to read it. If you have not all had the opportunity to read *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada*, let me tell you that it is truly fascinating. You see even more things.

Of course, this morning, we got a good introduction from our experts, but as a new Member, as I said, I would like to get something confirmed. We understand that some provinces have already gone a long way. At the Canadian level, I think everybody here who has an interest in this file knows that changes have to be made in the electoral reform process. We all agree on this.

That being said, how are we going to proceed? At the federal level, I know that the Law Commission of Canada has been dealing with the issue of electoral reform, as well as a parliamentary group. Actually, electoral reform is one of the issues to be dealt with in relation to the democratic deficit, but it is not the only one.

Is there anything else, or is this truly a fresh start at the federal level? Am I right to understand that?

The Chair: It depends what we are talking about exactly. First, we have one piece missing. We have this briefing today, but of course there is also the motion to accept the Speech from the Throne as amended. Now, that motion should be followed by an order of reference which was supposed to be sent to us in the coming days, but it appears now that we might get it only during the week when we return.

Mr. Broadbent and myself have spoken to the minister in charge, Mauril Bélanger, who told us that we should be getting this order soon.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: But maybe, to be more specific...

The Chair: In that document, there will be something.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Excellent. I understand that in terms of the process...

The Chair: Now, regarding the research that has been done, I will ask our researcher to tell us more.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Canadians have never been polled. This is in a sense why I'm asking the question.

The Chair: That is what we will find out about.

[English]

Mr. James Robertson: There has been a great deal of discussion about electoral reform and various organizations have been promoting it, but officially, formally, there has been nothing at the federal level, other than the Law Commission of Canada, which has, as one of its four mandates or areas of interest, the democratic institutions. They engaged in this process two or three years ago and they released this document earlier this year. Their proposal was that Canada needed to introduce, at the federal level, an element of proportionality. They recommended a mixed member system, similar to that in Scotland, and they indicated that there needed to be additional consultations with Canadians. They did not recommend, necessarily, a referendum. They did not recommend a citizens' commission.

They thought the government should draft legislation to bring in proportional representation, that there should be widespread consultations with Canadian citizens through a parliamentary committee, and that there should be a period of delay to enable the necessary changes to be brought in at the administrative and legal levels, but that it should be started relatively quickly.

At the provincial level there are various initiatives, but I think most of them have started in the last two or three years. This seems to be an issue that has suddenly become much more a part of the political agenda.

At the federal level there have been debates in the House. Mr. Nystrom proposed a number of private member's bills and motions, one of which was the topic of an opposition day in 2001, I believe, but there has been no action or formal decision taken.

● (1150)

The Chair: I guess, in other words, the order of reference we will get and our actions from that point will really be the first formal action Parliament will ever have taken in that regard, will it not?

Mr. James Robertson: That's correct.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Boivin.

[English]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Just so that people understand my worry, because I did read the book—and as I said, it's fascinating.... I was somewhat scared to see that most of our constituents, from ocean to ocean to ocean, seem to not even be sure of what type of system we have right now. They thought we were the government because we won everywhere, so it scares me to think there have been so many initiatives, and here we are talking of this system versus this system. It's as if, what is the real problem? Why is there such a profound sense of democratic deficit when people don't actually know what the system is? How can you pinpoint the system but not even know what the system is? I don't know if I'm making myself clear.

Personally, I will be pushing for maybe going to see a bit more to find out what the problem is, because maybe it's the way we represent them. Maybe it's not the electoral system that's the problem, but it's us, and we have to change the way we do things, as this report was saying.

Anyway, before we start saying this is a good system, I think we have to be sure of what the problem is and what we have to fix so that we fix it well.

The Chair: Okay. I think we all agree that we're a long way from anything like that.

[*Translation*]

Today, we have a briefing on various models. We have also agreed that we will have an informal dinner with a guest who will help us better understand another system in another country.

Also, we are still waiting for that order of reference which we will be getting very soon, to go ahead. Meanwhile, as you know, I have been trying in your name at every meeting to be proactive and get the Minister to give us his document as soon as possible to help us organize our information sessions and all the rest. I certainly do not want us to drag our feet and we definitely have not been dragging our feet. We started dealing with that issue immediately after it was voted on by the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. Reid, you had another question?

Mr. Scott Reid: Just going back to the Canadian experience, am I not correct in thinking they had dual-member constituencies in Prince Edward Island after they took the two houses of the legislature and combined them into one. I believe they simply—

The Chair: Yes, I referred to that earlier.

Mr. James Robertson: We'll confirm that and get some briefing material.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm interested in knowing how it was done; that's the real point.

The Chair: Yes, that research is going to be done.

If there are no further questions, this pretty well completes this part. I'd just like to take a couple of minutes, unless there are further questions, to inform colleagues of what we intend to do at the next meeting. We have Mr. Kingsley at our request, if you remember, coming back for a second round. That will be Tuesday—when we return. I'm also told that the supplementary estimates are now out, and they'll be referred to us.

Mr. LeBlanc, we could bring this at a future meeting as well.

We also have the performance report of the House of Commons, which gives us an opportunity, if we so wish, to bring the Speaker and the Clerk of the House to our committee and ask questions about how the House is administered and so on—if that happens to be what we want to do. I'm just illustrating various options here.

[*Translation*]

Anyway, we have already booked the Tuesday following our return for a meeting with Mr. Kingsley. If we have received the order of reference by then, I would like us to reserve some time on that

same Tuesday, maybe at the end of the meeting, to talk about it, still in the spirit of trying not to slow down anything regarding the issue of electoral reform. I do not know if this is agreeable for the following days.

Ms. Picard.

● (1155)

Ms. Pauline Picard: I agree with what you have just said. I would just have a suggestion. Would it not be interesting to have someone from the Law Commission of Canada come and tell us about their research? I will try to read the document that deals with reform, but we could get some clarifications on some issues. I would suggest that we invite someone to have a discussion to that effect.

The Chair: It is a good suggestion.

[*English*]

Colleagues, is there an interest in having Madame DesRosiers, or somebody else if she's not available, from the Law Reform Commission, perhaps on the Thursday of the week back, so we can look at the work they've done? They've done work for a long time on this issue. Would there be an interest in having that?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Isn't she the new dean of the Ottawa University law faculty?

The Chair: I think she is, so she's not very far away.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Exactly.

The Chair: If she's available, would there be an interest in doing that?

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, on the same point, a lot of us have been waiting to get the word from Mr. Bélanger, to be direct, on what the government thinks the process ultimately should be. I strongly agree, for example, that she should be one of our witnesses at some point. In addition, we could get some people who have done the work in British Columbia and put that project together and so on. There would be a lot of witnesses. Rather than inviting her next, at the next meeting I hope we'll have from the government a proposal for proceeding that could help us shape the agenda.

The Chair: Okay.

What we will do then is keep Madam Picard's suggestion, if that's okay, until at least the next meeting, and maybe we should consider that the same day we discuss the order from the government. There seems generally to be support for it, but perhaps we should wait until we see the order from the government. Is that acceptable?

[*Translation*]

Do you agree?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: Let us not forget that we are meeting with Mr. Kingsley next Tuesday. We might set aside a short period of time at the end of that meeting to discuss the agenda, especially if we have not yet received the order of reference.

Mr. Reid.

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid: We never got around to dealing with the issue of whether information from in camera meetings should be kept for 30 years or disposed of.

The Chair: Yes, we did. We disposed of that item.

The Clerk: We never actually voted on the motion.

The Chair: Did we not?

Monsieur LeBlanc.

The Clerk: Mr. Reid is actually quite right. It had slipped my mind as well. It was brought back to a subsequent meeting, and the chair put the question on the motion. In the process of discussion somebody raised another matter, and the question was never decided. As he mentions, we haven't made the decision yet as to whether in camera transcripts are to be destroyed at the end of the session or to be archived and made public after 30 years. I apologize for that. It's my neglect in not bringing to your attention that we hadn't disposed of that matter.

The Chair: If there's a motion that can be put by one colleague, if that's what you want to do, we can debate it, or if no debate is necessary, we could just vote on it and dispose of the matter as soon as possible.

Mr. Reid, do you have a suggestion for us?

Mr. Scott Reid: I would move that we archive these things for 30 years and make them public at the end of that period.

The Chair: It is so moved by Mr. Reid. Does anyone wish to speak?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I understand that we have before us a motion.

Mr. Reynolds.

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Chair, I know this committee doesn't require notice, but I'd just like to table this right now. We can debate and vote on it at the next meeting, so that everybody gets a chance to understand it. If there are any questions on why we want to do this, they can talk to me or members of the other side here.

The Chair: Okay. You are alerting us and tabling this motion. Thank you, Mr. Reynolds.

If there is nothing else to raise, will someone move the adjournment of the committee?

An hon. member: I so move.

The Chair: The committee is adjourned.

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