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Chair

Mr. Gary Goodyear

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC)): Colleagues, let's bring our meeting to order.

We have limited time today. I would like to remind members that at the end of this meeting there are two things that I wish to happen. One is that we need to leave some time for committee business, some of which has carried over from the last meeting and some of which is just standard committee business. As well, colleagues, I want to remind you that Mary Dawson, the Conflict of Interest Code and Ethics Commissioner, has asked to meet with the committee. She will be bringing some of her colleagues, and we will leave time for that at the end. Depending on how the meeting goes, we may suspend to do that informal meeting and then resume the meeting, or perhaps the meeting will have found its natural conclusion and we will conclude the meeting and then meet with Ms. Dawson. We'll see how that goes.

I want to remind members that pursuant to the committee's order of reference of Thursday, November 7, 2007, the committee is here to study Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (expanded voting opportunities) and to make a consequential amendment to the Referendum Act.

Colleagues, again we are dealing with three different bills at the same time, so I just want to refresh your memory that today we are on Bill C-16.

I want to introduce our witnesses, whom I appreciate very much attending without handcuffs or warrants. We do appreciate the fact that you have made, in Mr. Docherty's case, a second attempt to attend the meeting. The dean of arts at Wilfrid Laurier University, colleagues, you might remember, was scheduled for last week, but the weather did not allow for that. So we certainly appreciate your second attempt, and it appears to be quite successful.

Mr. Pammett, we appreciate your being here as well. Mr. Pammett is with the political sciences department at Carleton University, where my son used to attend. So it's an absolute privilege to have you here.

I will allow our witnesses a couple of minutes to introduce themselves to the members of the committee. If you have an opening statement, you're certainly welcome to do that, and then, colleagues, we will open it to the usual round of questions, seven minutes for the first round, and we'll see how we do with that.

Perhaps we can start, Mr. Docherty, with you, please.

Mr. David Docherty (Dean of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University, As an Individual): Thank you very much. Thank you for the kind invitation to appear. I will say that I managed to raise quite a few eyebrows yesterday when I told my colleagues I was going to Parliament Hill to appear in front of a committee at 11 a.m.

I realize I only have a few minutes, so I'll keep my comments short. I did manage to make some notes that you can look at.

Most of my comments deal more specifically with some of the advance polls, in terms of "not the day before", and I know my colleague Dr. Pammett will be maybe making some comments on the Sunday before the election day poll, and I'm happy to answer those questions. I thought I'd just take this opportunity to make a couple of quick comments about advance polls in general, and also on part of the title of the act, increase the opportunities to vote, and to make some general comments about other things this committee may wish to look at or other considerations in terms of increasing voter turnout.

I think the best way to look at the first purpose of any of these changes is this. Will these changes create the kinds of things we want, or what might some of the unintended consequences be? If, at the end of the day, the consequences are larger or more detrimental than the purpose, we might decide to tackle the problem from a different perspective. However, if the purposes are achieved with minimal problems, then certainly this process is worthwhile.

So what do we know? As members of this committee know, more and more Canadians who vote are voting in advance polls, but while the number of Canadians voting is going down, the number of voting Canadians who vote prior to election day is increasing. According to Elections Canada data, we now have over 1.56 million Canadians voting in advance polls, so this is becoming an increasingly large number of Canadians and a larger number of the electorate. It's an important constituency and it's a growing constituency.

The question is this. Will increasing the number of advance polling days actually increase voter turnout in Canada? Unfortunately, I'm not convinced it will. First, in the absence of any good survey data, we know very little about who actually votes in advance polls in Canada. Barry Kay and Chris Cattle, in a piece they did for the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, argued that differences in advance polls and poll results on the election day results—

•(1110)

The Chair: Madame Picard.

[Translation]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Excuse me, but could we ask the witness to slow down a bit, because the interpreters are having difficulty keeping up.

[English]

The Chair: Perhaps you could slow down a bit, Mr. Docherty. My apologies, Mr. Docherty.

Mr. David Docherty: No, my apologies.

The Chair: I'll tell you what. I think I should accept blame for that. I told you two or three minutes. I don't tend to cut off witnesses, so, please, take your time.

Mr. David Docherty: It's not been the first time I've been told I talk too quickly.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madame Picard.

Mr. David Docherty: It's one of the politest times I've been told.

Barry Kay and Chris Cattle argue that differences between advance poll results and election day results in 2004 suggested there was a swing against the Conservative Party. Their argument was essentially that we may want to look at advance polls as an indication of whether things occur between advance polls and election days that change voters' minds.

Tony Hill at MIT looked back even further and argued that between 1979 and 2004, the Conservative Party, or its predecessors, tended to do better in advance polls. Hill suggested that 2004 was not an anomaly and there might not necessarily have been things occurring among the public between the advance polls and election day to change their minds.

We do know, based on advance polling, that Conservatives tend to fare well outside of Quebec and that Liberals have traditionally done better in Quebec in advance polls than election day polls. We also know that advance polling is higher in New Brunswick than in other provinces, and that in Ontario, advance polling is highest in the Ottawa area. We don't know why this is, but the numbers we look at have been able to tell us this.

The problem I have is that I'm not sure what any of this means. It could just be election day effects. The 2004 election took place in late June. How many voters wanted to vote early as a result of holiday plans? We don't know. The 2006 election took place in winter. How many of the 1.56 million advance pollers decided to take advantage of good weather and advance polling days and not risk voting in possible bad weather on election day? We don't know the answer to these questions.

If we extend the hours and have more advance polls, will this number increase? Again, we're not sure. What I would caution against is having too many advance polls well before election day. I like the idea of extended hours right before election day. I think the notion that we should have more advance polls and should extend the hours immediately prior to election day is actually a good thing. I'm not convinced it will increase voter turnout by those individuals who might not otherwise vote, but if it makes it more convenient for those individuals who are committed to voting, then I think even this step is one in the right direction.

So, by all means, I support this legislation. My own view is that it does much more good than harm.

I would also suggest doing some survey work. I know Elections Canada is loathe to engage in election day surveying, but it might be helpful to find out whom these individuals are and what percent make up their minds to vote on voting day. It might also be helpful to know if they are committed individuals who would have voted otherwise or if the advance polls are the things getting them out to vote.

I would also suggest that we revisit other methods of increasing voter turnout. The permanent voters list is often pointed to as one of the biggest problems in getting new voters out and in having up-to-date lists. I think there's an awful lot to be said for this; perhaps it's time to revisit the permanent voters list and return to door-to-door enumeration. It's more expensive, but, quite frankly, democracy is not cheap, and I think if we're really committed to increasing voter turnout, we have to look beyond just advance polls.

Your proposals also talk about institutional change. I'll be very, very quick here. I think there are also cultural changes going on. As part of my own work, I've noticed you can almost track decreasing voter turnout with decreasing newspaper readership. Newspaper sales go down at exactly the same rate as voter turnout goes down. There's nothing anybody in this room can do about that, but I think it's worth reflecting on in terms of how political messages are getting out and how we engage voters.

Finally, I'd like to make my own little pitch about youth voting. As a professor who talks to students all the time, most of the studies I've been able to look at suggest that if youth don't vote by the age of 25, they're not going to vote at all, or it's very, very difficult to get them to vote. I think all of us, academics and politicians, have a job to do to engage youth. One thing that concerns me is hearing politicians of all stripes using the word "taxpayers" when they really mean "citizens". This turns off the youth too quickly; essentially, they're saying to university students and others under the age of 25, come back to us when you have a job.

Citizenship talks about a two-way level of responsibility, a responsibility of politicians and the state to citizens, but also a responsibility of citizens to the state. I would encourage all of us to increasingly use the words "citizenship" and "participation" in government, instead of "taxpayers".

Again, I have a lot more to say. I'll be happy to answer any questions, particularly about the advance polls and the day before polls. But at this stage, I'll thank you for your time and turn it over to my colleague, Jon Pammett.

● (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Professor Pammett.

Professor Jon Pammett (Political Science, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you.

My affiliation is with the political science department at Carleton. For many years I've worked on studies of voting, with a kind of sideline on participation and non-voting, which in more recent years has taken more prominence than the voting in my own work.

I want to say just a couple of things in introduction here. First of all, on advance polls, we know who votes in advance polls. They're more likely to be older and they're more likely to be people who are determined to vote, who are taking opportunities to get their votes in. So increasing the number of advance polls may have some effect, but the people who are attending them are people who are generally likely to be voting anyway.

The main problem with turnout is, of course, with younger cadres of newly eligible citizens. We have done quite a number of surveys of young people, voters and non-voters, and we do know some things about why young people don't vote. One of those things might be addressed by the changes being proposed in this bill; maybe a couple of others will not.

The kind of thing that young people who don't vote give as a reason, one of the things that really differentiates them from older non-voters is their propensity to say they don't vote because they're too busy. Now, leaving aside the question of whether they're really more busy than the rest of us, the question would be, what does this mean? I think there are really three things it can mean.

First of all, it can mean they perceive themselves to be very busy. I'm not saying young people aren't busy; I know very well many of them are studying. They run one or two jobs at the same time. They can be busy. They perceive themselves to be too busy to take the time to go on election day.

Secondly, though, I think this busyness hides an unwillingness of young people to cast an ill-informed vote, and this I think speaks in some way to their credit. They don't want to vote because they don't really know enough. They haven't studied who the parties are, what they're saying, and so on. So there's a kind of knowledge gap or knowledge lack that is behind this busyness rhetoric.

The third thing is lack of interest. Politics is marginal. They're not very interested in voting.

Of those three things, in providing for more opportunities, the bill might address the first one, that is, people who genuinely perceive themselves to be too busy to go out on a workday, on a weekday, could very well be enticed to go out to vote on this Sunday prior to the election. So I would say that it could have some effect.

The only other thing I wanted to say is that in my reading of the bill, it does strike me that it proposes to set up what I think is a unique election system. I don't know of any other country in the world that would have, in effect, a two-day election period.

So my question is this. Why call this an advance poll? Why not simply bill it as a change to a two-day election period and give publicity? This might entice more people to take it seriously rather than calling an advance poll.

At any rate, I think it's an interesting idea, and it might go some way to increasing turnout.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

Colleagues, we'll start with our first round of questioning. Normally we do seven minutes, but would it be acceptable if we

cut that back to five minutes to make sure we get as many questioners up as possible? Are there any objections to five minutes?

Thank you very much. Let's go to a five-minute round, beginning with Madam Robillard. You might want to talk amongst your colleagues and get your questions short, and let's get as many of them as we possibly can.

Madam Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming to meet with us today, gentlemen.

I am sure you understand that all of the political parties have the same desire, or the same objective — to increase voter participation. However, we are lacking research data for taking the right measures and making sure they are effective.

Mr. Docherty, on page 2 of the French version of your presentation, you seem to be saying that we have to avoid having too many advance polls before election day. You seem rather to favour increasing or extending voting hours.

I have a very specific question to ask you. Instead of adding two advance poll days, as Bill C-16 proposes, if we increase the voting hours on the three advance poll days we have now, and the number of places where people can vote, do you think those two factors would likely produce results in terms of voter turnout?

[*English*]

Mr. David Docherty: Yes, it's a very good question.

I think my real concern is having too many advance polls well prior to election day because I think we lose the ebb and flow of an election. We lose the build-up of an election and the dialogue that takes place among individuals, among Canadians. So to answer your specific question, yes, if we were to increase the number of hours on the advance polls and increase the locations of the advance polls, then we would go a long way to making it easier for individuals to vote in advance polls. I'm not opposed to the two extra days that this bill presents. My fear is that we might open the floodgates to say that every day is voting day once the writ is dropped. So I think we want to be very careful about when we have those advance polls, and I would certainly be more in favour of longer hours and more polling locations than too many more advance polling days.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: I understand. We are wondering about that.

You know that this bill will involve a cost of \$34 million. Is there a better way to use that \$34 million, for example by increasing the hours and the number of polling stations? These are the kinds of questions we are asking ourselves around this table.

Mr. Pammett, do you have any comments on the same question?

[English]

Prof. Jon Pammett: My focus, I think, would not be on doing much to increase the advance polling days prior to the stage just before the election. I like the idea of focusing on that and opening all the polling stations, as this bill proposed to do. I would suggest opening them for the regular election hours. I believe the bill proposes to start them at noon, which I think is later than the regular hours, and to close them at eight. So that might be a shorter time period. I don't see why it wouldn't be sensible to just use the normal election day time period and focus on that day. I think that would have the maximum impact.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Do you know whether there is research that proves that voters would get out more to vote on Sunday than on Monday?

[English]

Prof. Jon Pammett: Yes. There is research that shows the countries that do hold elections on weekends...and there are quite a number of countries that either hold elections on weekend days or declare election day a holiday. I believe there's a study, by André Blais, which is available to this committee, that goes into this in some detail.

• (1125)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Yes.

Prof. Jon Pammett: Are you familiar with that one? It's detailed there where a lot of these places are, and indeed, these are associated with higher turnout weekend voting.

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Lukiwski, five minutes, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing here.

I must say, Mr. Docherty, that I found your brief very interesting. I have a couple of points, and then I'll just get you to maybe comment on a couple of your observations.

Number one, I think you concur with a number of other witnesses we've had here. While the bill before us, Bill C-16, is not going to be perfect—it's not going to dramatically increase voter turnout—it's probably better than nothing. It's going to, at least, in your opinion, marginally increase, incrementally increase, and I think it's important for all of us to know here that the intent of this bill is to try to increase voter turnout.

If you want to get into an argument, well, it doesn't increase it enough. I'm not sure how relevant that is, but I think most witnesses agree this will have an effect of increasing the voter turnout.

I'd like to concentrate on a couple of your comments, your observations. The first thing is that although you probably, correctly, assume that Elections Canada is maybe loath to do the surveys, I think it also would be very interesting to see a survey of some empirical evidence, in other words, of how many people actually make their voting decisions on voting day. I think for future legislation that might be very interesting to know.

You may want to comment on that, but what I do want to ask you particularly about is your observation that perhaps the permanent voters list may not be the best way to go, and perhaps we should consider going back to the door-to-door enumeration. I guess my observation would be that I don't think the door-to-door enumeration would necessarily improve the permanent voters system, because I can give you an example of what happened back in Saskatchewan, and I know witnesses coming after you will perhaps attest to that.

We found that in certain sections of Regina, when we provincially do door-to-door enumeration, when we got the voters list out and all candidates took a look at it, in many elections we would have actually blocks upon blocks of communities that were not enumerated. I would go to certain areas—maybe 10, 12, or 15 houses in a row—that were not on the voters list, yet we knew there were people there.

So I went to Elections Saskatchewan and said, “Why is that? Are you guys just getting sloppy? Didn't you enumerate?” They said, “No, the problem is these people won't come to the door. Many times we knocked on the doors, and we can see people inside the house, but because of the time of day, they were afraid to come and answer the door.” So I think that's going to be a problem, frankly, in a lot of urban centres, where we have the same fear of one's safety.

Therefore, I think to get more and more people actually on the voters list, we need to have maybe a hybrid between some form of a permanent voters list and maybe special enumerations.

I'd just like to get comments from both of you on what you think might be an answer to getting more and more people registered to vote, because I think that is one of the more serious problems we face.

Mr. David Docherty: First of all, it's nice to appear before a committee where everybody has the same goal, so this is really a great opportunity.

To clarify remarks, Elections Canada I think is loath to engage in an election-day survey of people who voted. I just want to make that clear. They actually do a lot of good surveying to try to increase the vote, so I didn't want that to be read as a criticism of Elections Canada, and there are reasons why they don't want to do exit polling, essentially. A lot of the national election surveys have indicated how many people make up their mind on voting day, or two or three days beforehand, so the committee may want to take a look at some of those national election surveys.

In terms of increasing voter turnout, yes, I think one of the important things is that we have to make sure that Canadians have more opportunities to vote. So if they do not vote, not to necessarily say we can lay the blame on them, but at least they can't say we didn't give them enough opportunity. I think this bill goes a long way to improving the opportunities that every Canadian has to engage in the democratic system, and for that I absolutely support it. So I'd say that.

In terms of door-to-door enumeration, yes, there are problems in terms of getting people to answer doors. Certainly all of you have worked on your own campaigns and knocked on doors. Depending on which neighbourhood you go to, some people don't answer their doors. I do think, though, and I have the beauty of tenure to be able to say this, that door-to-door enumeration is very, very expensive. Democracy is not about saving money, so the \$34 million this is going to cost is well worth it. If it costs a few more million to do door-to-door enumeration, or a hybrid, as you say, I'm all in favour of that. My fear with the permanent voters list is that it does actually impact those Canadians who tend to move more, therefore those people who don't own houses. It also impacts new voters and new Canadians, and I think that's part of the biggest problem.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Professor Pammett, did you want to make a brief comment? We are out of time on that round.

Prof. Jon Pammett: I will comment on a couple of these items.

On the matter of when people make up their minds, the national election surveys have shown almost from the beginning that about a quarter of the people who vote claim to make up their minds on election day or very shortly before. Presumably, when the stimulus occurs, they will make a decision. This kind of last-minute decision-making will occur when they are there at the polls.

I don't think I have any comments on enumeration per se, since there's no change being proposed in this bill. Elections Canada certainly does a certain amount of what they call targeted enumerations to try to fill in these gaps, and I'm sure they will continue to do that.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues.

May I remind you to keep comments short and questions succinct? We're dealing, again, with advance polling opportunities versus enumerations, which is a great conversation. That is another bill we will be dealing with very shortly.

Monsieur Paquette is next for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentations.

Listening to your testimony, I observe that your conclusion is the same one reached by experts, university professors and people who have been studying Canadian politics for a long time whom we heard earlier.

In a document entitled "Potential Impacts of Extended Advance Voting on Voter Turnout", Mr. Blais and his colleagues concluded, and I quote, "We conclude that Bill C-55 is likely to increase voter turnout in Canada, but the magnitude of this effect is likely to be small."

You said yourself just now, in your presentation, "Will increasing the number of advance polling days actually increase voter turnout in Canada? Unfortunately, I'm not convinced it will."

So to date, no one is truly convinced that this will have a significant effect. In the study I referred to earlier, we were told by researchers that adding one advance polling day, it being an additional advance polling day we are talking about, the Sunday, would increase voter turnout for the election by about 200,000 votes and, once again, at a cost of \$34 million. Obviously, I agree with you that you can't put a price on democracy, but it seems to me that this \$34 million, as you said, could be put to better use.

I will put two things to you, since we do not have much time.

First, given that the studies are not conclusive, would it not be better to ask the Chief Electoral Officer to implement this measure in the next by-election, on an experimental basis, as a pilot project? The problem is not extending the hours at polling stations for the advance polls we already have, it is creating a polling day before election day. So would it not be preferable to do a few experiments in by-elections and draw a conclusion from them, based on a report that could be submitted to us? At that point, if the measure seems to have had a significant positive impact in terms of voter turnout, it could be implemented, rather than doing it right away and doing the studies later. That is what Mr. Mayrand said, in fact.

I am going to ask you one more question and then I will let you answer.

Because one of the problems, and you both referred to it, is turnout among young people, would it not be better simply to set up polling stations and revisal offices right in Canadian universities, where young people who are entitled to vote are?

So I asked you one question about a pilot project and another one about setting up polling stations in universities. Tell us your answers, because he is going to cut us off.

[*English*]

Mr. David Docherty: I don't think by-elections are a good test, in the sense that political parties put an awful lot of resources into by-elections, and they're targeted. If you look at the patterns of victories in by-elections versus victories in the subsequent elections or defeats by party, they're not necessarily the best test, so I would be a little bit cautious about reading things into that. Given the push that parties can have to pull out the vote during by-elections, they'll probably be making greater use of advance polls than they might during a general election. It's probably not a bad thing to do, but I would be very cautious about interpreting the results of that.

In terms of Canadian universities, I think Elections Canada is doing a very good job of trying to make it easier for students to vote. I think more could be done, but I think all those notions about... Certainly the fixed election date may actually help a lot of that, because once we have fixed election dates, if they're during a school term, we can move ahead and look at ways that Elections Canada can start to spur the vote. I think some of that might be taken care of by the fixed election dates.

• (1135)

Prof. Jon Pammett: I don't think I have anything to add on this question.

The Chair: I'm very impressed.

Monsieur Paquette, you have one minute left.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: No, that's fine.

[English]

The Chair: You're good? Thank you very much.

Mr. Angus, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you. Certainly the discussions we've been having on this bill have been very interesting, and they make us wonder if perhaps we should be writing a whole other bill here to deal with voting as opposed to strictly the issue at hand, because it has raised a lot of questions. We've received some answers and a general sense.

I think there is a general agreement that advance polling works, that people prefer it, that it is serving a number of needs out there for the change we've seen in our voting public. The question we keep coming back to is the element of changing what is not really an advance day but a full-out election day on the Sunday before, which would be a fairly dramatic change in how we have held voting in the past. Certainly there are questions culturally—a whole series of questions.

What we've heard from Elections Canada is that they figure the result of that will be a marginal change, if anything, given all the other opportunities to vote. Have either of you looked at the problems that would arise because elections are run with volunteers? Elections Canada has to find people out there. There is certainly anecdotal evidence that it would be problematic to be able to pull the vote full out for two straight days. Have you looked at this element and at whether or not that would be a problem?

Prof. Jon Pammett: No. I'm not quite sure how one would look into it. Elections Canada are the people who are in the best position to know whether they can get the proper personnel in place to run such a two-day event, and presumably what the added costs would be. I suppose the facilities are already established and are already provided for and rented. That would not be an added cost. It would be mostly personnel costs and personnel availability, but I don't know how one would actually research such a hypothetical future.

Mr. David Docherty: I would say the same as Jon. I don't have much more to add about that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Right. The question that comes back—I know we're not really here talking about enumeration, but it was raised—is the question of how best to ensure bang for the buck. We're going to have a whole bunch of advance polls. It's going to grab a certain amount of the population who might not otherwise vote. We keep going back to young people and whether or not letting them vote full out on Sunday is going to dramatically increase that vote—I'd say that is highly questionable—and whether or not we should be putting that money into a voters list or enumeration, at least in universities, to try to engage young people to make sure they're on a list and that there has been contact. We keep coming back to the fact that young people aren't voting, but there does seem to be a real disconnect about how we're reaching them and how we're working with them. Can we actually go out there and say that if they can vote on Sunday, that's going to solve the problem? I don't think we can say that.

In your experience, do you think Sunday would have an effect either way on the youth vote?

Prof. Jon Pammett: Personally, I think it would have some effect, but I don't think any one of us is maintaining that this would have a dramatic effect or that it would solve the problem in some sense. It might be an incremental benefit. I don't think it needs to be an either/or situation. The other things that are mentioned about improving registration, improving access, more polling stations, all of these I think would help as well, but since this bill is directed at this particular suggestion, I am simply indicating that I personally think this would have some impact.

Mr. David Docherty: I agree. In the absence of any hard data, we can't make any definitive conclusions. I think it would improve things. How dramatically, I don't know. Certainly, at the risk of being on the record, if it's the youth we're after, we don't have to open the polling stations before noon on Sunday—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Docherty: —but I think opening on Sunday would help.

• (1140)

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a final quick question. We had a fairly universal negative response from the church leaders who spoke, number one, for cultural, for faith reasons, but also because churches are locations for polling. I don't know what the numbers were—10% to 15% of our locations. They were pretty emphatic that this wasn't on, as far as they were concerned, on Sundays in their locations. Does this mean that we just cut them out of the picture altogether, or do we take that into account as something we have to factor into the balance when we're making this decision about full-out Sunday voting?

Prof. Jon Pammett: I take the point about the churches as polling places, but you have more access to schools, or better access to schools, on Sunday, and maybe that would be a trade-off that could operate.

Mr. David Docherty: I would agree. I think that's a concern.

The other concern is that if this does become a second full day of elections, then we have to think about media blackouts and pollings and all those other kinds of implications that follow along with it. When one can report polling results, and all those kinds of things, presumably would have to be backed up as well if this does become essentially a second full day of voting or a day before voting.

There's a whole series of other things. Polling locations is one, media blackouts, results of polls, and all those kinds of things have to be taken into consideration.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues. That ends this round.

We're going to go to our next round. I'm going to try to hold it to three minutes. If you don't have a question, that's great.

I stand to be corrected, but I do believe the Chief Electoral Officer said there were 2,000 polls in churches out of 64,000 polling stations across Canada.

Madam Redman, you're up. If you can be as brief as you can, that would be great.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Am I splitting with Marcel?

The Chair: I'm going to give some leniency to this issue because I don't want to cut any questions off, but we do have another set of witnesses.

Madam Redman is first.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): On a point of order, is this the last round?

The Chair: It may have to be the last round.

Hon. Karen Redman: I want to thank the witnesses for coming. I know specifically Dr. Docherty got stuck in an airport when he tried to do this last time.

I have three parts to my question, and I'll put them out quickly.

We were told that it would be about a \$34 million cost. I agree with Dr. Docherty that you can't put a price on democracy. Having said that, I guess one of the challenges from where I sit is, is this the best use of that money given that the intention is for greater voter participation?

Most of us around this table have looked at the mandatory voting in Australia and the mandatory voter registration in New Zealand. One of the issues I don't think has been discussed enough, and it's a related issue to another bill, is a voter ID card universally.

I was wondering if you could briefly comment on those, as briefly as you choose to, as other ways that we may be able to encourage voter participation. I agree with you about the permanent list; I think there has to be something done about it.

Mr. David Docherty: Maybe Jon is better geared to talk about the voter ID card.

In terms of the \$34 million and is this the best use of money, I think we haven't even talked about electronic voting. That's such a huge issue. I think this is a far better first step than going down that road at this stage, because I think there are all kinds of problems that would have to be addressed with it. I think \$34 million spent on this is probably better. I can't imagine how much it would cost to institute a secure, safe electronic voting system. In terms of this, I think it's probably a pretty good use of money.

In terms of the permanent voters list, I know Belgium has it. Earlier studies suggested that most Canadians voted in one of three elections. Jon may have more up-to-date data than that in terms of whether mandatory voting would solve some of that problem or not.

Prof. Jon Pammett: Mandatory voting would certainly solve the problem. Of course, generally, public opinion doesn't favour it, so I think it's a lost cause to be promoting it in our case.

Australia votes on Saturdays, and of course when they have the mandatory voting it's difficult to disentangle the voting. But I've certainly heard the chief electoral officer of Australia talk about how they get at least half the vote before noon on Saturdays, when people are out doing their marketing or whatever. If there are objections to Sundays, you could consider a Saturday solution. Of course, that wouldn't butt up against a Monday election, but Friday-Saturday would work.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Redman.

Monsieur Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you.

I have two quick questions, and I haven't got time to thank you for being here.

The first question. When you're talking of statistics in regard to why the participation is higher one day than the other, whether it be summer or winter, do you not think that's relative to the efforts made by the individual parties? Do you not think this is a show of strength or weakness on the part of the parties, in the sense that they get their people out there to vote? That's number one.

My number two question is on the \$34 million. I don't want to talk about enumeration because the chair is going to cut me off. However, our system is based on the fact that people are on the list or they're not on the list. The ones who are on the list are aware of what's happening. They're getting documentation in the mail and they know that there's something happening, so they look into it.

I grant it that there is advertising in newspapers, television, the whole shebang, but I'm not convinced that people who are not on the list, whether they be young people or much older, are actually grabbing what's happening with the messages on TV and in the newspapers. I believe that if they were receiving a postcard or a letter addressed to them personally they'd be much more hooked into the voting system.

I just want to have your long comments on this because he's going to cut me off.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

The Chair: That was very slick.

Mr. David Docherty: In terms of the advance polls and the weather and the election-specific effects, we don't know. One can only intuitively assume that in a winter election, the parties were probably telling the voters they had identified as core voters that if the weather was nice, they should get out there to vote, and here are the advance polls. They're pulling their vote in the advance polls because you don't know...

Those are election-specific effects. Is that why we had more voter turnout in advance polls in 2006 than in 2004? Probably, but that's the only answer we can give in the absence of empirical data.

Jon, did you want to talk about it?

Prof. Jon Pammett: I'm not quite sure what subject I'm being asked to address here.

Regarding your comments on the list, young voters can get on the list by registering at the polls on election day. The problem there is that it's an extra deterrent. No card comes in the mail if you're not already on the list, so you're not given that reminder. Requiring an extra step for people for whom going out might be a marginal decision is an extra problem. A lot of young people do mention this as a reason for not voting, if they're not on the list.

The Chair: Mr. Reid is next.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both our witnesses for being here.

As a former political science student at Carleton University, I somehow managed to go through the entire thing without ever being in one of your classes, Professor Pammett, and that was probably my misfortune.

I can concur with the insight that for the purposes of getting my vote, there was certainly no need to open the polls on Sundays before noon when I was a student, that's for sure.

I agree with you as well on the problems of the permanent voters list. I got a bit of an insight into this when, inexplicably, between 2004 and 2006 I went from being one voter to three voters on the list. I was living alone, but Scott Reid, Jeffery Reid, and Scott Jeffery Reid were all recorded as living at my address. It's a whole new and different kind of expanded voter opportunity there for you.

Anyway, I've been thinking about why certain people and certain groups come out and vote at advance polls. They're not a simple cross-section of society: seniors come out much more. I'm guessing it has something to do with the same reason seniors get all their Christmas shopping done early; they are able to structure their lives because fewer contingencies arise to throw off their schedule, such as a hockey practice for the kids being changed or something unexpected happening. Those are just the kinds of things that go on when you're a parent and you're earlier on in life.

Given that observation, it strikes me that you'll find that it's certain kinds of seniors—younger seniors, those who are more mobile. I don't know that for a fact; I simply suspect it.

I wanted to ask about the idea of voting at advance polls that are open at all locations. My impression—and it's just an impression, but it seems logical to me, and I wonder if you think I'm right in this—is that people who do not have the mobility to get to advance polls, which may be located far from home and at only a few centralized locations, would be more likely to take advantage of advance polls if they were open at all locations.

I'm thinking here, for example, of students, who typically don't have cars; people who are homeless; shut-in seniors, who may rely upon a family member to come from a different area and drive them to their polling station; those who are handicapped; and those who have similar sorts of needs. In theory, they can vote by other means earlier on, but that doesn't always happen.

Do you agree that this group would likely benefit more than other groups in society from a wider range of locations for advance polling?

• (1150)

Mr. David Docherty: Very quickly, I would just say yes. People who vote in advance polls, we seem to indicate, have higher socio-economic status, meaning they not only know where the advance polls are but also have better means to get there. So if you increase the locations for advance polls and they're closer to where they would normally vote, then yes, you'll probably catch a larger group of those individuals. Whether they would vote because of that or not,

we don't know, but the opportunity is certainly much greater for those individuals.

Prof. Jon Pammett: Yes, I agree with the premise to that question.

I started off by saying that people who vote at advance polls were determined to vote, and part of this determination involves finding out where the few advance polls really are. I mean, it's not entirely obvious where they would be. Having them open at all locations at one particular time would I think encourage their use. I think it would also encourage their use by younger people, as well as by the older people who now are more likely to seek out advance polls.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Reid: Am I out of time?

The Chair: Yes, you are. I'm sorry.

Madame Picard, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the document we were given, entitled "Potential Impacts of Extended Advance Voting on Voter Turnout", by the holder of the Canada Research Chair in Electoral Studies, the experts say, and I quote:

The use of alternative voting methods varies from one country to another, and the expanded voting time frame of Bill C-55 would make Canada a unique case in the world. To our knowledge, only Swedish legislative electoral law provides a similar combination of voting opportunities.

I would like to review a bit of the history of advance polls. At first, they were used only for people who could not get to the polls on voting day, on "D-day". They were only for those people, because they could not vote because they were travelling outside Canada or for whatever reason. They had to state the reasons why they could not vote.

In my opinion, if there higher turnout at advance polls, it is something all the parties strongly encourage. In every riding, for every party, there is almost a race to the advance polls. I have heard people say they had to win the advance polls. So all of the volunteers who are going to work on election day vote in advance. If it is winter, they encourage people to vote at the advance polls: there are phone banks, the parties have strategies to get more and more people out to the advance polls. I think it is honest to say that. I do not believe that having two elections days is likely to encourage voter turnout.

As the chief electoral officer of Quebec said, if you really want to encourage voting on "D-day", it has to be on Sunday rather than Monday, but not two days in a row.

What do you think of all that?

• (1155)

[English]

Prof. Jon Pammett: Well, moving to a single election day on a weekend, either a Saturday or Sunday, would be an option. I think the studies worldwide, as I mentioned before, show that countries that do hold their elections on a weekend have higher turnouts. They're not all that much higher, but they can be higher. So if that were an option, I suppose you could argue for it. I'm simply addressing the proposal that's before us here.

The Chair: Professor Docherty.

Mr. David Docherty: I wouldn't have anything to add to that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Angus.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank the witnesses for attending today and for their insightful answers.

Obviously you're very well researched on the subject. We certainly appreciate the answers and the help you have given the committee to make their decisions.

I will excuse the witnesses at this point, and I will suspend the meeting so we can have our other expert witnesses come to the table.

The meeting is suspended.

• _____ (Pause) _____
•

The Chair: Colleagues, let's bring our meeting back to order. We will start with our next set of witnesses.

I want to welcome to the committee Mr. Ouellet and Mr. Wilkie. We appreciate your being here.

Colleagues, we are still discussing Bill C-16 and the issue of an advance polling day.

I'm going to invite our witnesses to take a brief moment to introduce themselves.

If you have an opening statement, you're welcome to do that. If we could keep it to two minutes or three minutes, that would be appreciated. Then we'll start our rounds of questioning.

Perhaps we could start with Monsieur Ouellet, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Ouellet (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, I am accompanied today by David Wilkie, the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer of Saskatchewan. I am Jean Ouellet, the Chief Electoral Officer of Saskatchewan.

Before I begin my remarks, I would certainly like to thank the members of the committee for inviting us to present the views of the office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Saskatchewan regarding your bill.

[English]

It is often considered that high voter turnouts are desirable, as it is generally seen as evidence of legitimacy of those who are elected;

alternatively, low turnout is associated with an inaccurate reflection of the will of the people.

The Province of Saskatchewan has just undergone its 26th general election on November 7, 2007. The preliminary calculated turnout stands at slightly over 76%. We can be very envious of that, I think. This represents an increase of approximately 5% from the last general election of November 5, 2003. Many scholars will peer over the results of this particular election—and we had two this morning—to try to find a reason or reasons for this increase, as generally turnouts are falling.

It is not my intention to second-guess the reason or reasons for this success; however, I believe that political entities and the election administrator have a role to play in securing greater participation in electoral events by eligible electors. For example, a close race between political participants will generate greater interest among voters, and political parties will find getting their votes out an easier task to accomplish.

As election administrators, we constantly look at other jurisdictions for ways to make our process more accessible to electors. Rules and laws are easier to change than attitudes. Ease of voting is certainly a factor in the rate of turnout.

Looking at Bill C-16, I believe the proposed legislation will give electors greater opportunity to exercise their franchise. With regard to the proposal for five days of advance polls, the Province of Saskatchewan already has five days of advance polls. Our period of five days is no less than one day before polling day, but no more than seven days before polling day. As a rule, it's generally one day before polling day.

Because the Province of Saskatchewan does not have a fixed day of the week for its election, depending on which day the election is called, one of those advance poll days will be on a Sunday. Sundays are generally when most voters are away from work, although this perspective is changing constantly.

The Province of Saskatchewan's electoral period is a minimum of 28 days and a maximum of 34 days, of which there are all but two days during which electors cannot cast a ballot. Those two days are the day before the start of the advance poll period and the day before election day to permit the returning officer to inform their deputy returning officer of those who have voted.

Having reviewed some of the proposed provisions of the bill from an election administrator's point of view, I would raise a few concerns that have already been echoed by Mr. Mayrand, our Chief Electoral Officer for Canada.

The conduct of the last day of the advance poll on a Sunday before election day would present some difficulties if the voting is to be carried out under a different rule than would be carried out the day following. It is more and more difficult to find workers who will accept the work for a day, let alone two consecutive days of voting. Also, let's not forget that there is a check and balance in the system, and that's the candidate's representative. They will also have two days of advance polls; they will be there for two days, and they're generally volunteers.

There could also be instances where two different sets of deputy returning officers and poll clerks may have to be hired to cover the two voting opportunities. Legislation should make sure that returning officers have all the tools to obtain the polling material from any previous poll team, should it ever be required. For example, I remember in my days when I was an assistant returning officer, where the evening before voting day, one of our DROs had a heart attack; the polling material was locked in the car and there was no way we could get that material. So if you have a ballot box that is locked in a car and you can't access it, your count will be very delayed and incomplete.

As an administrator of elections, I would like to see a provision that allows for greater flexibility for the electoral authority to determine whether a single day of voting for a specific polling place, be it on a Sunday or a Monday, would be adequate to cover all those individuals. For example, persons living in personal care facilities may not need that second day of voting opportunity. Visiting this location on two different days may become redundant.

Similarly, I feel the bill should offer some flexibility for polling places to be established at different locations on each day. Too often we think of urban voters. My province is, in large part, a rural province. Our polling divisions sometimes cover very large tracts of land. If we were to establish voting opportunities in one corner of the polling division one day and in another corner the other day, we'd have a greater chance of reaching those people.

• (1200)

In closing, I come back to the point I made earlier: ease of voting is certainly a factor in rates of turnout.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Wilkie, did you have anything further to add?

Mr. David Wilkie (Assistant Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan): No. I'll be able to help with the questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start our first round of questions. Again, I just want to remind members that because of the time, we'll stay with the five-minute round this first round.

Monsieur Proulx, five minutes, *s'il vous plaît*.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here this morning.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ouellet, I found it interesting that you have about the same objections or the same negative thoughts as the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the question of administration, particularly with respect to the two days, election day and the day before.

Do you have problems finding staff in Saskatchewan, as we have just about everywhere else in Canada? The question that was asked when the Chief Electoral Officer appeared related to precisely that, staff and remuneration. It is difficult already now, so if there are two days in a row, with two sets of rules, it will be even worse.

I like your idea of having two groups of workers, one for the day before and one for election day. On the other hand, that means that there will be three categories of workers: one group for the advance poll days, we'll call them "ordinary" or "regular", another for the Sunday before election day, and a third for election day. I imagine that this would create a pretty heavy administrative burden for the elections organization, not only in Canada, or in the province, in your case, but also for the organizations and political parties.

You gave us to understand that there are a lot of rural regions in your province. You addressed that aspect delicately, talking about the possibility of having advance polls in different places, not just in the province but in each of the ridings. If, instead of spending over \$30 million for Canada as a whole to get two more days, it were to be suggested to you that we keep the present number of days, but increase the number of places where people could vote at advance polls throughout the country, for each riding, what would you think of that?

For example, in a city with a population of 100,000, there are generally two places for advance polling, on average. What would you think if, instead of having two, there were four or five? If people in rural regions could travel five kilometres instead of 10 or 20 kilometres, do you think that this would facilitate voting and increase turnout?

Second, instead of adding days, I would like to hear your comments on the possibility of using those funds to improve communications and improve ways of reaching people who are not on the permanent list.

Mr. Jean Ouellet: There are a lot of things in play.

The reason why we have the same problems we might talk about in terms of election workers is that we have fewer and fewer workers available to do this work, particularly in the West. In the past, we had a lot of seniors or people who had a sense of civic duty and wanted to do it. Now, we very often have to make appeals on the radio to get workers, who ultimately weren't there. It is difficult, particularly in urban areas, where people are much busier.

In terms of increasing the number of places to vote, would that help? Certainly. We can reach people more easily. However, rather than increase the number of places, there are other options. For example, why not have a mobile polling station for advance polls, which would be in one rural community one day, in another community the next day, and so on? You could have that kind of mobility for advance polls.

In terms of communications, in the last election in Saskatchewan we used the radio for the first time. We had not used radio before that, but this made it possible for us to reach people on voting day.

• (1210)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to our next questioner. Mr. Preston, please, you have five minutes.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much for coming today. If it's not too late, I'd like to congratulate you on the Grey Cup victory.

A voice: Hear, hear!

Mr. Joe Preston: I did that for my friend from Saskatchewan.

Mr. Charlie Angus: It was a lousy game, though.

A voice: It was a terrible game.

Mr. Joe Preston: Sorry, did we stray from the topic, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, no.

Mr. Joe Preston: You mentioned rural areas in your comments, and my friend Mr. Proulx also mentioned them. I'd like to go a little further on that.

I come from a rural area in Ontario. Federal elections have advance polls for a number of days the week before, but there are four or five in an area that's very large. I know people drive for up to an hour to get to an advance poll, or half an hour, depending on where they live. They may choose to vote at an advance poll, but because of inconvenience they cannot.

You mentioned the possibility of mobilizing those over the course of that four-day period, which might help a little. What we're asking for, and what this bill has, is that on the Sunday before, an advance poll be held in the station where they would normally vote on the day of election. This would make it fairly convenient. In their own small community, as Mr. Proulx said, the polling station then is much closer to home. We have a very close situation, so we're looking for that turnout to be better.

You also mentioned that the busyness of rural voters is causing you some concern in finding workers. Well, the same thing happens here. The closer to home we can work, the better off we are too.

We also mentioned during the discussion that in rural Canada there are still some Sunday family activities, whether it's going to church or.... With the previous witnesses we talked about university and youth. Not everybody is away at a school. Many are away at a school during the week, but they are home on the weekend. This would give that youth the opportunity to vote close to home, because they're home on the Sunday.

I'd like to have your thought process on any of that.

If there's any time left, I know Mr. Epp would love some time.

Mr. Jean Ouellet: With respect to the length of travel, one of the problems with the advance poll federally is that you have advance districts. So x number of polls would go to a particular advance poll versus something that may be closer to home, particularly in rural areas.

Because there's a registered elector, there's no great difficulty with doing that. We would have a copy of the whole list for the entire electoral district. That would certainly be one option that could assist the process. In Saskatchewan we have advance polls and we can go to whichever one we want within the constituency.

I have proposed super polls in my last three annual reports. We would set up polls in shopping malls, in grocery stores. In Manitoba, we would set up polls in airports. We could bring the vote to the

people versus the people to the vote. That's one of the proposals I have recommended.

Mr. Joe Preston: Can anybody from any poll go through one of these? That's the plan? Okay.

Mr. Jean Ouellet: Absolutely. You vote with a write-in ballot or you can have some of those kiosk vote-ins where you have electronic voting. You select your constituency or your electoral district and then your list of candidates comes up versus the next person with the next list.

Sunday is somewhat of a convenience. In Saskatchewan, parents tend to be slaves to their children, and they go to soccer games and whatever. We have done some very informal looks at our advance polls on Sunday. We have found it doesn't change. It's just about the same as any other day. There's no greater turnout.

•(1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Preston, you have about thirty seconds left. I don't think you can do it.

Mr. Joe Preston: I know Ken is good, but I'm not sure if he's that good.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll just end up in another round where there will be opportunities for more questions.

Madame Picard, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Ouellet, Mr. Wilkie.

The Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec has provided us with his comments, because he could not be here to meet with us. He is of the same mind as you.

He said that moving election day to Sunday would solve certain problems, including the availability of premises. He pointed out some consequences that can be foreseen if Bill C-16 is enacted: the costs of this new measure, problems with recruiting election personnel for the hours that the advance polls on the day before election day are open, the availability of premises, custody of the ballots and the difficulty for personnel of clearly understanding the differences between the rules that apply the day before and the rules that apply on election day.

The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada also told us about these problems, and I note that you have made the same comments.

My question is this. Have you thought about the question of how to encourage young people to vote?

Mr. Jean Ouellet: I would like to make one brief observation on the subject of election workers. In fact, we share our provincial workers, that is, they are the same people as the ones who do the work at the federal and municipal levels. However, they mix up the rules to be applied. They apply the rules for one to the other, and so on, because they forget. If we have two different rules, one for the Sunday and the other for the Monday, we have a problem. There is a lot of creativity in the system. We have to think of that.

In terms of encouraging young people to vote, in Saskatchewan we established two initiatives, this time around. We tried to reach them. We have publications designed for young people that talk about performances that are happening, and so on. We inserted a voting guide into that newspaper, so that we could reach them. We also used workers, what are called Community Relations Officers, who go out to connect with young people at university.

So these are initiatives that we have established. It is difficult to say what their effect will be, because in my province young people have a choice. If they are attending university, they can vote based on their place of permanent residence, where their parents live, based on their university residence or based on the apartment they are renting. So no statistics are typically kept on young people.

Ms. Pauline Picard: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Angus, please, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you for your presentation this morning, Mr. Ouellet. It was very clear.

As the member for a very rural, isolated and enormous region, I am very familiar with the problem regional organizations have with finding the necessary resources and volunteers to campaign.

[*English*]

For example, in my region we have to run five separate campaigns with volunteers in every one of them. I know most of the other parties don't have any volunteers, except in one of the main communities, because the difficulty...and I'm not saying this to pat ourselves on the back. We have problems getting volunteers. But everyone is struck.

What I find with our discussion so far is that it's been very high-minded, very noble, and very disconnected from reality. Every one of us around here knows that if we simply counted on advance polling days, none of us would be here.

We get elected because we find our vote, we get our volunteers to pull that vote, and we phone our people who are strongly supportive of the vote. And at 6 o'clock, half of them haven't gone out to vote and we remind them to go out and vote. So getting the vote out is as much based on volunteers and trying to get people to come out. Every party is becoming increasingly challenged.

It raises the question: if at the end of the day we're turning to our volunteers and to our Elections Canada staff to do two full days of elections when we're already challenged to bring out enough volunteers for one day, are we actually going to see an increase in

voting, or are we going to have a more difficult time pulling our vote because we are putting more strain on the staff who are being brought forward and the volunteer base?

• (1220)

Mr. Jean Ouellet: You're very correct that the candidate's representative, and the runners as well—those people who will go and get the vote out—are an element that is required in the system. That's the check and balance you have to have.

It is very difficult. Is it money that will get the people there? I don't know. More and more, all election administrators are facing the difficulty of finding workers. We beg, we borrow, we advertise on the radio to say we need workers here and there. And we use old lists drafted by returning officers of their former workers to see if we can entice them to work. So it is very difficult.

We have to find some opportunities to bring the votes closer to the individual, such as what I proposed before, those super polls.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I guess this is the question, and I think we are all generally agreed that advance polling works. It makes it easier. It's something that all the parties can work with to remind people they can go out for so many days.

The question, though, is the efficacy of choosing the extra full day of voting that would not be bound by the exact same rules but would be very close to the rules. It would no longer be an advance poll. It would actually be a full-out voting day, but not quite the same as the other voting days.

We've found that the churches are saying, "You can use our place on Monday, but we're not going to let you in on Sunday".

From your experience in a province that has large rural representation... It seems to me the further we get out from our urban areas into trying to maintain the volunteer base and the staff for elections in the isolated rural communities, it becomes more and more difficult. Are we simply adding a layer of impracticality onto our field workers for that Sunday?

Mr. Jean Ouellet: No. I believe there will be some benefits to be drawn from it, because many times if one intends to vote on election day one does not plan to be away on election day. But there could be instances where in fact they have a death in the family or whatever, so if they have that extra day closer to election day, we would capture this vote that would not be captured otherwise.

The workers—and you're correct, we sometimes have to bring them from communities within that large tract of land, and they have to do a lot of mileage to get to their poll on election day, and the same to return the box and the electoral material and so on.

But we have no choice. This is a reality that we have to deal with. We have to find the workers, and if we say there has to be a poll in a particular location, then there has to be a poll.

In our legislation we have access to schools. If we feel that a school is a convenience, the school boards do not have any choice. If we ask for it, they have to give it to us.

In rural areas as well, most large communities of voters would have a community hall, a community centre, or a multiplex or sportsplex. We have access to those locations as well.

Those are certainly advantages we can draw from the system.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we're going to start our second round now, and we're going to go down to three minutes per question and answer.

Mr. Epp, please, for three minutes.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Thank you very much.

Being born and raised in Saskatchewan, I just love having you guys come here to Ottawa to see what this place is like.

I have a couple of quick questions for you. You mentioned I think that your voter turnout in your last election was 75% or thereabouts. That is quite a bit higher than certainly the national average in the last federal election. Is that an upward trend? Is that higher than your usual Saskatchewan elections from previous years, or is it an anomaly? How does it compare to the Saskatchewan turnout of voters in the last federal election? Lastly, to what do you attribute this relatively high rate of voter turnout?

Mr. Jean Ouellet: As indicated in my presentation, I'm not a scholar, so I won't speculate.

It was 76%; the previous general election was 70.95%; the previous one was 65%; the one before that was, again, 63%; and then before that, in 1991, we had 82% or 83%. The Saskatchewan people do vote, they're interested in showing up and making their mark.

To what would I attribute the growth? As I indicated before, there are two interveners in the rate of turnout: one is the political process and one is the administrative process. As to which is the most responsible for it, I wouldn't speculate, but certainly there was great interest in this particular election in Saskatchewan, and it shows.

We also changed the way we delivered elections in Saskatchewan in that election. For example, for the first time we used radio, as I indicated before. We changed our advertising program, which was mostly legalistic and very repulsive—that is the expression—to something that is more user friendly, and that enticed people to vote. We also, for the very first time in a provincial election, used voter information cards. It had never been done before, but people expect it now; they see it federally, they see it municipally, so they should see it provincially as well. It's a combination of many efforts, and scholars will tell us later on what was the true reason.

Mr. Ken Epp: Thank you.

I can probably look this up myself, but if you know right off the bat, what was the rate of turnout in the last federal election among Saskatchewan voters? Do you know that?

Mr. Jean Ouellet: I must apologize, I don't.

Mr. Ken Epp: I'll check that out myself. It's very interesting.

How close am I to being finished?

The Chair: You're pretty much done.

Mr. Ken Epp: Thank you. My internal clock told me that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, colleagues.

We don't have any other questioners on our list from the other parties, so we will have time for a third round, and we'll stay with three minutes. I'll be watching if you generate a question, but right now we'll go to Mr. Lukiwski for three minutes, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you both, Mr. Ouellet and Mr. Wilkie, for coming. It's good to see you both again, coming from Saskatchewan, the home of the Grey Cup champions.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: The question I was going to ask was originally broached by Mr. Epp, and I have an answer to Mr. Epp's question. Mine was going to be the difference between the federal voter turnout and the provincial voter turnout. You had mentioned that in the last two provincial elections the voter participation rate went from 71% to 76%, and in the last two federal elections the voter turnout was about 63% to 64%, or in that range, so significantly lower.

I'd like to get you to perhaps offer your opinions, because these are the same voters, on why there is a difference. My belief, and I don't know if you share this, is that the last two provincial elections in Saskatchewan have been four years apart, whereas the last two federal elections have been about 18 months apart. Do you see the frequency of elections in a minority government, when you are going to—usually, at least—have elections far more frequently than a government that elects its members for a majority...? Other than that, are there any reasons you see as to why you have been able to, on average, get a significantly larger amount of the voters to come out to the polls in Saskatchewan for a provincial vote than we do federally?

Mr. Jean Ouellet: That would be speculating. I think there is such a thing as voter fatigue, and it also depends when the election takes place. I'm a believer in fixed election dates, and that will certainly help people plan, and you now have that federally. That may help.

If you look at the municipal voter turnout, it is even lower than that 60%, so people tend to show up when they feel the issues are closer to them than for more larger questions.

• (1230)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: One of the reasons, of course, is that if the electorate wants to change governments, they tend to increase the numbers. But again, federally that didn't work. I mean, we changed governments in 2006 and the voter turnout was the same as in 2004.

All the things you do in terms of informing the voters is perhaps the real reason. I applaud you for your efforts in Saskatchewan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

We have had some indication that there are two more questions, so I will go to a fourth round. It will have to be very short this time.

Madam Redman and then Mr. Reid, and then I think we're done.

Madam Redman, please.

Hon. Karen Redman: I realize that was not a height reference when you said short, Mr. Chair.

An hon. member: You can boost the seat, Karen.

Hon. Karen Redman: I need to apologize. I've been in and out during your intervention, so if you've covered this off, I'll read the blues.

I was very interested in your discussion about super polls. It seems to me that, not unlike public transit, people will take it if it goes where and when they want to go, and if you put polls where people are already frequenting, you would probably have a much higher voter turnout. Do you have additional information as to where you decide to locate them and, logistically, are there any special requirements or challenges? I'm thinking that the classic shopping mall is a place you would put them. Do you have that kind of information?

Mr. Jean Ouellet: It's purely guesswork. Shopping malls are where the youth are. You can certainly reach some of these individuals there. In terms of grocery stores, for example, having a fairly rural province, some of the farmers from the outlying communities will do their groceries in the cities—in Regina or Saskatoon, or whatever. If we can offer the convenience of voting at the same time, I think that's great.

Hon. Karen Redman: Thank you.

I think that's something very much worth pursuing. I'm intrigued by that.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Redman.

Mr. Reid, please, for three minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

I also want to ask about the super poll idea, partly because it's within the scope of this bill. We've tended to wander off to enumeration issues, which can't be dealt with in the scope of this bill, but striking the super polls can.

I am also going to ask about improved youth participation. You mentioned shopping malls. Could they be done on university campuses? We have large numbers of students, frequently from a variety of ridings, and in some cases there are student bodies of 10,000 or more. Is it something that can be done in a place like that? And has it been done in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Jean Ouellet: Wherever you can imagine placing them, I will place them. In this particular election, we had people, who were almost in tears, calling us to put them in universities. I had to say I am sorry, I can only put them in universities for the individuals who are living in a residence at the university. I can't reach the entire community. What is a better place than a university to reach the students, for God's sake? I mean, that's where they live most of the time. If they could have that convenience, absolutely, I'll put them wherever I can reach the people.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's an accident of how we've designed our system. I don't know if it's a happy or unhappy accident. You vote, not where you work but where you sleep. It's where you are at night, not where you are during the day. That creates all kinds of problems in a commuter society. It sounds like you're trying to address that problem.

Something else that strikes me with regard to universities is that typically a student body doesn't have some of the ID that is helpful in voting. Do you think there's merit in doing something connected with the idea of the super poll that allows people to be assisted in bringing their ID up to date by the time of the vote? I guess it would be like having a returning office, in a sense, where you can deal with the administrative issues. This strikes me as something that could assist in boosting voter turnout by giving students the tools they need to do their voting.

• (1235)

Mr. Jean Ouellet: As Mr. Lukiwski touched on earlier, in Saskatchewan, we still have enumeration within every electoral event. We do not have a permanent register of electors. There was mention of it in the past, but it's still not there. We do not have identification of voters in Saskatchewan, unless their name is not on the list. It is only when their name is not on the list that they have to show a proof of residence and a proof of identify, which does not include visual identify.

If you have kiosk voting, you can certainly have greater service. I mean, look at Service Canada. Why can't I put a poll there? They'll confirm the identity of my voter, and the voter will cast a ballot. It would be perfect—absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I regret that we're going to have to stop there. It wouldn't be fair to go to one more member without a full round, and we don't have time for a full round. I will offer an option to any members who still have questions: if you will please get them to me, I will make sure our witnesses receive them and I will request that the witnesses answer those questions, if there are any, as quickly as possible.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank both of you for coming. Again, those were insightful answers. When committees have to deal with these types of issues, it's always helpful to have the advice of experts so that we can do our jobs better.

We'll excuse the witnesses with the compliments of the committee.

Colleagues, we were to end at 12:30 so that we could do committee business. I want to remind members that we still have a meeting with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. That meeting has been moved down the hall. I will instruct you as to where that is. The reason is that this room is booked, so we cannot stay in this room. However, if we could have members back to the table, I want to remind members of a number of things.

We have had a letter back from Mr. Marcel Blanchet. It was distributed to members of the committee during the meeting; that letter is before you.

As well, we will be starting clause-by-clause study of Bill C-16 on Tuesday. In order to ensure that our clerks and analysts have an opportunity to have a look at amendments and get them published as they have to, would it be acceptable to members to request that any amendments to Bill C-16 be in by one o'clock Friday—tomorrow?

I'm hearing an ooh, but not an outright objection. There's an ah; I've got an ah.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: It's too short.

The Chair: Is it too short?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: It's too short.

The Chair: How about five o'clock?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I think we have 34, do we not?

The Chair: We have 34 amendments to a 15-clause bill. That's exciting.

Is five o'clock acceptable? I'm trying to be considerate of our clerks.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That would be five o'clock—when?

The Chair: Tomorrow.

I'm open to suggestions. I'm not trying to push the committee in a direction.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Does the committee actually need all that time prior to Tuesday? Could we not say five o'clock Monday? Would that be too short?

The Chair: These guys are beating me up all the time, so another meeting won't bother me.

What is the committee's wish?

I'm going to suggest that Friday is a bit too late....

Go ahead, Madame Picard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard: Monday.

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you mean Monday at noon?

Hon. Karen Redman: We won't be ready by tomorrow, so we'll at least need—

The Chair: Would noon on Monday be acceptable, Madam Redman?

Shall we say one o'clock on Monday? Going once, going twice...I hear another noon.

I'm going to go for one o'clock. Is that acceptable? I'm trying to find a negotiated balance here.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Could I add something? Could we have the same delay to receive the summary of the different studies?

• (1240)

The Chair: Which studies do you mean?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Which studies? We received a list of the studies and we were supposed to receive the summary. You told us, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Wait, I remember; you have my apologies.

Go ahead, Monsieur Bédard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bédard (Committee Researcher): The summaries have been prepared. They are being translated. The translation will be ready tomorrow morning, and time to have a look at them, it should be distributed tomorrow afternoon or Monday morning at the latest.

[*English*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That doesn't give us much time.

The Chair: No, I agree with you.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Maybe we should push back the clause-by-clause study.

The Chair: I think we're going to have to, knowing that. You have my apologies and my appreciation for reminding me.

When will those summaries be out to members?

Mr. Michel Bédard: It will be Friday after 5 p.m. or Monday morning.

The Chair: I have to agree with members: that's not enough time to read them, assess them, analyze them, and come up with amendments, should there be any.

All right. We probably cannot go to clause-by-clause study on Tuesday. That's going to be far too tight. Can we have amendments in by Tuesday at one o'clock and plan to do clause-by-clause study on Thursday, which relaxes things a little bit?

Colleagues, that seems to be the decision.

Moving on, we need to have witness lists in for Bill C-6 and Bill C-18. We do have some witnesses, and we'll work on that probably for Tuesday, but I also want to remind members that we need to have those witness lists in.

We don't have a lot of time, and I don't want to be rude to Madam Dawson. You have been handed out the revised report of the steering committee. Can everybody pull that out? We're attempting to adopt a report that is asking for extra meetings for the continuation of the debate on the motion by Madam Redman.

I'm not sure we're going to have time to deal with this; I do apologize. I will adjourn the meeting at ten minutes to one. Just so we don't get into confusion, room 139 north is down the hall on the right side. The Ethics Commissioner and her team are waiting there for us right now for our meet-and-greet. This room is not available, so we have to evacuate at that time.

The floor is now open, however, for this. I suppose there's a motion to adopt the report. We're into a debate. I don't think there were any names on our list last time. Does anybody wish to comment on this new report?

I have Mr. Reid and Mr. Lukiwski.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: I've just been trying to examine the two side by side. I'm gathering that the distinction is the date, December 4. It's also changed to "resumption of debate on the motion of Karen Redman". Those are the only changes. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct. The time was also left; there were no other changes. There was some discussion as to whether we would resume the debate, meaning there were speakers and there was an amendment, and of course those are still on the table. That's why the word "resumption" is used.

Mr. Scott Reid: This deals I think with the unintentionally erroneous statement made by Monsieur Guimond that the amendment and the subamendment had—

The Chair: No, that's incorrect. Mr. Reid, you are correct.

Mr. Scott Reid: The amendment and subamendment would still be—

The Chair: It's a continuation of where we left off at the last meeting. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Scott Reid: That does answer my question, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Did you have anything else?

Mr. Scott Reid: I haven't at the moment.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Lukiwski, and then Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: You may have answered it. I'm just not quick enough to figure it out. Am I correct in understanding that the subamendment that we had from Madam Redman's motion is still on the table?

The Chair: Let me be clear for members. At that particular meeting, the meeting was adjourned for lack of quorum. Nothing else was decided, so it makes sense that we continue from that point.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I just want to make sure; I'm not trying to delay this thing.

What is the subamendment? This motion, to me, seems to be slightly different from Madam Redman's original motion. I'm not sure if I'm correct on that; I'm going from memory here.

The Chair: I believe this is word for word. We can get the amendment to you.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: We have an amendment and a subamendment. Is my memory correct on that?

• (1245)

The Chair: We'll get that out for you—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I don't even need to see a hard copy. If you've got it handy there and could just read it to the committee, I'd appreciate it.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. James M. Latimer): This, word for word, is Madam Redman's motion. The amendment that was moved was:

That the motion be amended by replacing the words "2006 election" with the following: "2004 and 2006 federal elections"; and by replacing all the words after the word "relation" with the following: "and in comparison to the election campaign expenses of the Liberal Party of Canada, and where Elections Canada has refused to reimburse some Conservative candidates for election campaign expenses"

The subamendment that was subsequently moved was:

That the amendment be amended by adding after the words "Liberal Party of Canada", the following: "and all other political parties".

The Chair: We concluded the meeting with the debate on the subamendment.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: So procedurally, then—and this is the part I want to get to—if we adopt the report from the steering committee at the next meeting, we're debating not only Madam Redman's motion, but we also have to discuss the amendment and subamendment. Is that correct? I just want clarification.

The Chair: I think that's a fair concern. I have a concern that it doesn't exactly say that here.

On the record, is that the assumption of everybody?

Some hon. members: Definitely. Yes.

The Chair: Without going through another change of words and bringing it back, everybody's in agreement that this is what's understood.

Hon. Karen Redman: We're picking up where we left off.

The Chair: Correct.

All right. Thank you. Colleagues, I appreciate that cooperation.

Monsieur Proulx, go ahead, please.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, seeing that we're not going to be doing the clause-by-clause on Tuesday, what is your plan for Tuesday morning? Could we use the Tuesday morning meeting to get back to this debate on this motion from Mrs. Redman?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Instead of having two meetings.

The Chair: I think we're getting into a different range there. I'm going to suggest no. My attempt will be to have witnesses here on the other bills and to move forward with legislation that's on the table. These are extra meetings.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I see. Okay

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: So do we have a delay to present the names of the witnesses?

The Chair: We have some names; I don't know who they are. But we are also asking for more names.

In fact, these gentlemen who were here right now might want to be added to the list. I'm waiting to see if members want to invite these folks, because we are going to be dealing with the issue of civic addresses.

I think we're moving off topic a bit. I'm going to have to adjourn the meeting. I don't want to do that, but it looks like we're going to have to deal with this again on Tuesday. Perhaps that's what we're going to have to do, because this is committee business.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes, but we're talking about committee future business.

The Chair: Okay. I think we'll have to continue this discussion on Tuesday—not necessarily discussion of the motion.

Does that make sense? Am I being clear?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes, that's fine; so Tuesday morning.

The Chair: At 11 o'clock.

Colleagues, you're so good to me. I appreciate it very much. That will be the decision.

A reminder: witnesses for Bill C-6 and Bill C-18, please. There will be the summary of the reports to members by Monday, with the

idea of going to clause-by-clause on Thursday. With respect to The meeting is adjourned.
amendments, we said one o'clock on Tuesday.

Thank you, members. We did well.

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