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Chair

The Honourable Don Boudria

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•(1110)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.)): Order, please. I see a quorum.

[Translation]

Pursuant to the Order of Reference of Thursday November 25, 2004, the topic on our agenda today is electoral reform.

[English]

The chair has received notice of a point of order from Mr. Casey.

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): I inadvertently revealed some information, in the middle of a debate in the House of Commons, about our vote the other day on the resolution of the error in mailing. I only wanted to apologize to the committee.

I didn't give any details about the vote, but I said we had the vote and we resolved it. That was in camera. I didn't realize it was in camera, but I apologize to the committee. I understand that the information was made and tabled shortly afterwards, in any case, but I did make a mistake and I apologize.

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

In fact, when someone raised it on a question of privilege, it was only moments later that I tabled the report, although the incident had occurred the day before. Nevertheless, thank you for taking the time to inform members of the committee.

We have a document, as you know. I'm a little uncomfortable with the process this morning because one party is not at the table, one who's usually very interested in these matters. I understand that some calls are being made. We'll make further phone calls.

I don't think we're voting on anything right now, but we should resume our deliberations nonetheless.

With the permission of everyone, I will now ask our researcher, Mr. Robertson, to help us go through the document to orient us on the visits that some of us had to Australia and New Zealand, the visits to England, Scotland, and Germany, for those who were on that particular leg, and the conclusions that each one of us tentatively arrived at.

Of course, Madam Megan Furi is here as well. I believe she was assisting on the European leg, while Mr. Robertson was on the Australia and New Zealand leg.

Mr. Robertson, do you want to lead us off into our song?

Mr. James Robertson (Committee Researcher): I think the briefing note was circulated. We had a discussion about this a few weeks ago, and then it got pre-empted by questions of privilege and some other business.

Basically, the order of reference is set out: the general background of the witnesses, the travel, and then, starting on page 3 of the English, certain basic options, which are listed in no particular order.

The first one would be a special parliamentary committee, which has the advantage of involving parliamentarians. The difficulty would be in getting members of the House who would be able to spend the time, because it would presumably be a fairly time-consuming exercise. There is also a criticism that might be voiced that members of Parliament are not neutral arbiters of electoral rules and there need to be people from outside. There is some precedent, primarily on aboriginal affairs committees, of including non-parliamentarians as ex officio members. That has not generally been done very widely in the Canadian House of Commons.

The other basic option would be a commission of inquiry, a panel of experts, or an eminent persons group, which could either be given the mandate, like a royal commission, to investigate the options for electoral reform and to make a recommendation to the government, to Parliament, or make, as a sort of preliminary matter, some determinations about what concerns or issues are of concern to Canadians. Is it low voter turnout? Is it the lack of representation in the House of Commons? Is it the fact that certain groups such as women and minorities are underrepresented in the House?

The estates general is a model from Quebec that has never been tried at the federal level, but it has an advantage. As was explained to the committee by Monsieur Béland, this was a small steering committee that went around the province, heard concerns from citizens and groups, and received submissions. Following these consultations, they convened the estates general itself with representatives from the entire province.

The other option is a citizens' assembly, which, as you know, was tried in British Columbia. It was quite a unique experiment. It involved two randomly chosen people from each riding, with an attempt to have one man and one woman. Its disadvantage was that it had no political input because active and recently retired politicians were specifically excluded from it. A few of our witnesses also questioned whether it could be tried at the national level, given the complexity of bringing people from 305 ridings to Ottawa or to some place in Canada and not having it too unwieldy. Other people liked the idea, but there's also the problem of whether this group should be allowed to make a binding decision or a recommendation that goes to a binding referendum.

The proposal from the Law Commission of Canada, which would only apply if there was general consensus, I assume, is that the Government of Canada could introduce draft legislation and then a parliamentary committee could undertake a consultation process. This is being used in the National Assembly in Quebec and I believe in Prince Edward Island. In both those cases there was work leading to the concept of proportional representation and there had been previous discussions on whether a form of proportional representation was desirable, which is why they were in a position to introduce draft legislation.

The last option is the status quo, where we're basically saying no reform of the electoral system federally is necessary at this time either because we are waiting to see what happens at the provincial level or because Canadians are not yet convinced of the need for it.

Any of those models could be used. As I say, there could be, for instance, an eminent persons group or a group like a commission that could go around, decide what the concerns or issues are, report back, and have a parliamentary committee make a decision at that point as to what form of electoral reform they would recommend.

• (1115)

There could also be interim reports along the way. We could have a parliamentary committee that does some kind of preliminary study as to the issues or concerns that, depending on its results, could lead to the appointment of an all-party or a citizens' group. That could then feed into some kind of citizens' assembly or estates general.

I think those are the main points.

There are a few issues the last section deals with, "Underlying Elements". One of the issues that certainly became apparent in the travel to New Zealand and Australia was that proportional representation has a lot of issues. A ballot where you put a number in terms of your choice beside each of the people running is a fairly straightforward and simple solution. If you go to a full proportional representation system or a mixed member proportional system, it's a much more complex change.

There are lots of issues concerning proportional representation. One issue that comes up is, what are you trying to address? What are you trying to achieve by making changes to the electoral system?

In New Zealand it was a feeling that there needed to be more checks and balances on the executive, and therefore they were less concerned about having majority governments. In the Law Commission's report they wanted to increase the representation of women and minority groups, and they also felt it would be less of a

problem in terms of having representation by parties from across the country. I think it was the Pépin-Robarts committee back in the 1970s that felt proportional representation would ease regional tensions.

So depending on your objective, it may affect what kind of proportional representation you want, and that in turn may affect the process of approaching electoral reform.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I wonder if we could get a bit of reaction on some of these options from various colleagues. I know I have some I'd like to make, but I don't want to make them first. Maybe after different people have reacted, I could do so.

Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the special parliamentary committee, one of the things that is noted is that coming to any kind of consensus on this would probably be difficult, given the resources we have in a minority parliament. What I have against this sort of system in which you'd have larger ridings and multiple members is that you would almost be guaranteed minority parliaments in perpetuity, and particularly in a case where you have a multi-party system. Where you have only two parties, I guess you certainly would have a majority from time to time.

Today they are dealing with this question in British Columbia, in terms of a single transferrable vote. So I think it would be very instructive for this committee to see what the voters in British Columbia determine on that referendum question.

I do think we talk a lot in this place about the strengths and weaknesses of minority parliaments and how difficult it is to make them work, and that is certainly being demonstrated in the chamber now. There has been a lot written in the press about how Parliament is at a standstill and whether it's the fault of the opposition parties or whether it's just a fact of life that minority parliaments don't have a majority to push through their agenda.

I've always felt that members were elected here to do three things: first, to advocate for their constituents; second to be a delegate, because not everybody would want to or could go to Ottawa to make their feelings on things known; and third, to carry out the mandate of their party. I think the third one is going to be particularly difficult.

I have no problem advocating for all people in my riding, regardless of how I think they might have voted in the past election. I think that's part of my job and I have absolutely no problem with that, and I know, Mr. Chairman, you haven't either, but I think a large part of my duty is to carry out the mandate on which I and my party campaigned. And when we are almost guaranteed perpetual minorities, carrying out that mandate would be difficult at best and impossible at worst. That is one of the things I see as a real downside to all of this.

I want to stress again that I think before we do anything definitive on this, we should see what the results are in the province of British Columbia.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johnston. That's a good point. I do hope—and I'm making an editorial comment—that we don't arrive at a conclusion today, on the day when an election is being held on this very subject, although I think the possibility that we would arrive at that today is remote at best anyway. Nevertheless, thank you, Mr. Johnston.

Who would like to speak next on the document that's in front of us? I have something I'd like to say.

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chairman, first I want to apologize sincerely to all my colleagues. I try to get to these meetings on time and take full part, but other things are going on, as members know, outside of this room.

I take it we're just—

The Chair: We thought everything happened here.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Some of us thought nothing was happening here, but I won't say that.

I'll make a preliminary comment. I have a motion I would like to move, and we'll distribute it once I get officially put on this committee by replacing my colleague.

First, we should be recommending some variant, some mixture of the proposals before us. We should be doing it soon, either at this meeting or the next. That's point one.

Secondly, I have long believed it's not an accident that 90% or more of the world's democratic systems either have pure PR or a mixture of PR. Our electoral system was originally class-based. It didn't include women or the majority of males. It was very much a product of a slow, gradual, on the whole peaceful evolution towards democracy. The next step should be to get an electoral system that better represents women and visible minorities, a system that is more proportionate to the parties' votes.

We've had a multi-party system in this country for over 50 years, but we've had a two-party electoral system. It's dysfunctional, in my view, deeply dysfunction from the point of view of national unity. The Liberals in western Canada, for instance, never get the seats they're entitled to by the proportion of votes. So they tend to be dismissed as a so-called eastern or central Canadian party. In recent federal elections, the Reform Party has got more than 20% of the votes in Ontario but no seats. They get dismissed as a mere western party. This too is dysfunctional from the point of view of national unity. My party, historically across the country, should have more

than double the seats we have today in the House of Commons. In 90% of the world's democratic electoral systems, we would have those seats.

In brief, it's not an accident. In all the countries we visited, our committee broke up in two groups. We visited countries that have made changes, that have, in my view, democratized in the right way. We can all pick our models, but I am a strong advocate of having individual constituencies. I think we have to retain that. It is a good part of our democratic legacy. But I also think we have to add a major component of proportional representation to deal with the dysfunctional system. We need to consider regional representation in our caucuses, a better deal for women, a better deal for visible minorities, and, ideologically speaking, a fair representation of the parties in the House according to the choices Canadians have made.

So I'm a supporter of a variant of the recommendations of the Law Commission report—two-thirds, one-third. But whatever the mix is, I think we need a mix in Canada. We are a highly diverse country, physically and culturally. We need to evolve in a better democratic electoral system.

I understand I'm now officially on the committee.

•(1125)

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I can now distribute my motion. I apologize to my colleagues in the Bloc—I just wrote it this morning and it is available only in English. I don't know if I can even pass it out in English only.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Don't just apologize to the Bloc. I'm also a francophone and I'm a Liberal and I also represent Quebec.

[Translation]

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Excuse me, but I fully agree with Françoise.

[English]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Okay. I heard the same comment in the House the day of your speech. I also represent Quebec, not only the Bloc. It hurts me—

[Translation]

The Chair: There is another francophone in the Chair and he is not from Quebec. We understand what Mr. Broadbent was trying to say.

[English]

Order, please.

It's perfectly in order for a member to move a motion in either official language. Documents from witnesses can only be distributed in both. A member of the committee can read into the record his motion and hand it to the clerk. If a member of the committee does anything else with it, that's fine.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Okay. Perhaps I could just speak to it briefly.

The Chair: Could you perhaps read it for the record?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Well, all right, if you wish, I will do that.

The Chair: Perhaps if you could wait a moment, the interpreters will have it for better quality of translation.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

The interpreters can give us a signal once they have received it.

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I'll talk a bit about it beforehand.

The Chair: Okay, please do, and then I'll tell you, Mr. Broadbent, when it's arrived.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: What I'm recommending here is...it does not have a substantive conclusion; it does not recommend a particular electoral system. It does recommend a process. It recommends a process combining elected parliamentarians, on the one hand, with a citizens' consultative process on the other.

If we're ready now, I'll read it.

Do you see, Mr. Chairman, if they're ready?

The Chair: Yes, they are.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Okay. I move that:

The committee recommends that the government launch a process of electoral reform that would begin no later than September 1, 2005 and be completed by February 17, 2006. The process would involve a Special Parliamentary Committee and a Citizens' Consultation Committee. The Parliamentary Committee would hold hearings across the country consulting with experts, citizens' associations, business and trade union groups, academics and other organizations interested in electoral reform. The Citizens' Consultation Committee would conduct a deliberative process with citizens to determine what values and principles Canadians would like to see embodied in their electoral system. Two-thirds of the way through the consultative process the two committees would hold a three day session together during which they would share with each other their preliminary conclusions. The two committees would continue with their respective undertakings. In mid January 2006 the Citizens' Consultation Committee would publish its conclusions in a final report released to the public. After taking into consideration the report of the Citizens' Consultation Committee the Parliamentary Committee would make its final recommendations for electoral reform in a report to the House by February 17, 2006.

The report would be made public.

What I seek to do here, Mr. Chairman, I repeat, is not to get to a particular conclusion. It does presuppose we need reform of some kind. This process has, for me anyway, the positive advantage that it would involve parliamentarians who have electoral experience, which I think is crucial.

It was a fatal flaw, if I can put it this way, in the B.C. process. I've said on another occasion that the B.C. process, the citizens' engagement, was commendable in many respects, but the absence of serious political input, including the fact that none of the members on the citizens' assembly could have participated even in an election in the previous three years I think was a serious mistake. It's like designing a health care system without consulting doctors. I think parliamentarians should be crucially involved in the process of electoral reform.

At the same time, I followed with interest the Romanow commission process, where there was a serious effort to get out and consult Canadians, not on the details of health care reform, in that case, but on the kinds of values Canadians wanted to see in their health care system. We heard some presenters here, three or four, who talked about a citizens' deliberative process. That could be done in a serious way, as I say, by running parallel to the parliamentary committee hearings.

I thought it useful, as I said here, if the two groups involved in these processes were to spend a three- or four-day session together, two-thirds of the way through the process. The parliamentarians could feed into the citizens' consultative group some of the things they were hearing and the preliminary conclusions; on the other hand, the citizens' consultative group could feed into the parliamentarians some of the things they were picking up in terms of values that Canadians were looking for in the system. Each committee would go off and do its own work, but then the parliamentarians would be making the final judgment.

I thought it was important that the citizens' consultative committee would make public its report so Canadians would know the values that this citizens' engagement came up with. The parliamentarians would take that into account, in addition to what they found in their own hearings, then make a recommendation to Parliament about what that committee thought should be done in terms of electoral reform.

Thank you for all your patience and time, Mr. Chairman.

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

Madame Boivin has asked to intervene, and then after that I'd like to say something about both documents we have in front of us—Mr. Broadbent's document and of course the one prepared by our research people.

Madame Boivin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: I fully concur with this resolution. It corresponds to the objectives set by the House.

However, I still have one question that goes to the very heart of our mandate, which calls on the Committee to propose some reform measures. I get the impression that there would be two committees: one composed of citizens and one composed of parliamentarians. How will the citizens' committee be struck? Perhaps Mr. Broadbent could address that question. Ultimately it ties in with our mandate. I think everyone agrees that reform is necessary and I also agree that parliamentarians must be involved in the process.

Do we plan to go along with one of the suggestions made by a witness who argued that there were different ways of reaching the public? I wouldn't want to see a small committee... In my view, we'll need to select the members of this committee very wisely if we want to achieve the hoped-for results, namely genuine, in-depth electoral reform. We may be missing a few pieces of the puzzle in order to submit some proposals to the House. I would appreciate it if we worked quickly, because we don't want to drag the process out. However, I think we still have to iron out certain details in terms of how we plan to strike our committees.

•(1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boivin.

I'd like to say a few words to my colleagues. In my view, we're lacking one key element.

[*English*]

We went to Australia and New Zealand, and others went to Europe. We learned many things.

And I'm sorry that Mr. Reid has left the room, unless he's back...

We were told, for instance, that in the Australian Capital Territory, they have three ridings, or multi-member districts; it's almost like having three provinces in it, to use a Canadian example. Because the numbers were five, five, and seven, you obtained a particular result, if you added two seats to the two other territories within that, such that you ended up changing the entire composition of the legislature. That's what the proportionality did in that regard.

We were told, for instance, by the New Zealanders that if you have a mixed member system, the proportionality in the mixed member system, according to mathematical formulas, really doesn't work if there are less than 20 people.

All of these things I think need to be reflected in a big backgrounder that we must share with our colleagues in Parliament before we get into this. I don't know what many colleagues learned in Germany. I can be corrected on this, but I understand it's the only federation in the world that has a proportional system at the national level. Mind you, there are federations that have it at the local level, provincial or state, but not national. I want to know how that worked.

For instance, there's the Irish example: how did they arrive at not having ridings, and what are the benefits of that?

We already know that in the Law Reform Commission's report they made a mathematical calculation, and they admitted in front of this committee—they said it quite openly—that if you have one-third of the MPs proportional, two-thirds by riding, that would increase the number of seats by one-third. Of course, 50% is actually the right number, not one-third; mathematically, it's incorrect.

All of these things we learned, and I don't see us sharing enough of this with our colleagues of Parliament. At the end of that sharing, at the end of our report, the recommendations...if it is Mr. Broadbent's recommendation we want, or some other variation to be attached to the recommendation.

We've done all this work, and I think we've learned an awful lot. We would be remiss, particularly if this Parliament doesn't last.... Well, it might last now a little bit longer than some of us thought yesterday, but I think it's quite fair to say that it probably won't last three or four years. Some of these things might be implemented by another Parliament, and there should be some sort of repository of all of this. We need to share with our colleagues in a more fulsome way, with the recommendations attached thereto, as opposed to really only giving a little bit of background of a few pages.

In terms of presenting options, after we adopt one of the options the rest will all disappear. We'll be left with a very short document when you consider all of the work we've done and all of the

knowledge various members have acquired. If each one of us were to speak for 10 to 15 minutes about what each one of us learned, I think there would be an awful pile of stuff there. Of course, add to that the members who are not here, because there was a top-up to our committee to get members from elsewhere.

Those are my reactions. I don't know whether they help the committee or make things worse. I hope they don't make things worse; I hope they're of use to at least someone.

At any rate, there are other members who have not yet spoken. Then of course we'll start a second round.

Madam Picard.

•(1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I found our trip to Europe quite fascinating, although I must admit that I frankly felt somewhat lost, because of the language problem. We had some good translators, but their systems don't look anything like ours. The pace was quite hectic. We heard from witnesses, but we didn't necessarily have much time to ask them questions. We moved from one system to another, without necessarily having time to absorb everything we heard. Right now, I wouldn't be able to give you a report on what I heard during our tour. I have a vague idea of some of the other systems in place. And while some were perhaps interesting, I don't think they would be relevant here, given everything that we have experienced since Confederation.

While I agree with Mr. Broadbent's motion, perhaps it could be improved upon. He refers to a citizens' committee. In my view, this committee could be comprised of experts. Could we not look to the models in use in each of the provinces? In Quebec, the commission set up by Mr. Béland and the consultative process have worked very well. In Europe, some people even told us that they had consulted British Columbia to find out how that province had conducted its inquiry. Shouldn't we first be gathering all of the information on what the provinces have done and determining what may have been missing in the consultative process? What recommendations did they make that could help us in terms of carrying out Canada-wide consultations? One of the recommendations made called for a commission comprised of former parliamentarians with experience in the workings of the electoral system. I'm thinking here about persons like yourself, Mr. Chairman, or like Mr. Broadbent. This expert commission of former parliamentarians could reach out to and connect with citizens. It's important to remember that we need to make recommendations to the public. That is not an easy task. Voters who go to the polls every four or five years want the system to change, but they are not necessarily able to make suggestions or they made not know what types of changes are needed.

So then, I find the motion interesting, but perhaps we should take it a step further and improve or change the way in which these consultations would be carried out.

•(1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam. As future ex-MPs, Mr. Broadbent, Mr. Johnston and I listened carefully to your comments. We all have the same thing to look forward to. Others may be joining us, but still don't know it. We at least know what the future holds for us.

Go ahead, Ms. Longfield.

[*English*]

Hon. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Oshawa, Lib.): I've listened carefully to what everyone has said, and I don't think any of them are mutually exclusive.

I quite like Mr. Broadbent's proposal. I don't think it rules out or excludes any of the work that members of this committee did when they were looking at the various other systems that were in place. I think if we do this, the information will be available to both committees. I would also think that both of those committees might want to do more investigations of this type on their own.

I guess we owe it to Canadians to get out there and consult with people, no matter which side of the system they're on, whether they like the status quo or whether they believe there's something that needs fixing in our parliamentary system. I have to tell you that I don't think I've seen one that I'm 100% supportive of, but I think there are elements in a number of them that are worth further consideration.

One of the things is not in here specifically, but I think Mr. Broadbent would agree that we could add it very quickly. There needs to be some dialogue with the Canadian public to find out what it is they actually want to fix.

If you could articulate a number of things, people would say that we need greater representation from women and minorities or we need to increase voter participation. If you had a list of things that people felt needed to be somehow fixed, then eventually we would look at the various systems as to how best they might address those specific concerns.

One of the things we did hear was that there are a lot of people who say we have to fix it because voter turnout is so disgraceful and so low. We found out that there are many reasons for that.

One of them, which even the Chief Electoral Officer says he doesn't agree with as much as some of the members of the committee, is that there's serious over-counting and people are on the list more than once. If you're looking at a percentage of turnout, it may actually be the quality of the list we're using. If you wanted to increase voter participation, one might argue that the simplest way to do it is to make voting compulsory, but I don't think that's necessarily what Canadians are looking for.

I think this gives us the opportunity to go out and consult. It doesn't tie us into one procedure or another. At the end of the day, once we've had the discussion and the consultation, we'll be able to make some reasonable decisions. Hopefully, those two bodies will come together and decide there really is one system or a series of changes that we should make.

I can tell Mr. Broadbent that I'd be pleased to support his motion, as it's written here.

The Chair: Speaking of how it's written, Mr. Broadbent, I noticed one thing, if I can make a constructive criticism. At least, I hope it will be seen that way.

We're talking about a parliamentary committee making recommendations. The draft motion has been officially offered to the committee. The motion is to put in "a report to the government", instead of "a report to the House". Is that what you want to say, Mr. Broadbent?

Of course, if you report to the House and it is a parliamentary committee, that would be the normal way. Then the last sentence is not necessary, because if you report to the House, it's obviously public.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Can I comment on that? I'd like to respond to somebody else.

The Chair: Please, respond to everything.

Mr. Broadbent, the floor is yours.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Thank you. First of all, I'd like to begin by expressing my appreciation for the positive comments about the motion. I have indeed tried to draft a motion that is consistent with the work we have been doing and without reaching any foreordained conclusions. That leaves it open to parliamentarians to recommend after a consultative process, and I'm pleased that virtually all the comments have been generally supportive, with some useful suggestions.

I will begin, if I may, Mr. Chairman, with your comments. I deliberately avoided commenting on the trip to New Zealand or Australia and the other one that took us to Scotland, London, and Berlin, because I didn't think in this it was necessary to get into any of the details. Anyway, I thought it better not to, for example, raise some of the points that you, Mr. Chairman, raised of concern about how PR would mix. I fully understand that every country has to have its own system and no country can go to another and say it is going to duplicate this or that. It's totally irresponsible, and none of the countries we visited did it that way either. They built. They learned some things from other countries, but they essentially reflected upon their own traditions, to build upon it. And with respect, Mr. Chairman, I don't think we need to refer to either any of the pluses or minuses we've seen in the other systems we visited.

How I see the utility of those visits.... I heard and listened carefully to what Madame Picard had to say, and even though because of academic reasons I was perhaps more familiar than some members of the committee with some of those systems, because that was part of my work before, I totally empathize with the difficulties other members may have faced in going into these countries, where we're listening to a whole series of experts and going from one country to another, and it's difficult to absorb the essence of what we're hearing.

But it seems to me the cumulative result of what we heard is that even.... For example, the other countries that built on the Westminster model, like we did, whether it's Scotland, New Zealand, or Australia, have all modified, and they modified to suit their own historical circumstances and they modified in their own way I think to improve upon, within their own traditions, the first-past-the-post system, by retaining key elements of the first-past-the-post system, but by building on it.

So I come back to your point again, Mr. Chairman. I don't think as a committee we need to make reference to the pluses and minuses we saw. What we can say, if we need to in support of our recommendation, if we go with some version of what I'm proposing here, is that we did learn enough from other systems to see, in principle, lines of direction for improving our own system while still wanting, in the final analysis, to ground any change we make fundamentally on the Canadian reality.

So that deals with this. In short, I don't think some of the problems you raised are necessary, because we're dealing here not with a substantive recommendation but with a process recommendation. If we set up two committees of the kind I'm recommending, it will be up to one of those committees to deal with the serious issues you raised, Mr. Chairman, before it makes a recommendation, but I don't think we have to deal with it.

The other suggestions.... I think my Liberal colleague was talking about what is it we want to fix, that issue, which is an appropriate one. I'm not sure as a committee we want to start listing them here? No. All right, then I understand. That's part of what one of these two committees would find out, and it may turn out that most Canadians will want to keep 95% of what we have or they may want to change 80% and they may want more proportionality, or more women, or better regional representation, but again, I would say that's up to the consultative process to find out and not for us to determine.

• (1150)

I tried to make a proposal—my Liberal colleague said she supported it—that would be open-ended on that, to listen to Canadians to see what they did want.

Also, and I do want to emphasize this, I became convinced myself through the process that really, parliamentarians—men and women around this table, or our colleagues out there in the House of Commons—should be making the final judgment on this. They have the political experience. They have to consult with Canadians and consult carefully in terms of values and details. But in the final analysis, this is a political decision affecting the political process, and we would not be going the route, for example, of the B.C. citizens' assembly or the route that some of the other provinces have taken. We would be going our own way, which seems to me anyway to be consistent with a lot of the advice we heard before the committee.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Broadbent. Again, and maybe it's my personal curiosity, but did you want this committee to report to the government or to the House?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Can we take a minute? I'm somewhat experienced in politics, Mr. Chairman, but I'm not as experienced in the details of parliamentary procedure as, with all respect, you are.

Before we make the change, I'd like you to elaborate on what some of the significant.... Reporting to the House, I guess, would be the more appropriate one. Are you saying that's the tradition if it's a House committee?

The Chair: The reason I state that is that in the end it would be a parliamentary committee reporting, and normally a parliamentary committee reports to Parliament, as opposed to the government. As a matter of fact, usually if someone tries to do that, it's the opposition that says not to do it that way because this is Parliament, and a committee of Parliament has to report to Parliament.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I accept your friendly amendment, absolutely. Change that to “report to Parliament” instead of “to the government”.

The Chair: If that's what you want; I'm not trying to lead you here.

Do others want to contribute towards what we have here?

Mr. Reid, as you may know, there's a motion on the floor, and it is the motion we have here. There's a slight amendment that now says, in the end, to report to the House, as opposed to report to the government.

We also have before us a document entitled *Process of Electoral Reform* prepared by Mr. Robertson and Madam Megan Furi, of course. We have both of those documents, but right now we're speaking to the motion Mr. Broadbent offered to this committee.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): The obvious thought I have with regard to all these things, and I said this from the very beginning, is that it didn't make sense to me to make a decision on which system to go with until we'd had a chance to see the results of the British Columbia referendum, which, among other things, will involve the discussion in the media about what made the process successful and what made it unsuccessful.

The polls will open in a few minutes in B.C., and it just seems to me that rather than.... I'm not sure if this is on the table for a vote today. But as someone who has a certain amount of natural sympathy for what they are doing in British Columbia, I do think there would be some merit in trying to look at that and then vote after we've had a chance to see what some of the commentary is on whether or not their process and its acceptance or non-acceptance was helped or hindered by the citizens' assembly process by which they arrived at the STV model.

The Chair: As a matter of fact, before you arrived—or while you had stepped out, I should say, because I know you were here earlier, Mr. Reid—some of these points were raised about the possibility of actually concluding whatever it is we do on Thursday.

In any case, our staff needs some direction with regard to what to prepare. Is it only in the end a recommendation of the kind that Mr. Broadbent has offered us? Is it a recommendation and some backgrounder? It is obviously not all of it, because some of the options would be eliminated by taking this option. And if we want the backgrounder, do we want everything that's in the backgrounder? Do we want to add to the backgrounder? Is it all right the way it is? Of course, Mr. Robertson and Madam Furi would need to work on this and have it ready for Thursday for final adoption, if that's what you want to do.

If you want to pass it today, only the motion and nothing else, well of course you can do that now if you want to, but it would pass before the B.C. election, if that changes anything, as you've suggested. I'm just trying to identify options for us, not pretending that I know which ones you would like.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor, Ms. Picard.

● (1200)

Ms. Pauline Picard: I forgot one point when I last spoke. It has to do with dates. Mention is made of mid-January 2006 and of February 17, 2006. I'm wondering if it's realistic to restrict ourselves to these two dates. We don't know when exactly the House will resume sitting in January. Will it be on the 19th or on the 20th? The committee will need to meet at least once to decide who will sit on the committee of parliamentarians and who will set up the citizens' committee.

In my opinion, setting a date immediately is somewhat unrealistic.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to respond to the comment made by my colleague Scott Reid. I'm not certain that we need to wait and see what transpires in British Columbia. The Order of Reference that the committee received from the House of Commons speaks for itself. By unanimous consent, in accordance with the address in response to the Speech from the Throne, it is incumbent on the Committee to recommend a system to the House of Commons. Under the circumstances, I don't think we need to wait for anyone.

I'd like to make one final comment to assist our researchers. It ties in a little with what you were saying earlier, Mr. Chairman, concerning the committee's trip, whether or not one agrees with this type of trip. I think we're missing a bit of information. All we have really is an impression of how things are done elsewhere. You asked a question, Mr. Chairman. I would have to answer yes to your question, so that we can have an overview of things and then make a recommendation. If we vote in favour of Mr. Broadbent's recommendation, it would come at the very end. However, we need some kind of follow-up.

I only have one comment to make, and I will speak carefully because of found this process very edifying. It was a good overview of the various comments made, but a somewhat scattered one — I apologize for that — because it contains bits and pieces of information. I'd like to see everything tied together a little more.

The Committee heard from representatives of the Law Commission of Canada. They spoke to us about a number of things and they

gave us an overview of reform issues, without going into any specifics. During its travels, the Committee met with individuals who discussed their respective systems. We need something a little more coherent in order to formulate a recommendation. Right now, the recommendation seems to be drawn out of thin air.

Some people didn't understand why I didn't accompany the committee on this trip. The reason is that every time, the focus seemed to be only on how we wanted to proceed, on how we wanted to go about consulting with Canadians. For heaven's sake, let's see a summary of the comments presented during this trip and made by witnesses to the committee. Ms. White recommended to the committee various ways of reaching out to citizens. Let's focus on that, otherwise we'll be focusing on the content, when in fact we're only at the procedural stage and just now deciding how to go about consulting with Canadians on future electoral reform.

Let's try to be consistent here. That's all I have to say about the report.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Boivin. You agree with me that a summary should be appended to the recommendation, regardless of what that recommendation might be.

We're back to you, Mr. Broadbent, as no one else has indicated a desire to speak.

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I'd like to pick up on Mr. Reid's observations, if I may.

It seems to me that whatever happens in the B.C. referendum isn't going to be pertinent to the substance of this motion. Whether one likes the B.C. process or not... I came to have serious criticism of some of the earlier involvement... As I explained in my earlier comments, I think a fatal part of it was the failure to have politicians involved in the B.C. process. This motion really attempts to address that, having a consultative or deliberative citizens' process running in parallel to the MPs' consultations. I really don't see what will happen, whether one likes it or not in B.C. If we adopt this, or a variation of it and the ideas I put forward... In fact, of everyone who has spoken, no one has disagreed with this yet. There have been some suggestions for possible modifications, but it seems there's substantial agreement on it.

I would just say to Mr. Reid that one could end up, for example, recommending in this process what the B.C. commission recommended.

● (1205)

Mr. Scott Reid: Sure.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: That conclusion could follow from this. It's not one I would personally be happy with, but that's irrelevant. I deliberately tried to make a proposal that would leave all the options open, as directed by the House in fact.

I'll just conclude my comments and say that if we acted on the motion now, this may or may not lead to a recommendation to follow the B.C. process. Whatever happens in that vote today in B.C., I don't think it is really pertinent to or necessary for us reaching a decision. That's all I would say.

The Chair: Okay.

Having heard all of this, is it the wish of the committee to vote on the motion now, or would you like to wait until Thursday, after the B.C. situation, or do you want to have a fuller report to attach to the motion? I don't know if it's possible to put some meat onto that by Thursday.

Mr. James Robertson: For sure.

The Chair: So that's possible.

If there's some consensus on this, we could agree to do this on Thursday and look at the document then and try our best to adopt it—as amended, or per whatever appears at that time, as I don't want to nail anybody down here.

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Personally, I would be quite happy if Mr. Reid wanted to have the results in first. I'd be quite happy if further documentation were added to this, as long as our committee can get something under way. If we can make a decision on Thursday, I think that would be great.

The Chair: Okay. The committee will reconvene on Thursday. Again, we will have this report on the agenda.

Colleagues, just so that you are aware of what's before us, the Speaker has asked us to review the *sub judice* convention. He's asked us to do that in the House; it was part of one of his rulings not that long ago.

Mr. Dale Johnston: Could you define *sub judice*?

The Chair: The *sub judice* convention prevents members from asking about issues involving a case before a criminal court, after charges are laid or, in the case of a civil dispute, after a trial has begun. That's the *sub judice* convention.

Of course, we're doing electoral reform now. There are a number of order in council appointments before the committee.

Actually, there are two things. There are order in council appointments before this committee, as circulated to everybody. If anybody has an objection to one or wants to interview a person, you should raise it. That's ongoing.

There's also the issue about the process of how to review appointments, which is before us as well. There's the issue of the countdown clock, which we recently raised with the Speaker in this committee, that is to say, whether or not we want to discuss having a form of countdown clock, *un compte à rebours*, just below the regular clock to indicate how much time is left, so that members can wind down their speeches as they get to the end. The Ontario legislature has had that since the days I was sitting there. So that issue is before us.

There is also the proposal of the Liaison Committee to amend the Standing Orders regarding committee travel during weeks we're not sitting, and there's the recommendation of the Liaison Committee on the presentation and study of estimates.

We also have an Elections Canada matter coming up, the report containing the recommendations on the Canada Elections Act and the nomination of returning officers,

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guimond, you've spoken about this on several occasions. We have the report on the recommended amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Adjustment Act to be presented to us by Mr. Kingsley, as well as Mr. Kingsley's report on the consequences of Bill C-24. We are awaiting three documents from him. Some are expected within the next few days, and others later. Finally, I received a letter this morning from the Speaker of the House and it will be forwarded to committee members in due time. The letter references a situation that was brought to the Speaker's attention concerning House employees who drive trucks off the Hill. Sometimes these employees are ticketed and have to pay the fines out of their own pocket, even though they are working for the House. I'd like to share the Speaker's response with the Committee.

[*English*]

I'm raising all these things just to indicate that we haven't exactly run out of work.

Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Dale Johnston: My understanding, Mr. Chairman, is that points of privilege take precedence at this committee. I noticed that there was no mention of the points of privilege referred to. My understanding was that there were a couple of points of privilege.

The Chair: I'm sorry. It was at the top of my sheet.

You're quite right, Mr. Johnston. There's an issue similar to the one we talked about the other day involving members of Parliament Holland, Reynolds, and Chong.

Mr. Dale Johnston: In that order?

The Chair: Yes. The clerk informs me that this is the order in which they were raised in the House.

So perhaps immediately after we conclude our report on electoral matters on Thursday, the first thing we will start with is some of these. Or, if you want to, we can start with them after the recess—assuming we can assume anything.

Mr. Dale Johnston: Assuming that it is a recess.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guimond, you asked to be recognized.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Will we be getting a French version of Mr. Broadbent's motion?

The Chair: It was read into the record.

Mr. Michel Guimond: I know, but we would like a copy of the French version for working purposes as soon as possible.

The Chair: I understand. The Clerk will arrange to provide you with one.

Would someone care to move the adjournment?

[*English*]

Thank you.

Madame Longfield moves that we now adjourn. The motion is carried.

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