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Chair

Mr. Gary Goodyear

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•(1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC)): Let's bring the meeting to order.

Colleagues, we have a bit of an interesting delay today as a result primarily of the weather, but we are going to start, because we have quorum for witnesses and we do have a witness at the table.

There were some business items that I wished to discuss at the beginning of this meeting. However, given that we do have some delay with members coming by, we don't have a quorum to make decisions. Actually, I think we now have a quorum to make decisions.

A voice: Yes, we do.

The Chair: All right, we have a quorum to make decisions, so let me briefly go through some of the items that I want to quickly go over, so we can get to our witnesses as quickly as possible. Perhaps if we can deal with these issues, our other witnesses may show up. We've talked about most of the items before and most of them are simply a matter of course.

The committee budget needs to be adopted for witnesses' expenses for Bill C-16. Has that been circulated? We're going to circulate that right now. Clearly, I want some authority to adopt that budget.

While we're circulating that, as I mentioned a few days ago, a few meetings ago, we do have the return of the forms from the conflict of interest code that this committee set a subcommittee up for last year and did a fairly thorough job of reviewing. We now have the forms back and I'm suggesting that we set up a similar subcommittee to look at those forms and report back to the main committee. If members around the table agree that's the way to go, then I would be looking for a motion to create one. I did have the opportunity to talk to Mr. Reid yesterday, as Mr. Reid was the chair of that committee.

Mr. Reid, are you prepared to present a motion to set up a subcommittee to study those forms?

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Yes, Mr. Chair. I'm assuming that the committee would be in the same form as the previous committee, which is to say that we had.... Well, I guess we have to choose the four. By the time I was chair, we had one representative from each of the parties in addition, for a total, including myself, of five people.

The Chair: Yes. I do have a motion here. Perhaps I could give it to you to read, Mr. Reid, because as chair I don't do motions. It is substantially the same as last year's motion.

This motion, colleagues, is in front of you, and it deals with setting up a subcommittee to review the revised forms, as directed by the subcommittee, and returned to us by the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Reid, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mysteriously, I've suddenly had three of these things come into my possession. At any rate, the motion reads as follows:

That a Subcommittee on the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons be created; that it be composed of five members, two from the Government party and one from each of the parties in opposition, to be named by the chair after the usual consultations with the whips; that a member from the government party be the chair of the subcommittee; and that the subcommittee be granted all of the powers of the committee pursuant to Standing Order 108(1) except the power to report directly to the House.

•(1115)

The Chair: Is that acceptable?

Madam Redman, please.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): My only question would be, is this in the usual form? Are these the parameters under which this subcommittee has operated on previous occasions?

The Chair: My understanding is it's an identical motion to the one we set up last year. That would be my understanding.

Is that your understanding?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. James M. Latimer): Initially it was adopted, but then further on in the session you added.... Do you remember?

The Chair: Oh, that's correct.

The Clerk: That's why I've adapted—

The Chair: It's been adapted, that's right, because later on in the session I went on that subcommittee as well. So the motion here has been adapted slightly from the original motion to allow the same thing to occur, that I would sit on that subcommittee as well. That's the only change, Madam Redman.

Hon. Karen Redman: Okay. Can you remind me, why was that adaptation...? I'm not objecting—

The Chair: Why was I added? Only because we started out that study as the main committee, so I had done a tremendous amount of research on the issue, on the code, on the forms. When it looked like it was going to be too big a deal for the main committee to handle with the workload we had, we developed a subcommittee. I thought, after a couple of weeks, that I had a lot to offer, so I volunteered to be on the committee. As a result, I was put on the committee.

Hon. Karen Redman: I think it's probably acceptable, because anything the subcommittee would come up with comes back to the main committee anyway.

The Chair: Absolutely. The idea with any subcommittee is that they report back to the main committee, and then we can adopt or deal with it at that point.

Hon. Karen Redman: I commend you for having that amount of interest in this riveting topic, Chair.

The Chair: I have no other hobbies.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Colleagues, can we move back to the first item? I'm trying to move a little bit quicker so we can get to our witnesses.

On the committee budget, is there a motion to adopt the budget for witnesses' expenses? Moved by Madame Robillard.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: I have some good and bad news. Last Tuesday I mentioned to you that the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec, Monsieur Blanchet, would be willing to appear on Tuesday. Unfortunately, he's called to say he's not available. He has cancelled, unavoidably and with great apology. He is not available at all next week. So there were some options, and I'll just lay them on the floor for the committee.

I spoke to the minister about legislation that's coming up. The minister has a very tight schedule but has offered to come on Tuesday to deal with the next two bills, which are veiled voting and rural voting.

We could move to clause-by-clause on Bill C-16 on Tuesday, but I was concerned about the members not being able to hear those witnesses. I think more witnesses were offered.

Did you get another list of witnesses for Bill C-16?

The Clerk: I received two names this morning.

The Chair: All right. We do have some other requests for witnesses on Bill C-16, so it may appear that the committee wishes to....

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): I'd like to speak to your suggestions, if I may, and maybe prior to that I would like to bring to the attention of all of the members the significance of today's date. The significance is, of course, it's one day closer to the Saskatchewan Roughriders winning the Grey Cup.

The Chair: Thank you very much. What's your question?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: If the witnesses cannot appear and other members of the committee want to be able to have an opportunity to question the witnesses, then I would suggest, particularly if you're saying that the minister would be available on Tuesday to speak to two other pieces of legislation that are coming forward and that we have to deal with anyway, we just bring the minister in and start examination of those two pieces of legislation.

The Chair: That's fine. Let's deal with this one point at a time.

We've had the request for more witnesses and I am concerned that we're not able to hear Monsieur Blanchet. So it is the suggestion of the chair that we do not move to clause-by-clause—that's the first thing I'm going to suggest—but that we wait and hear those other witnesses. That would be my suggestion, and on Tuesday we hear from the minister and just juggle things.

Madame Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I realize that, as a result of the weather, certain important witnesses, including Mr. Loewen, who worked on the research project for Elections Canada, will be unable to appear today. Would it be possible to hear them next Tuesday rather than have the minister appear on other bills?

● (1120)

[*English*]

The Chair: In fact, as for Mr. Loewen, my understanding is he should be here in five minutes.

Ms. Dobrzynska will also be here in five minutes. Mr. Archer is obviously at the end of the table. Ned Franks will be here today. David Docherty is stuck in Toronto. He can come on Tuesday or Thursday.

That makes the decision. Mr. Docherty can come Tuesday or Thursday. The other witnesses could be invited also for Tuesday or Thursday. The minister is not available on Thursday, so that puts him back to Tuesday.

Mr. Angus, and then Madame Picard.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you.

We certainly believe in the principle that we have to hear the witnesses necessary before we do clause-by-clause, and I think we're all on the same page in that.

I think it would be excellent if we had the minister come on Tuesday. It would be a good chance. The minister is very busy, so it's easier for us to adapt to his schedule than for him to adapt to ours.

I think the rural identification vote is a big issue. We have to make sure that we have all our ducks lined up in a row before we go back to the Canadian people, so I certainly would like to hear from the minister on Tuesday, continue on with our witnesses on this bill, and then go to clause-by-clause.

The Chair: Okay.

Madame Picard, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): For my part, I'd like to hear Mr. Blanchet. Do you know whether he's outside? We could organize a videoconference or at least ask him to send us his comments in writing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Picard, I actually anticipated that request. I've asked Mr. Blanchet to send in writing his opinions on the bill. However, I still felt that we needed to ask the committee if they wanted to actually hear from the witness first, as well as.

So we will receive something in writing from Mr. Blanchet. He is not available at all next week. Apparently he's testifying on a similar matter in the province, so we were usurped by that issue. He may be available the week after, but again this leaves us without him next week.

We're still back to filling up Tuesday. I have Madam Redmond back on the list here, so we're going to hear from Madam Redmond and then we can make a decision.

Madam Redmond.

Hon. Karen Redman: I had requested earlier.... I have heard from your office, but unfortunately there's no steering committee this week. It's not scheduled until next week. And I would point out that we were dealing with the in and out advertising system the Conservative government used in the last election. That motion is still on this table.

I think everybody on this committee can walk and chew gum, so I would suggest that rather than pulling forward legislation that hasn't yet been presented to this committee, next week, in lieu of having a string of witnesses on these important issues, we could take the time to deal with that very important issue.

The Chair: Obviously I'm going to leave it up to the committee. I did call your office, all the whips actually, regarding the steering committee. Monsieur Guimond was available for yesterday. I did not hear back from your office, Madam Redman. I heard from Monsieur Godin, who said that he couldn't meet until next Wednesday, and then I did hear from you late Wednesday, which was far too late to get the meeting together for Wednesday.

So I did mean to bring that up today, that next Wednesday is a scheduled steering committee at 3:30, and the subcommittee on the code of ethics will be also meeting right after that, so it's all falling together. It's going to happen, but I don't see that happening as quickly as yesterday.

Hon. Karen Redman: Why does it have to be on a Wednesday?

The Chair: It doesn't.

Hon. Karen Redman: I'm here today. I'm here tomorrow. I'd be more than happy to meet as a representative of the Liberals on the steering committee.

The Chair: I can send out a notice again requesting whether Friday's okay. I won't be here on Friday, I apologize. So we have a notice going out today that the steering committee is next Wednesday at 3:30, because those are the agreed times that I've gotten from the majority of the members of that committee.

I am certainly happy to discuss that with you after. If we want to try to schedule something for Monday or Friday or earlier, as long as everybody's agreeable to it, I'm comfortable with that, but those are the reasons why I chose next week. Wednesday is just the normal day that they meet. We met the first time on a Monday because that's when we were here, but normally the steering committee, when it does meet, it was a Wednesday afternoon, as did the subcommittee. There was no harm intended. It was just trying to organize some very busy schedules.

Colleagues, is there any...? Yes, Mr. Reid, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: With regard to the steering committee, my understanding is that as presently composed it consists of yourself as chair, which means that you are not in a position to advocate the point of view of the Conservative Party but rather are in a neutral position, and then it consists of one member from each of the other parties. So there is in fact no member of the Conservative Party there representing the perspective of the government on the committee, and for that reason I must say I think it's unbalanced.

There are other committees that have steering committees that include a government member, that are five-member committees and similar in their structure to the conflict of interest code subcommittee that we just struck. I must say I think it would be more appropriate to have a similar structure for the subcommittee, and I would like to make a motion to that effect.

● (1125)

The Chair: Could I, just for my own convenience, ask you to put that motion forward once we deal with the Tuesday issue? Is that fair? Because the steering committee is on Wednesday, and I just want to get these witnesses or the minister here for Tuesday, and then I'm happy to go back and deal with what's happening with respect to the steering committee.

I'm happy to do it now, because I'm not saying no to you—

Mr. Scott Reid: No, okay.

The Chair: —it's just a matter of order and so we're solving problems in a certain order.

Colleagues, if there are no other statements on this, I'm going to ask for your indulgence that we in fact bring the minister in on Tuesday, deal with those two bills, have the steering committee at this point in time on the Wednesday, but possibly we might discuss it earlier, and we can talk about other agenda items at that point.

Do I have the consensus of the committee that the minister comes on Tuesday and deals with these two bills that are coming before us?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I'm going to speak with Madam Redman after to see when the steering committee meets.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Chair, I have received a message on my BlackBerry from my staff who are watching this in the office, and apparently we phoned your office at nine o'clock on Monday morning to have a steering committee.

So I'm just going to reiterate.... It's quite interesting to hear Mr. Reid talk about the need for an enlarged steering committee. There certainly are committees that operate with no steering committee, and if you're going to get to five or six people in a steering committee, it would seem to me that you're nullifying the agility that one would hope one would have with a steering committee. Maybe those kinds of future plans should be made by a committee of the whole, rather than by hiving off half of this committee to go off and decide things that come back to this committee before they're enacted anyway.

I have great concern that there has been filibustering in this committee since August—I would remind us collectively—on an issue that's of great importance to Canadians, in that there is a motion before us that has not been dealt with because of the active and vigorous discourse given by a variety of Conservative members who have rotated in and out of this committee. It is an issue that I think all opposition parties feel very strongly should come before this committee.

I'm also aware of the fact that we're keeping Mr. Archer waiting. He has braved the weather to come here and report on this issue. I would say that it seems like another attempt to catapult other issues, important as they may be, in front of an issue that was started and actually could have been well on its way to being discussed and perhaps resolved starting last August. There has been a vigorous attempt by government members to keep this off the table. This seems like another ploy, in my view. So because of that, I look at it with a little bit of concern and am a bit suspicious of the motives.

The Chair: The chair apologizes for your inability to see what's obvious, Madam Redman. The steering committee did meet originally, and we discussed that legislation would be dealt with and that if we had no legislation we would revert to these other motions. That's exactly what the chair is doing.

If anybody is trying to avert the committee from its business, which the steering committee recommended and which was adopted by this committee, Madam Redman, it would appear that it's you at this point.

So I'm going to propose that we stay with legislation, as agreed, and I'm happy to meet with you Monday, Wednesday, or Friday, if you like. Your office may have called me on Monday, but we spoke on Tuesday at this meeting regarding a steering committee, and I spoke with you or got hold of your staff—I can show you the e-mail—and you got back to me that you were going to check.

Monsieur Guimond got back to me and said it was okay today or Wednesday or next Wednesday. Monsieur Godin got back to me. You and your office or whoever was responsible did not get back to me until the following day, not Monday but Wednesday. We have a 48-hour notice of meetings. There's not 48 hours between 9 a.m. Wednesday and 3:30 Wednesday on any calendar I know about.

Colleagues, I just want to point out, if you are sensing some impatience from the chair, that I am aware of what's going on in committees, and I'm not about to sit here and tolerate it. We have a job to do. We can get this job done. We can do all of the above. We have legislation in front of us. The minister is very busy. We can get two bills dealt with next week. We can move to witnesses. We can be efficient. We can set up extra meetings, but I'm not going to sit here and see time wasted on having issues that don't actually matter in front of us when we can't do anything about them.

We have witnesses here who have travelled a long way. I think we should hear these witnesses. I think we should do the business of the committee, which is a motion, but not the other way around. It's my feeling that we should do legislation. That's what we agreed on.

At the steering committee, please inform your member to bring that up, and we will have a vote. If the steering committee wants to

change the direction and the precedent of the House, then this committee will adopt or reject the steering committee's report.

Now, are there further comments, or can we move on with business?

Mr. Lukiwski.

• (1130)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Chair, I have just a very brief comment regarding the composition of the steering committee and particularly in response to Madam Redman's conspiracy theory that there is some attempt on the Conservative members' behalf to hijack that committee.

There is certainly not. Mr. Reid was merely raising the issue of fairness. My understanding is that the chair does not have a vote on that committee, so the Conservative Party is thus unrepresented in terms of votes.

If Madam Redman doesn't want to have an additional government member sit on the committee, then I would suggest a compromise: why not let the committee composition remain the same but Madam Redman take the chair, and then you would have a vote?

An hon. member: That's a good point.

An hon. member: I think that's excellent.

The Chair: If the committee wants to continue this debate, I'm not going to suggest which direction the committee should go in. The committee is the master of its own domain and its direction. I'm just trying to keep things civil and moving forward.

Do we want to continue to debate the proportional representation on the steering committee? In fact, if I can speak for the steering committee—and you're quite right, I don't have a vote—the steering committee has met, and it's very congenial. Everybody talks. We seem to get along, and we seem to get our business done.

What I would like to do right now is get the committee's permission to invite the minister for Tuesday. Are we ready for the question? Apparently not.

Madam Picard, and then Mr. Preston.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Chairman, may I suggest that we hear our witnesses? I believe the situation is very unpleasant for them, who have travelled all this way to come here. So I move that we hear our witnesses, that we finish with the agenda and that we resume our discussions afterward.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Preston.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): I would like to move that we see the minister on Tuesday, and that we see further witnesses on Bill C-16 on Thursday. That will give the steering committee a chance to meet.

So let's so move, and move along with this.

The Chair: I'm going to just go back to Madam Picard, because I sensed a motion there that we just move the agenda around. We have two witnesses here now, so we can get our witnesses to the table, deal with it, and come back to this.

So do I have the agreement of the committee to leave 15 or 20 minutes at the end of the meeting, regardless of where we are, so we can deal with this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much, colleagues.

We have two witnesses. We did intend to have one group speak for one hour and the other group speak for another hour. Members of the committee will probably realize why that is as the witnesses introduce themselves. There is a bit of a separation in the expertise of the witnesses. However, I'm sure—as Madam Redman says—we can juggle a couple of stones at the same time.

Friends, I appreciate your coming out today. I certainly appreciate the fact that you're here in such foul weather. The committee appreciates the work you've done in preparation for this meeting today. What I would like to do is offer you a few minutes to introduce yourselves, and then if you have an opening statement we'll come back to that. So if you would, just introduce yourselves first, and then we'll proceed after.

Mr. Archer, please.

Mr. Keith Archer (Professor, Political Science, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Good morning.

My name is Keith Archer. I'm a professor in the department of political science at the University of Calgary, and I'm the director of research at the Banff Centre.

• (1135)

Mr. Peter John Loewen (Research Associate, Canada Research Chair in Electoral Studies, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): I am Peter Loewen, a graduate student at the Université de Montréal in the department of political science and a research associate with the Canada research chair in electoral studies.

[Translation]

Ms. Agnieszka Dobrzynska (Research Associate, Canada Research Chair in Electoral Studies, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): My name is Agnieszka Dobrzynska, and I am a research associate in the Canada Research Chair in Electoral Studies at the Université de Montréal. I hold a doctorate in political science.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

What we will do now is ask each witness for an opening statement. Normally we try to keep it around two to three minutes.

If you could please start again for us, Mr. Archer, you have the floor for three to five minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Keith Archer: Thank you. My opening statement is very brief.

From the end of World War II until 1988 voter turnout in Canada was in the order of about 75%. In the five elections since 1993 turnout has sharply declined and now ranges between about 61% and

65%. The intent of Bill C-16 is to reverse this trend and to do so largely by increasing the number of advanced polling opportunities. I believe the intent to increase voter turnout is non-controversial. It's widely held that higher turnout is better than lower turnout. There is some dispute, however, about whether this is the best or perhaps even a good way to increase voter turnout.

In a review of declaration voting—and declaration voting includes such things as absent voting, postal voting, and advanced voting, among others—undertaken by the Australian Electoral Commission in 2004, the following observations were made. First, there has been an increase in declaration voting from about 12.6% of all votes in 1993, to 15.9% in 2001. Second, one of the major reasons for this, according to the Australian Electoral Commission, is societal change. The nature of societal changes that were identified in that study included things such as changing work patterns, changing retail shopping hours, increased mobility, and changed family and living arrangements. Third, this has led to increases in so-called convenience declaration voting. I think the trends that were experienced in Australia are very similar to trends in Canada.

In its report the Australian Electoral Commission also concluded that declaration voting presents difficulties to electoral administrators. They concluded that declaration voting results in increased costs of elections and increased or perhaps more complicated challenges facing electoral administrators in the processing of votes.

In his presentation to this committee, Canada's Chief Electoral Officer was reported to have identified these administrative costs for Canada. The additional costs and administrative challenges need to be considered carefully and weighed against the prospect of the effect of this legislation on increased turnout.

To make this assessment, I believe it would be useful to see some additional research on a variety of reform alternatives to compare the relative costs and effectiveness.

Thank you.

The Chair: Perhaps I could ask Mr. Loewen if he has an opening statement. I know you have submitted something. Thank you very much. We'll offer you some time for an opening statement anyway.

Mr. Peter John Loewen: I do, and if I may, I would like to share my time with Madam Dobrzynska, because we've jointly prepared a statement.

I do thank you very much and I thank the members of this committee very much for the opportunity to come and talk about the report that we drafted for Elections Canada entitled *Potential Impacts of Extended Advance Voting on Voter Turnout*. We certainly want to answer whatever questions we have as clearly and as comprehensively as we can. We thank you very much for the opportunity to speak about this and for your interest in electoral participation.

We do regret that Professor Blais can't be with us here today. He's out of the country, but as we prepared this report together, he has prepared these remarks with us.

In the short time we have here we want to provide you with answers to the questions that we think are most prominent in our report and that perhaps are weighing most heavily for you on this legislation. First, what's the cross-national evidence on the effects of increasing convenience for voting on turnout? Secondly, what evidence do we have in Canadian federal elections about the relationship between increased advanced voting and overall turnout? Finally, who is it that votes in advance?

We think that by answering these questions we can better understand what the short-term and the long-term effects of greater advance voting on overall turnout will be.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Ms. Agnieszka Dobrzynska: Bill C-16 proposes a number of measures to increase the convenience of voting in Canada. These provisions are: increased advanced polling opportunities, the existence of two consecutive regular polling days rather than only one, and the possibility of voting on a Sunday. The combination of the three measures provided for in Bill C-16 would make Canada's electoral legislation very unique. Only Sweden offers a similar combination of convenience measures to encourage greater voter participation. The case of Italy seems to resemble that of Canada. A period of two consecutive days, Saturday and Sunday, was recently established in Italy for voting. However, advanced polling is not permitted in that country.

In the past, several studies considered whether administrative measures to increase the convenience of voting would have an impact on voter turnout. However, existing empirical research has yielded conflicting results. Certain studies indicate that measures such as increased advanced polling opportunities or the possibility of voting on a holiday can increase voter turnout; others observed no impact.

With regard to the existence of two regular polling days, certain studies report a negative impact, which seems hard to believe. Although these studies are rigorous, all have their limitations. That is why we have conducted a new empirical transnational study including elections held in all democratic countries between 1990 and 2001. Our sample included 151 elections in 61 democratic countries. Our objective was to examine the impact that administrative measures to increase the convenience of voting would have on overall voter turnout.

The findings of our analyses indicate that, in countries in which electoral legislation facilitates voting by allowing advanced polling, voter turnout is approximately four percentage points higher than in countries in which this option is not available. However, the possibility of voting on holidays and the availability of two consecutive regular polling days had no significant statistical impact.

We have three comments to make. First, the three measures we examined had a positive impact on voter turnout; however, the correlations were not that strong. Second, the availability of two consecutive regular polling days was found in only six elections in our sample, which may explain why it is so difficult to identify a significant statistical trend. Lastly, our findings suggest that, although all of these measures could have a positive impact on voter turnout, the real impact is limited.

[English]

Mr. Peter John Loewen: We addressed two more questions. First, does increased advance voting increase overall turnout? Second, who takes advantage of the opportunity to vote in advance?

On the first question, we think the evidence is rather clear. Increased advance voting opportunities give time-pressed individuals more opportunities to vote, and they give parties more opportunities to mobilize voters into these voting opportunities.

The American evidence, which we think is the most well developed, suggests that liberal voting laws and multiple opportunities to cast a ballot increase turnout, but there is a caveat. Increasing turnout often depends on an effort by parties to mobilize voters into these opportunities. In other words, increasing voter opportunities alone may not be enough; it may also require parties encouraging voters to take advantage of these opportunities.

Our objective then was to determine whether or not increased advance voting in Canada was increasing overall voter turnout. When we compared the increase in advance voting in federal constituencies between the 2004 and 2006 federal elections, we found overall turnout increased as well. In concrete terms, we found that for every ten additional voters who decided to vote in advance in 2006, nearly six of those individuals would not have voted otherwise.

In terms of the 2006 election, the 1.3% increase in advance voting resulted in a 0.7% increase in overall turnout. It had a modest effect, but it was a real one.

We concluded from this that further increasing advance voting opportunities in Canada is likely to increase overall turnout. It's extremely difficult for us to quantify the actual magnitude of the impact, but we are confident in saying we do not imagine the impact being greater than 2% or 3%.

Who is likely to take advantage of these greater opportunities to vote in advance? To ascertain this we considered evidence from the 2006 edition of the Canadian election study, which is a long-running survey of thousands of Canadians during each federal election. Through a statistical model we located the factors that differentiated those who voted in advance from those who did not.

To wit, older citizens were more likely to vote in advance than younger citizens. Those interested in politics were more likely to vote in advance than those who were not interested. Those who identified with a political party and/or were contacted by political parties were more likely to vote in advance.

We think these findings suggest two things. First, increased advance voting opportunities are likely to do little to close the turnout gap between the young and the old. Indeed, while also increasing overall participation, it will likely widen the gap in turnout between the young and the old.

Second, political parties will play an important role in determining whether extended voting opportunities lead to a significant increase in voter turnout. If the proposed changes are enacted, much of their effect will likely depend on whether parties can contact voters, inform them of these opportunities, and encourage them to take advantage of them.

We thank the committee very much for its attention to this report and questions of participation more generally, and we look forward to questions.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we have our final witness at the table.

Thank you very much, Mr. Franks. We all had a little trouble getting here this morning, and those of us who got here were having trouble getting started.

I will offer you the floor to introduce yourself, please, and if you have an opening statement please feel free to go right into it.

Thank you, Mr. Franks.

Mr. Ned Franks (Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I could have gotten here earlier, but I went to see a former student of mine, Peter Milliken, and had a coffee with him before coming, so my excuses and apology for being late.

I have some comments and I'll simply read them. I hope you have them in French, too; I'm not sure.

The objective of Bill C-16, to increase voter participation by increasing the number of advance polling days, is a useful and in my view uncontroversial reform. The percentage of Canadians taking advantage of advance polling opportunities has risen from 5.4% in the 1997 general election to 10.5% in 2006. The use of advance polling is likely to increase. The only potentially controversial issue I find in the bill is the proposal to have all polling stations open on the last day of advance polling, the Sunday before elections. This risks creating two polling days with equal opportunities for voter participation, one on the formal day of the election, and the second on the previous day. It is for this committee to decide if this is truly the wish and intent of Parliament and advise the House on that.

I estimate that increasing the number of advance polling days from three to five will, at best, improve overall voter participation by 1% or 2%. This is worthwhile. It will add to the cost of elections, but the entire cost of Parliament and its agents, including Elections Canada, is only a fraction of 1% of the overall budget of the Government of Canada and is a small price to pay for democracy. The importance of the democratic processes, representation in Parliament, and public participation through voting and communicating with Parliament and parliamentarians far outweighs their costs.

However, an increase of 1% or 2% will not resolve the problem of voter apathy. In the past 20 years, participation in Canadian general elections has decreased from a respectable 75% or better to the much less satisfactory low sixties. That 40% of electors choose not to participate is cause for concern. Voter apathy has become an issue in

many western democracies. Despite much research, it's still not clear what causes this decline or what can be done to reverse it. It's perhaps the most important problem facing our parliamentary system. The decline is not only in voting. Membership in political parties has also declined. Less than 1% of the Canadian electorate now belongs to recognized political parties.

Many explanations have been proposed for the declines in both voter participation and membership in political parties. First, political parties have become increasingly irrelevant. For example, opinion polls put environment and ecological issues high among the concerns of Canadians, while the environmental policies of the traditional parties consist largely of empty rhetoric contradicted by what they do when in power. Second, some identifiable groups have a low level of political participation. These include the young people, and especially the children of immigrants. I suspect that much of this derives from fundamental issues of how these groups view government and what government does to and for or fails to do about matters that affect them. Third, politicians and politics as a whole are in disrepute. Recent opinion polls put politicians at the bottom in terms of public trust. I think of the elderly English lady who told an opinion survey, "I never vote, it only encourages them."

I believe that the lack of public trust in politicians is in large part a consequence of how politicians behave, including how they behave in Parliament. I began taking university classes to visit Parliament 40 years ago. The current Speaker, Peter Milliken, was in the first of these classes. The current level of debate is as low as I have seen, and the bad manners and incivility in question period the worst. I would not want to take a class to watch question period at present. It would risk destroying their faith in our Parliament and parliamentarians.

There are some bright lights. To mention another former student of mine, Rob Nicholson, the current Minister of Justice, is exemplary in his courtesy and the relevance of his answers. But in general, Parliament and its denizens seem bound and determined to bring both the institution and politicians into disrepute. There is no good reason for Bill C-16 to be treated as a partisan issue. All members have an interest in encouraging voter participation. I hope that this committee can achieve a consensus on this useful reform.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we have all our witnesses at the table now, so there will be no need to stop. We can continue until we're at that last 15 or 20 minutes. We'll go with our usual round of questioning and usual order, in seven-minute rounds, starting with Madam Redman, please.

Hon. Karen Redman: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank all the witnesses for coming.

I guess I can't help but react to Professor Franks by saying that I really don't think this has been a partisan issue, and I would tell you that I think that some of the widely held presumptions people have made have been dispelled by some of our witnesses. I found it very interesting.

My father was a wholesaler in fruit and vegetables for his whole working career, and he used to always look at retail and say it's the one job he'd never want to have, because there's only a certain amount of business: whether you're open eight hours a day or 12 hours a day or 24 hours a day, there's only so much business you can have.

I looked at this suggestion of having two election days, two polling days back-to-back, rather than simply another opportunity for an advanced poll. I would tell you that we have experts here saying that it may raise the voter turnout by 2%, and I think it was Mr. Loewen or Mr. Archer who talked about the fact that you have to look at sort of the cost-benefit analysis. Maybe it was Mr. Archer.

So this is going to cost us \$34 million. What we've heard from Elections Canada and other people is that they're having trouble getting both volunteers and paid people—whether it was partisan reaction from our party representatives or Elections Canada—to come and work on the polling days and the advance polling days we now have.

Given the price tag of \$34 million, my question would be: Are we simply going to spread out the voters who now come, so maybe we'll get 60% or 62%, but they will now say “Well, maybe I'll go Sunday or maybe I'll go Monday”? Or are we better off to look at different innovations, different ways to increase voter turnout that would appeal to the young people, the 18 to 36 age group, who seem to be vastly under-represented, as well as the children of new Canadians who don't seem to be coming out to vote?

My question is to everyone who chooses to answer. For \$34 million, I haven't seen demonstrated that this will necessarily increase voter participation. If that is really the thrust of this piece of legislation, can any of you give us input on other aspects of voting that we could look at that may indeed get us a greater return for that \$34 million and the 2% it might possibly bring in?

•(1155)

The Chair: Is there any particular order of response, Madam Redman?

How about we start with Ms. Dobrzynska.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Agnieszka Dobrzynska: I think you have to consider what the real cost incurred would be. If it is a net expenditure of \$34 million, you have to consider that a 1% increase in voter turnout would represent approximately 200,000 more voters, but that each additional vote would cost approximately \$150. I don't think it's up

to us to decide whether that is worth the trouble. It is up to you to make that decision. Are there any other solutions, particularly to attract young people? There are, but would they be more costly or, on the contrary, less costly? That's another question. In my view, you have to evaluate all aspects of the question and ask whether it's worth it to incur a cost of \$150 per vote gained.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter John Loewen: I should like to say as well that it's clear to us from our research that it's not only the case that people who vote on election day vote in advance because it's more convenient and that it's only a movement back and forth of regular voters. Rather, what advanced voting has done in Canada, at least in 2006, was to give people who were at the margin—people who probably found voting inconvenient on the day of voting, who may have worked in retail or had other reasons to not vote—an opportunity to vote. So when we say that six out of ten voters who voted in the advance polls would not have voted otherwise, we feel this quite strongly.

The overall impact probably does ceiling out at 2% or 3%, but we should like to say there are a couple of other factors to take into consideration. The first is that voting is habitual, that when people vote for the first time it predicts very strongly that they will vote throughout their life. When people don't vote in the first one or two opportunities they have to vote, that gels into a pattern very quickly. So the knock-on effect of increasing voter turnout by two or three points can be higher in elections later on.

I should like to say finally that I think politicians, and certainly political scientists around the world, scratch their heads at what can be done to bring more youth into the voting process generally, at what can be done to close this widening and quite massive gap between young people and older people. This bill won't do it, but what it will do is to give some youth and some old folks and some people in the middle who are on the margin and who find voting inconvenient a reason to go and vote, because they'll have one extra day to do it, then one day of advanced voting at the back end as well.

The effect isn't large, and I think our own opinion would be that it's for parliamentarians to decide what the price of a vote should be in terms of actual participation. I don't know what a deal is.

Mr. Keith Archer: I think the evidence is pretty consistent that there has been an increased demand for voting alternatives outside one-day regular voting opportunities. We see that in an increased demand for postal voting; we see it in an increased demand for advance voting. And we see more people taking advantage of those opportunities.

That is clearly something I think election administration officials and parliamentarians need to be aware of and take into account.

The challenge for you, I guess, is to understand when those arrangements are sufficient to address that demand. Canada's advance voting arrangements strike me as fairly generous at the moment, and larger numbers of Canadians are taking advantage of those opportunities.

Will larger numbers continue to take advantage if these are extended even further? I don't think we know the answer to that. I think we're all speculating a bit.

I'm not surprised at the estimates people have been bringing forward that the growth would likely be on the order of 1% or 2%. A 1% or 2% increase in voter turnout at a cost of \$34 million strikes many people as a lot of money, so I can understand the second thoughts people are having, given the cost projections that Elections Canada provided.

More generally, is this a good way to address declining voter turnout? I think that was part of the question.

In answer to that, it's important to recognize that most of the research that's been done over the last 15 years or so has suggested that the group that has been most likely to see its voter participation drop off in the last generation has been young people. This administrative change is not designed for that group.

Are there ways of addressing declining youth voter turnout? I think so. I think there are lessons we can learn from other democracies. One of the major innovations I've been struck by is taken from the Australian context, in which the Australian Electoral Commission has introduced a so-called provisional voter register. What a provisional voter register allows people to do is register to vote at 16 or 17 years of age, and that change has introduced the idea of voter registration at a time when people are still in high school.

Introducing that kind of innovation, in which civic education and voter registration information can be addressed at a time when there is a very high participation rate in social studies classes, strikes me as something worth considering as well.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're a little over on this round, but I think we're going to continue.

Mr. Franks, please.

Mr. Ned Franks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just be very brief.

I consider it worthwhile to spend that money. I would not be the one to tell 200,000 Canadians who take voting seriously enough to go to an advance poll that we don't consider their votes worth \$150.

The marginal cost of something like this is always higher than the average. I think it is an effort to say that Parliament cares about the people who find difficulty in voting on polling day and is trying to make voting a more positive, convenient experience.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Lukiwski for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you all for coming out today on a very stormy day in Ottawa.

I'm going to try to encapsulate what I've heard—and please correct me if I'm wrong—and put things into context, if I can, based on your comments. Basically, what I've been hearing is that even though there are some conflicting reports—and there are many studies out there—generally speaking, I think it would be safe to say there's a consensus among you, perhaps not unanimity, that voter participation would increase if the elements of Bill C-16 were passed. It may only be marginal—it may only be anywhere from a 1% to a 3%

increase—but nonetheless I think the considered opinions of you on a consensus basis is that it would drive up the percentage of voter turnout.

That, of course, is the essence of this bill. It may not be perfect; it certainly may not be the panacea to all of the ills facing us in terms of why people don't vote—and I take Professor Franks' comments to heart. Quite frankly, I think you're right on the ball there, Professor, with many of your comments. However, there are certain elements of the problem of low voter turnout that we can't legislate.

I think there's a massive amount of education that needs to be done. I think it's also incumbent upon us, as Professor Franks pointed out, to ensure that the image we're portraying as parliamentarians is such that people want to become more politically engaged because they feel they're being represented professionally and properly.

I think it's necessary for this committee just to focus on this bill. This bill is suggesting that if we enact the legislative provisions, we will increase voter turnout. The cost factor is something that, yes, you're quite right, we will have to determine, but I wholeheartedly agree with Professor Franks: at what price democracy?

I certainly don't want to get into a debate at any time with Canadians who feel they have not been given a proper opportunity to cast a ballot, to say, well, we would have done it but it's going to cost \$150 if you do it.

I think we can all safely agree that this will achieve the desired purpose, and that is to increase voter turnout. This bill does not try to suggest it's going to increase it by 10% or 20% or more.

I think one of the important elements of what I've heard today is what Mr. Loewen has said. The tendency of people to vote on a continuing basis is established very early. I think there could be a multiplier effect here. If in fact your research is correct—and the more I think about it, the more I believe you are correct—if we can see, for example on the first election, a 1% or 2% or 3% voter increase, and we see a lot of that is among younger people, then I think with subsequent elections we will see that percentage of people casting ballots continue to rise. It may be, if we do an analysis ten years from now or twenty years from now, we'll see a continuing upward trend of people who want to go out to vote.

Obviously, I support this bill. I just want to make sure I get some comments from some of you that I'm not misrepresenting what you've said; that there is a bit of a consensus among you that we will probably see voter turnout increase if this bill is passed, the amount of which we really can't safely predict. Would you concur with that?

• (1205)

Mr. Ned Franks: I haven't done as intensive studies as the others have, but I'll make two points. One, yes, I believe it will increase voting. I myself have taken advantage of advance polls from time to time; I'm very grateful they're there, and with more opportunities, I'm sure more people will.

Number two, the problem of increasing voter participation is going to be solved in increments. There's no magic bullet that's going to solve the whole thing; it's increment by increment. In my view, this is a very useful increment.

Mr. Keith Archer: The trends suggest that an increasing number of Canadians are taking advantage of opportunities to vote outside their regular polling day. I expect those trends will continue. I would expect initiatives that make it easier for people to exercise voting outside of regular voting days will lead to increased participation. Again, the percentages that have been bandied around here, 1% or 2%, seem to me probably the right order of magnitude.

Mr. Peter John Loewen: I shall not disagree with myself from earlier.

The one caveat I would make is that the trend is still downwards among young people, those aged 18 to 34, so we ought not to expect this bill to turn around their participation, but to stem the decline, if you will, to make that decline of participation less steep from election to election. But that itself is of great benefit.

The Chair: Madame Dobrzynska.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Agnieszka Dobrzynska: I would like to support Peter's remarks. It is true that Sweden is a kind of pioneer country. All possible voter convenience measures have been observed there for a long time. It has been observed that, over the long term, voter turnout rates are very high, even though voting is not mandatory. A kind of political culture has been created, but that's something that is not measured. We cannot demonstrate scientifically that the political culture is what determines whether people vote more. However, there is a phenomenon in the Scandinavian countries.

On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that, even in Sweden, voter turnout is in decline despite that political culture. That is the case around the world, particularly in the western countries. That decline is due to the fact that young people vote less than their parents used to vote. As Peter said, we can't guarantee that this measure will lead young people to vote more, but, over the long term, it could create a broader political culture that would encourage people to vote more.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Monsieur Paquette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): First, I would like to thank you for your presentations.

I particularly liked your study here—it has a wealth of information—and your somewhat harsh comments on parliamentarians. However, we all have our own opinions on mores and customs. I would have liked to be one of your students. You would probably have cited me as an example.

I very much enjoyed your presentations, but, at the same time, we see there is a certain diversity of opinion, except that everyone agrees that adding a general polling day the day before the general election is not a universal solution to the problem of declining voter turnout. Even though there may be increases, they will never be significant enough to stop the decline.

In the last two elections, in Quebec City and Ontario, we saw that the advance polling turnout rate was very high. That led us to believe that there would be a higher general turnout rate than in previous elections. However, in both cases, rates remain the same. In Quebec in 2006, the voter turnout rate was exactly the same as in 2003.

I also believe that each of you in your own way noted the fact that it is perhaps the role of the state, of governments and parliamentarians, that is perceived as being less useful than it was in the past. In a way, I believe that the political class has encouraged that, in particular when the effects of globalization were presented as unavoidable effects, natural effects against which governments could do nothing. So they preached, saying that, if we could do nothing with our governments, we would organize ourselves differently. We then witnessed much greater involvement by organizations in civil society, on environmental and other kinds of issues. So I think we have to work more on that.

You talked about a political culture. What I very much liked in your report—in fact, I didn't like it as a conclusion, but it enlightened me a great deal—is where you say on page 20 of your study, and I quote:

The first result suggests that the huge turnout gap between the youngest and oldest generations is unlikely to be reduced by an extension of advanced voting, since it is the oldest citizens who are most prone to take advantage of such measures.

It's in this context that I very much wonder about the utility of taking \$54 million...

An hon. member: It's \$34 million.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I had written down the figure; the Chief Electoral Officer told us \$54 million.

to provide an option that will probably appeal to those already using the other options, such as postal voting—my parents vote by mail—or advanced voting; we have three days of advance polling. Ultimately, we may encourage voting by people who are already the most likely ones to vote, that is seniors or adults. That's why I wonder whether we shouldn't focus our efforts more on a different way of accommodating young people. Mr. Lukiwski said it earlier: people who vote when they're young tend to vote all their lives.

A suggestion was made to us, and I don't know whether you have any other ideas on how to attract young people quickly. The idea would be to have the same convenience measures as there are in homes for seniors, where there are electoral review boards and polling stations. There could very well be a certain obligation on the Chief Electoral Officer's part to have review boards in the universities and postsecondary colleges, as well as polling stations on voting day. Students could thus vote at their universities, but those votes would count in their home ridings. That's a suggestion that was made to us.

I would have liked to have your opinion on that and perhaps on other ideas that you have to encourage young people to vote in elections. The question is for the four of you.

•(1210)

[English]

Mr. Ned Franks: I don't think you should make a distinction, that getting more seniors to vote is better than getting more youth to vote. Every citizen is equal, and I think that what you have to do is just get —

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Yes, but it was just said that someone who votes young will tend to vote all his life, and I share that view. That is why I am particularly concerned about young people. If youths vote at the age of 18, they will probably vote in the next election, and that will become a responsibility for them as citizens. If we don't concern ourselves with that, of if we don't concern ourselves with it in the same way as we do for someone who has been voting for 50 years, it seems to me we are missing something. That's somewhat the gist of my question. The idea isn't to consider that one person's vote is less important than someone else's.

•(1215)

[English]

Mr. Ned Franks: Let me offer you a different thought on this. If I were to express the concerns that lead to non-participation among the students I've dealt with—who are a very, very elite group in Canada—I would say that the environment is one concern, and that they don't see the government doing what they think should happen. Another one—and I recognize this is a very contentious issue—is that 60% to 80% of my students have indulged over the years in the recreational use of prohibited drugs. And it doesn't make them feel any allegiance to the system to have something they consider an innocent pastime treated as a criminal offence. Putting it another way, 60% to 80% of my students over the years have been “criminals”. They just haven't been caught or punished. What I'm saying is that this leads to alienation from the system, for better or worse.

I'm not going to offer any solutions, but I'm just saying that it's that kind of thing that, to my mind, creates this problem. That's just an example—because there are many other things that do it too.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other witnesses who wish to answer?

Mr. Archer, please.

Mr. Keith Archer: Yes, I have two brief comments.

I've not had an opportunity to read the paper written by the colleagues from the University of Montreal, but I'm not sure the finding was that seniors were the ones who are more likely to take advantage of this as much as older people were. So if there's a positive correlation with age, that suggests it could be the middle-age group as well. Maybe there could be a clarification on that.

On the question of whether there are things that can be done to encourage young people to participate, absolutely, as we have more than one problem with low voter turnout, and there can be a variety of policy responses to address a variety of problems.

The Chair: Mr. Loewen.

Mr. Peter John Loewen: We should just say, quite quickly, that our finding was that as people get older, through the whole course of their lives, they're more likely to take advantage of opportunities to vote in advance—though, emphatically, that does not mean young people won't do it. It only means they'll take advantage of those opportunities at a lower rate than older folks will, which will increase the gap between the young and the old, while increasing youth participation at the same time. It's just that participation of older folks increases faster.

I should just say that we don't think the legislation is a silver bullet at all. If you want to solve the problem of youth voter turnout, you need to find out why young people around the western world feel a distinctly lower sense of duty than every generation before them. This is the single greatest explanation of youth voting decline. It's just a lack of a sense of duty that voting is something one ought to do—and that's a tough thing to solve.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

We have diverted significantly from the bill today, but I think it's an interesting discussion.

When I was a wee lad in the Catholic school system, the bishops always made sure that we had all our sacraments done before we got out of grade eight, because they figured if we were left on our own, we would never do them. That was considered a no-brainer for maintaining the flock size. And yet we have in high school today—And I would disagree with a lot of our talk about young people: I go into the high schools all the time, and I find I get better and more interesting questions from them. We do this whole get-out-to-vote campaign in high school, and yet they can't vote, because they don't vote till they're 18.

Many of our students leave northern Ontario and go to university. At that point, they're not enumerated. They go to university, say to the University of Ottawa or Carleton, or someplace else, and they don't know anybody in the electoral system here. If they did go to vote, they wouldn't have the proper ID to vote, so they don't vote. So we have that disconnect. It starts right there. And I know a number of students who tell me that's what the issue is. And now we have legislation before us—one of our other bills—that will make sure they don't vote unless they can really prove who they are, because we're really trying to get tough on voting.

We have a disconnect, and I would suggest that we should be looking at the voting age. Every time I go to a school, kids say, do you think the voting age should be lowered? At first I didn't agree, but now I'm saying let them vote at 17; let them have that first participation in high school when everyone's there.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Angus, I apologize for interrupting. I don't mind it when the witnesses deviate from the subject matter, but if we're done with the questioning on this bill, perhaps....

I'd be happy to let you go on, but I'm just trying to get us back to —

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes, and that's what I'm going to get back to.

The Chair: Okay, perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Charlie Angus: To focus this, Mr. Archer, you mentioned that 15% of all votes in Australia are now declaration votes. I would think that's probably very similar to what we're seeing across Canada, because, again, there are youth and workers moving.... We have seen transient neighbourhoods.

What we're trying to do with this bill is to increase voter opportunities. But we are also not dealing with the bigger issue that there is no coherent pattern of universal enumeration to make sure that people in these neighbourhoods are on our lists, to make sure that young people who do move are met by officials and their names are registered so they are in that process to vote. It is a bit of a haphazard system.

From your experience of looking at Australia, do you think the problem of people moving and not being on the list is part of the overall decline in voting that we're seeing?

• (1220)

Mr. Keith Archer: On the Australian case, I guess that's an exception to the decline in voting turnout generally, because the provision of compulsory voting means that if you don't turn up at the polls, you're going to get fined. Consequently, there hasn't been much change there, even though there's been a change in the way in which people are exercising that franchise.

As we said, the use of mechanisms like postal voting and what they call pre-poll voting—what we would call advance polling—is increasing the opportunities for people to express that vote in different ways, and they're taking advantage of it, as we're seeing in this country as well.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Then let me qualify the question. Do you think that the pattern for declaration voting would be similar here, that 15% of our population wouldn't be on any list if they came to vote because perhaps they've moved, perhaps the lists are just inadequate?

Mr. Keith Archer: It's been a while since I looked at data on the accuracy of our register of electors. The provision that we have in this country that allows people to register at the polling station I think provides an important safeguard to some inaccuracies that we have in our voter register. So that's certainly one of the administrative changes that Elections Canada has introduced to try to be responsive to a voters list that, quite frankly, is really difficult to maintain at a high level of currency and accuracy.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I think we are all agreed on the notion of the efficacy of advance polling, that people like it, it works. There is a percentage of people who just wouldn't be able to get out and vote otherwise, so we are perhaps gathering a certain percentage of the voters.

Where this issue comes down for us is we are setting up a number of advance polls, but we are also setting up two full election days, and one of those election days is Sunday. I have had concern expressed to me from people like Professor Franks. They are already cynical of politicians who believe that getting called on Sunday, having the full political machine rolling out on their day off, is not something they seem favourable to. In fact they seem very resentful when I mention it, and these are not necessarily even people of Christian background. It's people who just don't like to be bothered on a Sunday.

Would the overall effectiveness of the advance polls work sufficiently without that final full-out Sunday election voting? I put it to the witnesses.

The Chair: Would anybody care to respond?

Mr. Franks, please. We have about a minute and a half.

Mr. Ned Franks: I'll jump in. My guess is that it's less important than the others. There is a whole other set of issues that come in on it. What about people who work on Sunday? Are they going to have the right to have two hours off during the day to vote, and so on? Are we making it a real voting day or a pretend voting day?

I can't answer the question. As I said before, I think it's up to this committee to give its views to Parliament on it, because that, to me, is the only contentious issue in the bill.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Mr. Archer, you're okay?

Any other comments from the other witnesses on this particular question?

Mr. Peter John Loewen: We're not certain what the answer is to your question about the precise impact of Sunday alone.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we have time for one more round, a five-minute round. The reason I try to focus members to stay on the particular topic is really just out of respect for the witnesses, who have been told what to prepare for. If the witnesses want to stray a bit, that's entirely up to them. Sometimes I'll pull them back as well, but that's just to remind members of that.

Madame Robillard, five minutes, please.

• (1225)

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for coming today, despite the storm.

I would like to ask Mr. Loewen and his colleague for some information on the study they conducted for Elections Canada. You seem to have compared what was going on in other countries with regard to advanced polling. In your study, did you take into account the fact that there are other voting measures in Canada besides advance polling, which isn't the case in other democracies? There is special polling, which enables a person who will be travelling, for example, to go to the returning officer on any day and vote. That person may also vote through the mail. Certain other systems do not allow this flexibility.

Is that one of the factors you considered in the methodology of your study?

Ms. Agnieszka Dobrzynska: Yes, these are factors that we considered in another study that we conducted for Elections Canada a few years ago. Proxy voting, advance polling and postal voting are three measures that, taken together, increase voter turnout in the world the most. For the same sample as the one we used for this study, there was an impact of 11 percentage points. Those three measures taken together, in the countries where they were in existence, increased voter turnout considerably.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Was one of those measures more effective than others?

Ms. Agnieszka Dobrzynska: Advance polling is the most effective of the three measures.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: You told my colleague Mr. Angus that you had not studied the Sunday factor. Did I understand correctly?

Ms. Agnieszka Dobrzynska: We studied that factor. There's no impact if the day considered is a Sunday or a statutory holiday, because there can be two options, depending on the country. That measure had no significant impact on voter turnout. In most of the studies conducted by other researchers, there is a consensus that there is no impact.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: I have another question for Mr. Archer.

It seems to me you concluded your presentation by saying that other studies might perhaps be necessary to determine the positive impact of this measure contained in Bill C-16 compared to the relative cost.

Could you clarify your thinking? What would those studies be? [English]

Mr. Keith Archer: Yes, well, that's a good question, and I've not spent a lot of time thinking about what that would look like. But I think if one were to imagine what kind of study would be useful, one example would be to put in place the proposed change—let's say we're looking at advanced polling on the Sunday prior to the election and on the Sunday prior to that—in selected constituencies on a trial basis and actually measure the impact on voter turnout in those constituencies relative to constituencies overall. I mean, you would design a research study around the election event itself and be in a position to get a better estimate of the impact of that change.

Another could be to introduce an initiative like, oh, I don't know, Rock the Vote, for example, which is increasingly widely used by election administration authorities. They sponsor music events that are designed to encourage young people to come to those events and then use those events as opportunities to increase political awareness. You would look at the effectiveness of participation at an event like that in respect of the cost of the event.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll have Mr. Reid, please. You have five minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our guests for being here.

I have one general comment, and then I have two questions. I certainly agree with the comment that was made by a number of the witnesses, perhaps by all of you, that in addition to what's being considered today, there is value in looking at other actions that might have the effect of boosting voter turnout. A couple of my own favourites are the idea of greater enumeration by Elections Canada, particularly in areas with high levels of transients. Areas that are populated by students come to mind as an obvious one.

Another one is for Elections Canada to concentrate on putting out advertisements that are fact-based. I encourage the Chief Electoral

Officer to redesign some of their forms that would be less likely to have incorrect address and voting location information. That obviously affects voter outcome.

Professor Archer, I thought your comments regarding Australia were interesting, and I'll be interested in finding out more. As a former resident of Australia myself, I find a lot of what they do there with regard to elections is very interesting.

That being said, I turn now to the questions. I think I can state fairly accurately that if we were dealing with a calculus as to where the cutoff is, where it stops being worthwhile in a democracy to spend more money in order to get out more voters, we could probably all agree that if it cost a million dollars to get an additional vote it wouldn't be worth pursuing. At the other end, if it cost say \$1, it would be worthwhile. I would go so far as to say that I suspect if it were \$10 we could all agree. I base that on the fact that the \$1.75 subsidy per party for every vote they get, times four years between elections, boils down to about \$7 per vote per party. The parties were all happy to vote for legislation that put that into place, so clearly a \$7 or \$10 number is not considered illegitimate.

I did a little calculation. If we make the assumption—perhaps I'm being optimistic, but I don't think so—that it's a 3% increase in voter turnout that we get for our \$34 million, 3% times the 14,800,000 votes that were cast in the last election amounts to 444,000 additional voters. If it's only 2%, it would be a smaller number.

If that number is right, 444,000 votes boils down to \$76 a vote. I think the question for all of us is whether that is a justifiable amount to get that number of people out. I realize the witnesses may have some resistance to answering questions of that nature.

The third thing, and I do feel quite strongly about this, is that this is not something that will cause an equal rate of increase in voter participation across the board. And here is the part I'm really asking about. I would assert, and I'm anxious to see whether you agree, that there are certain areas where it's predictable that voter turnout will increase. Those are the areas where it is not easy to get to the advance polling station.

We are talking about universal advance polling stations. I once represented a suburban area, Kanata, in the riding of Carleton—Mississippi Mills, which incidentally in the last election had the highest voter turnout at the advance polls in the entire country. Typically the advance polls are at the same location where the actual polling will take place on election day, so it's easy to get to the advance poll. You just go from one poll in a high school gymnasium to having seven or eight polls there.

After redistribution I went to a rural area where the advance polls are frequently far removed from each other. We have a lower rate of voter turnout at the advance polls. When I look at the numbers for the last election, I noticed the lowest areas in the entire country for overall voter turnout were in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. In remote communities, frequently there are no advance polls. You can't have a grouping of polls together, so effectively you lose that ability to vote in advance.

● (1235)

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm about to wrap up.

My question is, do you agree that rural or remote areas are likely to see a greater percentage increase than urban and suburban areas in voter participation as a result of the proposed legislation?

The Chair: Thank you.

If we could just get a yes or a no, that would be great.

Please, Mr. Loewen.

Mr. Peter John Loewen: We found no difference in the probability of voting in advance between people who lived in rural and people who lived in urban settings in 2006.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, but you would find that because you didn't have advance polls at all locations.

Mr. Peter John Loewen: Yes.

The Chair: Are there any other comments from the witnesses?

Mr. Franks, then Mr. Archer, please.

Mr. Ned Franks: I'll just make a short first comment. I think we know enough that we don't need to do more studies. I think you've been given very good evidence of what the consequences of this are, and I don't think you need to go much further.

The second one is that the factors that affect the vote in Nunavut, in particular, are linguistic and cultural, I think, even more than remoteness, because a majority of the population there does not speak either official language, at least not with any comfort. That in itself is a huge barrier towards participation.

Thank you.

Mr. Keith Archer: My comment is on calculating the incremental cost of this initiative. I guess I would caution against simply saying that the way to do that is to take the \$34 million estimated cost and divide that by the likely increase in the number of people participating through advance polling.

I think a more reasonable way of calculating the incremental cost is to look at the cost of advance polling overall and then ask the question as to whether advance polling is worth the cost, given the number of people who take advantage of advance polling, and then have a discussion about how best to implement the advance polling initiative.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Paquette, five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I have a question concerning clarification of a technical point. You said that, in your sample of 151 elections, six elections allowed for two consecutive regular polling days. How many countries does that represent?

Ms. Agnieszka Dobrzynska: There were three countries: Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Namibia. Those are the only three countries in the world that have two polling days. There's also Zimbabwe, but it's not a democratic country. Italy was added two years ago, in 2005, but it isn't yet part of our sample.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I'd like to go back to our discussion on young people. I'm reading the following in your presentation:

First, increased advance voting opportunities are likely to do little to close the turnout gap between the young and old.

We understand that this increases the turnout rates of both groups.

Indeed, while also increasing overall participation, it will likely widen the gap in turnout between the young and the old.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter John Loewen: The particular reason why it won't close the gap is because older citizens are more likely to take advantage of increased convenience opportunities. We'd expect that citizens in every age group would take advantage of these convenience opportunities of having an extra day of voting and having an extra day of advance voting at the back end, but we would expect that as citizens get older, they'd be more likely to take advantage of those extra opportunities to vote. So within every group it should have a positive impact on participation, but the most positive impact should be among citizens as they get older.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Ultimately, the problem I see in the proposal to hold two votes... Because there's no denying the facts: these are two consecutive regular polling days, even though the rules would not be entirely the same. Wouldn't it simply be preferable to add a fourth advance polling day to the three already existing? We currently have one on Friday, another on Saturday and a third on Monday. We could add a day, the Thursday or Friday preceding the election, for example, with polling stations grouped together in a few places. That would demonstrate parliamentarians' will to promote voter turnout at a reasonable cost and would have quite similar effects to what the \$34 million would produce.

I suggest the idea to you; you can comment on it if you wish.

● (1240)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Franks, please.

Mr. Ned Franks: I think you're splitting hairs there. To my mind, it doesn't make much difference if you.... The recommendation is to increase the advance polling days, and that one comes from the studies from the work of Elections Canada and it seems to me to have a pretty thorough basis. As I say, I support that, with the question that I raised about the Sunday before polling day. I don't think negotiating, cutting one day off or adding one day on, apart from that one issue, is terribly useful. I think you either go for the package or not.

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We certainly do have problems when we count \$34 million and try to divide it by how many people. It somewhat becomes a bit of a red herring. I guess, again, the question we have to ask is the best way to use money to ensure that we're getting voters out.

We just had the Ontario election, and it was very instructive for issues of advance polling and problems with voting that we saw. We tried to get advance polling on the James Bay coast for the Cree. Well, that wasn't considered a priority by Elections Ontario, and on election day we heard the chief of one of the communities saying, "Nobody in our community will be voting, because this is when we're out hunting." So we lost an entire section of our region that was unable to vote because Elections Ontario didn't think it was of significant importance to make advance opportunities for those isolated regions.

So on the question of how best to spend this money, I have to keep getting back to the issue we have, two scenarios: we have advance polling; and we have full-day Sunday, the two-day scenario.

The other day, my colleague from the Conservative Party had said that it would be a great opportunity, because people would go to church and then they could go downstairs and vote. I guess my sense from the demographics—and I'd like to get a sense from you—is that the people who get up on Sunday morning and go to church regularly are pretty much within the frame of people we can count on to vote. If they're going to get up at eight o'clock and go to church every Sunday, they're most likely to participate in their civic duty. So is the extra Sunday the best use of money to ensure that they have ease of voting when we've provided all these other opportunities?

Mr. Keith Archer: I have heard that there are two kinds of objections to the use of Sunday as the effective second voting day. One is the problem with a potential conflict with religious observance and concern that some people may have with that. The second is more administrative—that is, evidently about 10% or 11% of our polling stations are located in churches. It strikes me that the administrative challenge is not an overwhelmingly difficult one to overcome. One could simply look for other public spaces in which to conduct the elections.

On the question as to whether Canadians object to voting on Sundays, I haven't seen any empirical evidence to substantiate that. So the two objections I've heard to using Sunday as the second voting day strike me as things that actually could be overcome.

The Chair: Mr. Franks, please.

Mr. Ned Franks: I want to make one comment about Sunday. You're thinking of just one religion. If you're thinking broad range about religions, you have to think of Saturday and Friday as well as voting days and how that would affect religions. There might well be others that I'm not aware of in there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, that finishes the round that I had suggested, but we do have witnesses here, and I think if there are any other short comments, we can do that.

Mr. Lukiwski, I was pretending not to see you, but I'm going to ask you for a brief comment, very brief, and then Madam Redman, and then that's it.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Chair.

Just to clarify my remarks for Charlie's benefit, what I've heard from people in my riding is that Sunday would work for them because they could vote as a family unit, but primarily because under the auspices of this bill they would be able to vote in their hometown

at their regular polling station, as opposed to travelling an hour and a half to an advance polling station. So that's where they thought the benefit would be, not just because it was Sunday but because their regular polling stations would be open on that Sunday and it would be a convenience for them.

● (1245)

The Chair: Madam Redman, please.

Hon. Karen Redman: I have just two points.

I would like to clarify that I was in no way trying to put a price tag on democracy, but saying that if we're going to spend \$34 million, what's the best result for that investment?

Do any of you know whether studies have been done if we were to suggest a Saturday? I think there are some provinces, and certainly some countries, where they vote on a Saturday. Was Saturday ever looked at? It may be a way to deal with some of the comments we heard from religious groups who objected to having the polling stations in their place of worship on the day they actually worship.

To Mr. Loewen and associate, was there any ability or any attempt to characterize the influx and the increase in advance polling in the last election as being due to the fact of the time of year it was, the fact that it was over Christmas, that weather could more likely be inclement than at other times of the year, and the fact that there would be many seniors who are snowbirds who would be looking to travelling, that it may have been a bit of an anomaly and the time of year the actual election is held may have some impact on the uptake of advance polls?

Mr. Peter John Loewen: I think that's a reasonable inference: that the fact that the weather was bad and that people travel over that period could lead to the increase in advance voting. It doesn't bear on our contention or our finding that of those people who advance-voted, 60% would not have voted otherwise. I think that's a fair estimate of how many people advance voting brings into the system generally. Whether advance voting is done by 10% of voters or 5% of voters, some significant share of those voters would not vote otherwise.

Hon. Karen Redman: Let me just clarify. Are those first-time voters who had not previously voted, or are those people who would have been on a plane to Florida on the actual day, and that's why they would not have voted, if they hadn't had the opportunity of the timing of the advance poll?

Mr. Peter John Loewen: Let me put it to you this way, and I hope this clarifies. They're people who we infer through our model would not have voted if advance voting had not been available in this election.

Hon. Karen Redman: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

That wraps up this session. I want on behalf of the committee to thank all the witnesses for the time you took to prepare for today and for the fact that you actually came here. You gave very insightful answers. On behalf of the committee, I appreciate this very much. All Canadians thank you for your work and your commitment.

You are excused. Thank you.

Colleagues, we are going to take the last few minutes. There is a meeting in this room right after us, so we have to hurry. I will mention that there have been discussions taking place, and I think we've solved the steering committee issue, in that we've agreed to meet on Monday at eleven o'clock in Room 112-N.

The issue of who participates in that committee has not been resolved; however, I feel it's important to get through that committee meeting first. The reason is, I'm not wishing to entertain motions of any kind when there is legislation before us until I am instructed by the steering committee.

If I may just drift aside for one second, I would like to apologize to Madam Redman. In my attempt to maintain civility here in the committee, I think I crossed the line, and I offer my sincerest apologies. You have my greatest respect and admiration. I apologize for the sternness of my comments. In no way did I mean them to be that way. I also apologize to members of the committee for the same reasons.

Colleagues, we have the possibility of ordering in the minister for one hour on Tuesday from eleven to twelve on Bill C-6, and from twelve to one on Bill C-18. We also have some more witnesses we will try to set up for Thursday. It looks as though we are going to have another four witnesses on this particular issue for Thursday.

Perhaps I should ask whether that's acceptable, at this stage of the game, to the committee members.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues. I appreciate that very much. We'll go ahead with that plan.

I want to remind again that Monsieur Mayrand has invited committee members to attend his office for a basic meet-and-greet and to see the facilities. The invitation is for next Wednesday evening from five to seven or Thursday evening from five to seven. I haven't heard from any members.

Mr. Reid, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: As the first one around the table, I'll just mention that on Wednesday I have been and some others may have been invited to dinner with the Speaker that evening.

• (1250)

The Chair: Fair enough.

Is Thursday the better day? I doubt we're going to get everybody there; that's going to be next to impossible. Is Thursday the better day for members?

Can I have a show of hands for Thursday? Then we'll try for Wednesday, and I'll just make it for whichever day the most can make it.

It is Thursday the 29th or Wednesday the 28th.

Monsieur Guimond.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): On Thursday, the call of the return home will be heard loud and clear. I don't know whether that's the case for my

colleagues who live a little further away, but it's the case for me. I have a plane at 5:25 p.m., a direct flight to Quebec City. I'd like to go, but Thursday is absolutely not a good day for me.

[English]

The Chair: We're seeing mixed reviews here.

Mr. Angus, did you have a comment?

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm sorry. Just to get up to speed.... Some of this committee work I'm doing for Monsieur Godin, so I'm not really sure. I'll have to convey this information.

What is this meeting?

The Chair: It's really very informal. Monsieur Mayrand is the new Chief Electoral Officer, and he has extended an invitation for the committee members to simply go to the elections office and have a look around; it's a meet-and-greet kind of affair.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay.

The Chair: Madam Redman, please.

Hon. Karen Redman: I don't know whether you want to do a show of hands, Gary, but I could do Thursday; I can't do Wednesday. I don't know whether you want to offer both dates and see what people—

The Chair: How many people think they could make Wednesday?

I have four.

How many people can make Thursday?

I have two.

So we're going to inform Monsieur Mayrand that it's Wednesday.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Further on this point, Mr. Mayrand has been very generous, and I suspect he threw out the two dates intending to be accommodating to us. I expect that if he's faced with the prospect of neither of the dates working he might actually show greater generosity, and in fact I'm certain that would be his intention. He might actually have other dates a bit later on that are available. I have a suspicion that the further out we actually have the discussion from the date, the more people can arrange not to have conflicts. Maybe we could try that, if it's a possibility.

The Chair: Yes, and I think that's a good idea. Things always seem to pop up. I'm sure we can't get all committee members no matter what date we pick, but I will mention that to him. You are quite right, I'm sure he will extend the offer, and perhaps he'll even agree to do the option for the other members as well at another date. I'll entertain both with Mr. Mayrand, and I'll mention it to the committee by way of a notice.

Finally, the last thing I want to mention to members is the Ethics Commissioner has also requested, if you remember, showing up at the end of a meeting for 15 minutes or 20 minutes, again as a very informal way of meeting. We have a new Ethics Commissioner, and she would like to present herself to the committee at the end of a meeting. If no one disagrees, I'm going to offer next Thursday after the panel of witnesses that we will hear. We are inviting four, and my guess is we could get four, but more likely we'll have three. So if it's okay with the committee, it seems fair that we invite her for the Thursday for the final 15 minutes or 20 minutes of that meeting. Are there any objections to that?

Mr. Preston, no objections?

Mr. Joe Preston: No objection. I just had a comment.

Next Thursday we will be seeing further witnesses. Is that nearing the end of our witness list, or will there be a never-ending never-ending?

The Chair: I believe we're at the end at that point. We are expecting a report from Monsieur Blanchet, but other than that this is the end of the witness list. I'm hoping we can wrap up our study of this bill Thursday, and we can consider clause-by-clause following Thursday's meeting, but we'll leave that up to the committee.

Mr. Joe Preston: It's not that I'm trying to deny—

The Chair: I understand.

Mr. Joe Preston: I certainly would have anybody we have. I'm just wondering if there are more coming on a list.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Joe Preston: I hear there are more coming.

The Chair: If there are any other witnesses, we're very lenient, and we want to make sure we do this job well. Just get them to us, hopefully no later than four o'clock today, but I don't suspect we have any other witnesses.

We're good for the Ethics Commissioner on that Thursday. Everybody is okay with that? Thank you, colleagues, very much. That certainly cleans...

Yes, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: At the beginning of the committee meeting I had put forward a motion to change the composition of—

The Chair: At the beginning of this meeting?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes.

At the beginning of the committee meeting I had put forward a motion to change the composition of the steering committee. You'll understand why I want to raise it now: there'd be no further meetings of this group until after the steering committee meets. Could we now move to consideration of that?

The Chair: I'm going to say no. The meeting is about to end, and just like other motions where we have legislation before us, I'm going to wait and have this discussion with the steering committee on whether we're going to stop studying legislation to consider motions. With all due respect, given that we only have four minutes left in this meeting, I am going to take into consideration two things; one is that we all agreed that we would do legislation before motions. I respect the motion, the motion is on the table, but I am going to set it aside until we receive further direction from the steering committee.

● (1255)

Mr. Scott Reid: If I might, Mr. Chairman, perhaps I will not get a chance to speak to the members of the steering committee prior to their consideration of it. I simply want to make the following observation, which I think is germane.

The Chair: I'll allow that.

Mr. Scott Reid: The steering committee is currently seized by a number of issues, but one of them is the question of how to deal with an issue that pits the three opposition parties, who are trying to ensure that we have a review of the practices of one party and one party only, against the other party's position, the government's position, which is that we should be engaged in a review of all of the parties. If only those who are on one side of the issue—

The Chair: Point of order, please.

I knew this was going to happen. Mr. Reid, I don't mean to cut you off, but if I could just make a comment maybe we can solve it.

Mr. Scott Reid: This is not intended to put anybody down; I simply want to make a point about fairness. I appreciate Monsieur Guimond has a very intelligent point of order to make. I was about to conclude simply by saying it will ensure greater fairness.

The Chair: Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: We have a good expression in French: Mr. Reid is trying to put the toothpaste back in the tube. We've previously adopted routine motions determining the composition of the steering committee. So Mr. Reid shouldn't start a debate on the subject.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. I don't see a point there. That isn't a point of order; we're getting into debate, and I won't allow it.

Are there any other discussions that have to do with business?

May I entertain a motion to adjourn?

Some hon members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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