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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I'd like to call the meeting to order. We are in public today, again reviewing, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Referendum Act.

We have a witness today who's going to share knowledge with us about the Referendum Act: Mr. John Hollins, the former Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario.

Mr. Hollins, you have an opening statement, and then we'll ask questions of you after that.

Mr. John Hollins (Former Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, committee members, and other members of the public, thank you very much for the invitation to appear before your committee today. As mentioned, my name is John Leslie Hollins. I was the Chief Electoral Officer for the Province of Ontario from 2001 to 2008, and to that end conducted Ontario's first referendum in over 80 years at the same time as the 39th provincial general election in 2007.

My comments today will address five subjects: my mandate, the statutory framework of the referendum, election and referendum administration, registered campaign organizations, and the public education program.

On the mandate, in 2007 I was given three mandates in connection with the 2007 referendum. These were to conduct a referendum at the same time as and in general accord with the rules and procedures for the 39th provincial general election; to provide for the registration and associated reporting for registered referendum campaign organizers; and to conduct a program of public education to ensure that electors throughout Ontario received clear and impartial information about the referendum process, the date of the referendum, the referendum question, and the content of the choices in the referendum.

Since there was no legislation in Ontario governing referenda at the provincial level—except the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, and it dealt specifically with changes in taxing matters—specific statutory authority was required to enable a referendum on electoral system reform to be held. The statutory framework for the referendum was established through legislation introduced some six months after the publication of the regulation that led to the creation of the citizens assembly in March 2006.

The key provisions of the bill: if the citizens assembly recommended the adoption of a system different from Ontario's current electoral system, a referendum on the recommended system would be held; if required, the referendum would be held in conjunction with the 2007 general election; the referendum question was to be defined by cabinet.

To be considered binding, the recommended electoral system had to be selected in at least 60% of all the valid referendum ballots cast, and in more than 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in each of at least 64 electoral districts.

The legislation also defined the operational framework for the referendum, essentially paralleling the provisions of the Election Act. It also established the concept of registered referendum campaign organizers and the regulatory framework for referendum campaign finances. The referendum campaign finance rules were later established by Ontario regulation 211/07.

Administering a referendum in parallel with a general election proved to be a positive experience, particularly from an event management viewpoint. Modifications to poll procedures and training, additional ballot production, and adjustments to staffing and support were readily accommodated during preparatory activities and during the event. As a result, when electors went to the polls, they were greeted with an effective and efficient process. Voters received two ballots, one to elect a member of the Legislative Assembly and one to determine the results of the referendum on electoral reform. They were able to cast both ballots in a supportive environment.

Since differences between election and referendum calendars and poll administration procedures were not significant, shared initiatives and budgetary efficiencies were achieved that would not have been possible in a separate referendum event. For example, by pairing voter information mailings and notice of registration cards with referendum education materials, Elections Ontario was able to inform voters about both events at a significantly lower cost than would have been required if they had been separate activities. The successful delivery of the event depended on integrated planning and delivery of many separate but related activities, including staffing, training, communications, procurement, technology, supplies, and logistical support.

The total cost of the 39th provincial general election, referendum, and referendum education program was \$94.56 million. To each eligible elector in Ontario, that was \$11.14. The administration of the general election itself was \$85.6 million, or \$9.99 per eligible elector. The add-on referendum administration was \$1 million, approximately 13¢ for every elector. The referendum education program was approximately \$8 million, a cost of 92¢ per eligible elector in the province of Ontario.

In addition to operational responsibility for the referendum, the Chief Electoral Officer had to ensure that the regulation of referendum advertising was fair, transparent, and accessible to all Ontarians who wanted to participate directly in the referendum debate. Persons or entities known as referendum campaign organizers were required to register with the Chief Electoral Officer if they were spending \$500 or more on referendum advertising promoting a particular outcome. Once registered, they were required to report on the contributions they received and the expenses they incurred to support their advertising.

As part of the registration process, the Chief Electoral Officer was required to review and approve the name of each referendum campaign organization to ensure that there would be no confusion with the referendum campaign organizers registered under the act; with a third party for the purpose of the election under the Election Finances Act; or with a candidate, political party, or political organization active anywhere in Canada. The legislation prevented registered parties and their constituency associations from registering as a referendum campaign organizer with the intention of conducting advertising to promote a particular result.

To this end, a guideline was developed to give clear direction to parties, constituency associations, and candidates on the limits to their participation in the referendum debate. To ensure that all potential referendum campaign organizations knew that there were referendum advertising requirements, newspaper advertisements were placed throughout the province.

Each registered referendum campaign organization was required to file a report with Elections Ontario detailing income and referendum advertising campaign expenses together with the name and address of anyone who contributed \$100 or more for the purpose of referendum advertising. I might add that the rules were fashioned after the leadership rules in the Elections Finances Act in the province of Ontario. There were no limits on donations or expenditures. A total of ten referendum campaign organizers were registered for the 2007 electoral system referendum. Nine of the ten raised and spent funds. In total they spent \$495,942.

The public education mandate was somewhat extensive, and there were key lessons to be learned. The question on the referendum ballot addressed a significant issue in the lives of Ontario electors by asking them to consider the fundamental aspects of the democratic process by which they are governed. Once they became aware of the issue, electors showed that they were interested and concerned, but they also wanted to evaluate the alternatives with experts on the proposed systems. Elections Ontario was not mandated to fill this role and could not develop a framework that would have allowed it to provide forums for the proponents to carry their messages to electors in all areas of the province. The provincial nature of the campaign meant that the opportunities to access prime-time

television, for example, for anything beyond paid advertising was severely limited.

A neutral education program was difficult to craft, as would be the case under any circumstances. It had to rely on partners to share in the message delivery, whether for proponents of the status quo, changed choices, or representatives of the media. The former groups did not readily come to the fore during the campaign. In particular, the media was trapped between competing interests, and the election campaign took up most of their time. Post-event surveys of eligible electors confirmed that 50% of eligible electors thought they knew more than enough to vote at referendum time. Of course, this is in direct contrast to the 52.1% turnout that we actually received. It would be remiss of me not to point out the number of rejected, declined, and unmarked ballots during this process.

• (1115)

I will do this on a comparative scale. In Ontario 20,000 ballots were rejected in the 2003 election. In the 2007 election in Ontario there were 19,000. In the referendum there were 28,000. In the 2003 election in Ontario 2,600 ballots were declined. In the 2007 election there were 3,400 and in the referendum, 21,000. In unmarked ballots, in 2003 in Ontario there were 7,000. In 2007 there were 10,000. In the referendum, there were 111,000.

I thank you for your time here today, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to a round of questioning. We're going to start with a seven-minute round but I ask you please to try to keep within that. I've been fairly flexible over the last little while. We have some more business later today and the more time we take here, the less time we'll have for that.

First, I'm not certain how they want to do it, Mr. Proulx or Mr. Cuzner, if they want to talk at the same time or split their time. I think Mr. Proulx is going first.

• (1120)

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): We talk at the same time enough during the day; we'll do it separately this morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for accepting our invitation and being here this morning, sir.

In 2007 you administered a referendum and a general election at the same time.

Mr. John Hollins: That's correct.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I'm appalled at the numbers you just gave us on rejected, blank ballots, and so on. Besides that, I'm not sure you're going to be able to answer in the sense that this particular referendum was on electoral reform.

Mr. John Hollins: That's correct.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: So it's not the same situation as the different referendums we've had. I'm thinking of the Charlottetown referendum or the multitude of referendums we've had in the province of Quebec. What I mean by this is that we have the pro-side and the con-side, or the yes and the no, and then we've got different smaller groups within the yes umbrella and within the no umbrella.

Do you feel it's appropriate to have a general election and a referendum at the same time? I'm thinking more, sir, along the lines of how you would split the expenses in the sense that in your referendum I presume most politicians did not get involved in the debate, probably did not start a campaign saying they were in favour or they were against. I assume it was left fairly neutral.

Mr. John Hollins: Completely neutral.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: It was up to the government to advertise and for the public to decide. Right?

Mr. John Hollins: Yes. The political entity stayed away from it per se.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: So if you were to run a referendum.... Were you there at the Charlottetown referendum, sir?

Mr. John Hollins: No, I was not.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I see. But if you were to run a similar referendum to Charlottetown, would you be tempted to run it at the same time as a general election? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Mr. John Hollins: I'm really of mixed opinions on this for a couple of reasons. Yes, it obviously saves money if that's the purpose, and of course you would do that. Does it cloud the issue? In my experience, I would suggest it did. There were two horses in the race fighting all the way along—the candidates to be noticed and the parties to be noticed. The other side was the education of the electorate to understand the second ballot they were going to receive. We certainly noticed that when I was trying to compete to get media time, to get exposure for the question itself.

So I believe, yes, if you wanted to be single-focused and your primary objective was the referendum to get a clear answer from everybody. Is there a fear to that? Of course there is. I would guess, and it's purely a guess, that the turnout would not have been nearly as good if the referendum had been presented by itself. I think it brought more people out. But then that's the interesting part of our democracy: we get to either vote or not vote, unlike in Australia, where it's mandatory.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, sir.

My colleague will have the other half.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks very much for the presentation as well.

There were more people out, and I see the cost savings. Thirteen cents per voter is pretty impressive, but with that number of spoiled ballots, can you still refer to it as successful?

Mr. John Hollins: The decision was clear: it was 63% one way and 37% the other. Would the 111,000, if they had been included on either side of that, have made a difference? They would not whatsoever. To me, the 111,000 suggests that not everybody was

there to vote for the referendum. They just clearly weren't. You had two events going on at the same time. I think that's a clear sign that you had two events going on at the same time.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You did some surveying prior to or post-vote as to whether the people going in were aware of the issue of the referendum question?

• (1125)

Mr. John Hollins: Yes. In fact, from the education perspective, we started in the month of June. That was when we were handed the education portfolio. Right away we polled to see how many people understood what was going on and felt comfortable that they could actually make a decision. We ran at about 8%.

Then we worked out our strategy, going forward to educate the public. We put a program together, which we monitored every month. Of course July and August were certainly a challenge, and the numbers didn't really come quickly. By September, we started to see a pretty good move. Our goal was 74% of the population. Why was that? I should probably qualify that. In 2003, in the last general election, we did post-election surveys. We always do that so that we understand the metrics, our success rates, and things of that nature. At that time they said that in our population in Canada right now, a 100% turnout would actually be 74% of your eligible voters, because 26% have no interest and have declared that they will never participate in democracy.

So we set that as our target, 74% of people having enough knowledge. As we worked through, by the time we came out—it was five days before *The Globe and Mail* ran a story saying that we in fact were sitting somewhere around 68% or 69%—we felt that from a goal perspective we were probably there, and we set that goal fully knowing that we were the optimists, because our last turnout was 56%.

I thought that the people who participated probably participated with good knowledge. If they didn't, there were probably unmarked ballots.

I hope that helps.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: That's good.

Just out of curiosity, has electoral reform been discussed any further, or has it been dealt with?

Mr. John Hollins: I believe that there will always be people pushing that agenda. Are they getting less press time today than they were then? Yes, they are.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Okay.

Mr. John Hollins: I don't know that the Legislative Assembly is even talking about it at this point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Lukiwski.

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

Thank you, Mr. Hollins, for appearing today.

I'd like to go over for a moment a few of the things that have been raised by Rodger and Marcel on the rejected ballots. You've identified the fact that probably—and I think you're quite correct—the reason there was such a high level of rejected or spoiled ballots is that people were there to vote in the general election and didn't really care about the referendum question. Therefore, they just left the ballots blank.

That obviously lends itself to the larger question as to whether or not referendums should be held in conjunction with general elections. We had a witness yesterday, Professor Boyer, who stated unequivocally—I'm not sure if you saw the testimony or heard it—that he believed referendums should not be held in conjunction with elections. He stated a number of reasons. One example he gave was what happened in 1976 in Saskatchewan. The provincial government, the Progressive Conservative government of the day, brought forward a referendum question on public financing of abortions. His interpretation—and I agree with him, and I was in Saskatchewan at the time—was that he believed the PC government of the day wanted to have this question on the ballot paper as a referendum question in an attempt to get people out to vote against public funding of abortions, and those people would more than likely have voted for the PC Party.

In other words—although he didn't say so in these words—I think the impression was that he felt that political parties might be able to use referendum questions to manipulate public opinion one way or the other politically. He felt that those two events should be separated. I'm wondering first if you have an opinion on that, or if you still believe that referendums should be held in conjunction with elections. I think that's one of the primary questions this committee is going to have to grapple with when we get down to discussing.

I'll be quite honest with you. My original thought process was that for cost savings, there is no reason for me to think otherwise than that the referendum should be held in conjunction with elections. I used to share exactly the same opinion as you just stated this morning. After Professor Boyer's submission yesterday, I'm starting to rethink my position. I think that's a big question that we're all going to have to come up with an answer to, whether referendums should be held in conjunction with general elections. You've stated that you think they should. Based on what I've told you about Professor Boyer's opinion, do you have any reason to doubt that your position is the one you want to stay with?

• (1130)

Mr. John Hollins: Because I trust the political entity entirely, I don't know that I would ever suggest that it would take advantage of a situation like that.

I'm not convinced that they should be run at the same time, actually, because I think the waters become muddy; however, I don't know what the risk-reward ratio is. It will cost you more money to get a lesser turnout to get the decision, and it goes back to the political entity's asking, can we really move on a referendum initiative that gets a 35% turnout? In Ontario, that's what you're going to get municipally. If it wins by 50% of that, say, you're going to have a situation in which 20% of the population is going to make a decision on a referendum.

It's really a question of what the will of the political entity is when they go forward with the referendum to ask the question. In the States it's done very differently.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have one last question, on expenses, but very quickly. I asked this question to Professor Boyer yesterday. What happens if you have a stand-alone referendum and only have, say, a 15% voter turnout, and the vote is split almost equally between yes and no? Let's say that 51% say yes to whatever the question is, which means that roughly 7.5% of the entire population is casting the winning opinion on a binding referendum.

Do you think there should be minimum turnout levels required before any referendum is binding?

Mr. John Hollins: I think that would fly in the face of our right to not participate.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Professor Boyer basically said the same thing. He said that if people aren't interested, then those who are should have the ability to let their opinions be known.

Mr. John Hollins: I guess the comparison would be with the question whether or not, if a candidate runs and doesn't get a certain percentage, you allow them to take their seat.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: The last question is on contributions. Correct me if I'm wrong here, but I believe I heard you say that in Ontario during the last referendum, there were no limits on contributions or expenses by referendum committees.

Mr. John Hollins: That's correct.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It goes back to a question I raised a few meetings ago with a previous witness, which we've discussed on a number of occasions since.

If a referendum question were held in conjunction with a provincial election—or a general election federally, for that matter—and if the question were one of some political sensitivity, similar to what happened in 1986 in Saskatchewan, there are currently federal expense limits that individuals can contribute to candidates and political parties—\$1,100 per year. However, if there were no expense limits or contribution limits on referendum committees, it is conceivable to think that individuals, corporations, unions—political parties, for that matter—could contribute to a referendum committee that could spend untold dollars to promote a position on the referendum question that happened to be similar to the political position of a certain political party.

In fact, they could do indirectly what they're not allowed to do directly to influence voter intentions. Do you see any conflict in having a separate regime for contributions on a referendum from that for the political financing regime we have currently?

Mr. John Hollins: In Ontario, definitely I do. The question was how you level the playing field, just as you say. If a yes campaign spends \$50 million and the no campaign spends \$100,000, what is the influence level? Is there one, or isn't there? I don't know. The people who make the rules have to weigh that when setting the rules up.

For instance, in Ontario, you had a double event, so what was the priority for the money? Was it the referendum or was it the political entity? The politicians stayed out for a reason.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Madame DeBellefeuille.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lukiwski has already asked a lot of the questions I had. Mr. Hollins, let's talk about the 2007 referendum. Could you tell us how the inmates' right to vote issue was dealt with? Did they have the right to vote in the referendum and the election? How did it work in Ontario?

We want to know because the issue of inmates' right to vote in referendums is still not settled. We have a lot of questions about that. Based on your experience, could you tell us how it worked?

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. John Hollins: In the Ontario election, everybody who was qualified to receive a regular ballot also received a referendum ballot. There was no differentiation whatsoever. So inmates who would vote normally would also get the second ballot. However, I should explain that in Ontario inmates vote using a proxy system; consequently, they empower someone to exercise their franchise on their behalf.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Since we are trying to modernize the Referendum Act, would you recommend that we give inmates the right to vote in a referendum?

[English]

Mr. John Hollins: I don't know that this is a question that I would deal with. If they have the right to vote in a general election, I don't know why they wouldn't on a referendum.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I want to know what you think. You can give your opinion. If you do not want to, that is your prerogative.

Nevertheless, would it be appropriate, in accordance with certain values, to give inmates the right to vote in a federal referendum? Would you recommend that? No witness tells us what to do, we just want to hear your professional opinion.

[English]

Mr. John Hollins: To reiterate, I don't know why you wouldn't give them the right to vote. If you're giving them the ballot to vote for members, I don't see why you wouldn't give them the right to vote in a referendum.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I am afraid that I may have misunderstood what you said, because you were speaking quickly and the interpreter had a little trouble following you.

Could you tell me whether you had trouble separating referendum-related expenses from election-related expenses? Was that a problem you encountered, as Chief Electoral Officer?

[English]

Mr. John Hollins: That did not prove to be a problem at all, because you had to register separately. Parties and constituency associations were not allowed to participate, so that there would be no duplication. A candidate wanted to become involved had to register separately. None did. But it was very clear how the process would be controlled, and the rules were different.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to Parliament Hill, sir. Your first two years at Queen's Park were my last two years at Queen's Park. It's good to see you here.

I'm going to ask for your opinion, off the top of your head. You referred to Australia. A lot of us still struggle with the notion of whether we should be forcing people to take their civil duties and whether doing so infringes on their rights or whether it is a part of being a citizen to guarantee that we can maintain those rights.

May I have your thoughts on that question just briefly, off the top of your head?

Mr. John Hollins: It's going to be quite an opinion.

Mr. David Christopherson: You're from Ontario, so we expect that.

Mr. John Hollins: I've never been an advocate of mandatory democracy. I thought it flew in the face of what a genuine democracy would be, which is your right to choose to do whatever you wish within the democracy.

I think that would pretty much sum it up.

Mr. David Christopherson: You've been very consistent in your thinking on that. I appreciate it.

On the issue of politicians staying out of referendums, given that this one was about the electoral system itself, which is probably about as sensitive as you can get, is it practical to think that, going forward on issues, we would call upon a referendum mechanism to make the decision that politicians and their campaigns would actually stay out?

Mr. John Hollins: I think it's a catch-22. If you run the election and the referendum at the same time, it's in the best interest of the politician to stay out. If you run the referendum separately, I think there's a very big gain there. I got it as feedback in the course of the referendum: "we expect our politicians to lead us, and they're not here to lead us". That made it very difficult for some people, because these are the people whom they would engage for an opinion, and they trust that opinion. When you come out of a neutral position and are trying to explain things.... I found it somewhat of a challenge.

Mr. David Christopherson: Staying out of it would obviously include not putting it in their election brochures, but what about candidates' debates, in which it would come up? Did they just decline to give an opinion? I can't recall.

• (1140)

Mr. John Hollins: It wasn't a decline. The rules were very clear.

Mr. David Christopherson: They couldn't even comment when asked a direct question?

Mr. John Hollins: They could put it in their platform, and there was what looked like a hush order.

It was interesting. I always figured that it was—and this was merely my observation—that the referendum was judging the business they're in, so it was a question whether it was a conflict for them to participate in the outcome. I thought, maybe that's the logical thing here. It's a very delicate point; consequently, I could see why they might not want to participate in it.

In any other referendum than that, I would say yes, make sure they're involved. People want to talk to them; they want to know what they feel and how they think.

Mr. David Christopherson: Right, and that takes us back to this whole issue of having different financing controls. If you have none in one and some in another, how do you separate the two during a general election? It can be very difficult.

Mr. John Hollins: How does it flow? People only have so many dollars to give. I wonder where it will go. Will it go to the parties?

Mr. David Christopherson: Most people only have so many dollars to give. Some people have lots of money to give.

I want to shift gears just a little. One of the things we're going to have to struggle with is the issue of our confederation. When there's a national question being put, do we mandate that it only be the national referendum law that applies, or, as in 1992, would there be the opportunity for provinces to use their own? Then there are variations of that. Could provinces use their own if they wanted, provided they met certain standards? I don't mean it in a hierarchical way. As long as they met those, they could work the details out for themselves. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. John Hollins: If you run a national election, you're not going to ask the provinces to run it for you. If you run a national referendum, I don't know why you would either. It's not that I agree with the delivery model. I quite disagree. We have three agencies serving every voter. That is triplication in government. That's a very big complaint in the province of Ontario. Why do I fund three agencies to deliver an election? Why doesn't the local clerk deliver all the elections? It's interesting, but it's very real. Consistency would say that you do it nationally.

Mr. David Christopherson: You didn't have any financial controls, you said. Do you think that's the approach we should take nationally too?

Mr. John Hollins: I'm going to make a bit of a leap here. I think we didn't have financial controls, because inherently there were financial controls.

Mr. David Christopherson: How so?

Mr. John Hollins: In the planning of the way our referendum went with an election, the finances were going to the parties. There wasn't much obviously going over to the campaigns. If there was no political entity at work and it was just a referendum, I think you might need controls on those dollars, because there would be a lot of dollars available. Also, it becomes a stakes game. What's at stake here? We've heard it around this table today. You might get big powerful lobbyists involved. I can see that. We see that in the U.S. all the time. If there's a win somewhere for somebody, and at the end of the day there's a bank account somewhere, I think you want to control those things.

Mr. David Christopherson: There is evidence that it doesn't always guarantee an outcome. But I have to tell you that most of us around this table, heading into a campaign, would prefer to have lots of money rather than no money in our bank accounts. So money counts.

The number of people who declined a ballot was surprising. You don't seem to agree. I was thrown when you said that 20,000 people declined it. Do you think they didn't have an interest? Or was it that they didn't know enough and therefore weren't going to cast an uneducated ballot? Or was it some variation of those?

Mr. John Hollins: I don't think they showed up to vote for the referendum. They showed up to vote for the candidate. It's as simple as that. You are running two events. You have some there for one and some for the other. We were lucky; we had a lot there for both.

The Chair: We now move into our five-minute round. I have a number of names on the list. We'll try to do those. You can still add your name if you haven't had a comment yet.

We'll go to Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Sir, I might have been distracted, and maybe that question wasn't asked of you, but let's assume that you would be running a referendum at the same time as an election, whether it be strictly in the province of Ontario or whether it be on the national scene. Let's assume that instead of it being on changes to the electoral system, it would be on something much more controversial, such as the separation of the province of Quebec or something else that I can't think of in Ontario. How could you separate expenses related to the election and expenses related to the referendum?

I'll give an example. I'm a candidate, and I travel in my riding or outside my riding to speak in the name of my party. At the same time, I decide that I'm going to make a pitch for one of the sides of the referendum campaign. How could you differentiate an election campaign expense and a referendum expense? It would be very difficult, wouldn't it?

• (1145)

Mr. John Hollins: I guess I see it through a different light. I wouldn't have to; you would have to. And you would have to apportion it by the percentage of time spent on that. If it cost you \$100 to make the trip and you spent 10% of your time actually speaking with regard to the referendum, you'd allot 10% back.

My protection is that an auditor will go through that with you, the public will see it, and if they disagree we'd have a challenge. Then accountability comes in.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Okay. Yes, you are seeing it in a different way.

Mr. John Hollins: I do. I see it very factually.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes.

While you're here, I want to ask you a question that's been bugging me for a while. You've used the permanent list of electors in Ontario, the same as we have on the federal scene.

Mr. John Hollins: Yes, I have.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Did you like the list or did you hate the list?

Mr. John Hollins: That's an interesting question. Let me share a little bit of history with you.

I started in Elections in 1972. I've always run off a list. I did some enumerations. I think there was a reality. The numbers in Ontario were very clear. When you went door to door, knocking on people's doors to get names on the list, we would get somewhere between 76% and 78% of the eligible voters. Fourteen days out, the list would be closed. In other words, we were disenfranchising 22% of the people. They could show up at the poll, but they wouldn't get a ballot. If their name was on the list, they would.

So we moved to an inclusive methodology, which was the national register. In other words, from an administrative perspective, I'm not touching those 22% any more. I'm not going to their doors. Now we go inclusive, whereby I have to try to find all of you and engage you completely through the process. I have to keep you in that process all the way through. I know I'm using databases that are somewhat out of date, but they have to be. People won't stop dying, they won't stop moving, they won't stop selling their houses, or turning 18. So that's the percentage I have to deal with. But do I really have to deal with it directly now, or can I deal with it indirectly?

I know the names I have on my list, and I know the residential addresses out there across the province of Ontario where I don't have a name. I can still communicate with that address. When I'm sending an ad out, I can still communicate. If I can continue to engage them, then it's quite possible for them to show up on election day now and they can still participate.

People say, "Well, okay, but aren't you jeopardizing currency? The currency to a democracy is the ballot, and aren't you jeopardizing that?" I'm not. I'm not because if your name's on the list or not on the

list, you're showing me ID that you are who you say you are and that you're qualified to vote. We're still containing democracy really well, but what we've done is, instead of narrowing our numbers we have to deal with over the process, we're keeping it open, aiming at 100% all the time, right up to election day.

It's no different from a party. A party has its money and it spends its money right up to the day before election day. Parties hate advanced voters, because they haven't finished their message yet. They haven't done their final sell. It's the same thing: why would I shut off two weeks? I still have two more weeks to get more names, more people, and they can show up on election day. That's why the national register of electors is good for our democracy. I really believe it.

Managing it, I won't lie to you, is a nightmare. It's very difficult, quite a challenge. But I think if you keep it in perspective, what it's there for and what your real challenge is, you're fine. I think it's good, healthy.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Am I done?

The Chair: Very sorry, it was—

Mr. John Hollins: Sorry for using up your time.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: No, thank you. You were very frank, and I appreciate it.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, you're up.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You indicated a total amount of spending by the various committees. Do you have a breakdown of those who were on the yes side versus the no side?

• (1150)

Mr. John Hollins: You know, I don't. But let me tell you, I think they were all on the yes side. There might have been a couple of no's in there, but it seemed like, at the time—

Mr. Scott Reid: That was the impression I got. I saw signs up. I can't remember if there was any electronic advertising, but I remember seeing some print advertising, and it was always on the yes side. It kind of makes an interesting statement. It reinforces the lessons of 1992, when I think there was 10 or 12 times as much spent on the yes side as on the no side, and the no side still won. This shows that spending isn't always a 100% accurate indicator as to how people will vote.

Mr. John Hollins: I think that's a difficult comparison, based on the volume of dollars spent. It wasn't that much money.

Mr. Scott Reid: It was way more. I agree with you. I'm making an observation that the spending on the yes side did not automatically result in a yes victory.

With respect to having the election and the referendum at the same time, there were a couple of things you mentioned. You get a higher participation rate when you have it with an election. You would get universal agreement on that. There is plenty evidence to demonstrate that when a referendum is held as a stand-alone you get a lower participation rate.

Is there any scholarship suggesting that you get a difference in the number of yes responses versus no responses? A referendum held at the time of an election produces a higher number of participants, but it also produces a large number of spoiled ballots. People have presumably said they were not sure they could make an intelligent decision. You might also get people who say they are voting no and generate more no votes than yes votes. Or is that not the case?

Mr. John Hollins: I've never heard that. The only one I've heard is that it matters where they are on the ballot. Whether yes or no comes first affects the percentage. They relate that to ease of voting. You will hear that everywhere. That's why countries or jurisdictions rotate names on ballots and try to find a balance.

Mr. Scott Reid: At the time of the referendum, I spoke to the folks at Fair Vote Ontario and said I thought there was a fundamental problem with the way the question was being put. They were supportive of what I said, but there was no way of incorporating the idea that the issue is not really MMP versus first-past-the-post. There are other alternatives, such as the STV option, which was looked at in British Columbia. I believe it would be helpful to have a preferential ballot in which you could rank your preferences and then assign your rankings as your preferred option drops off the ballot. It's the system used in some Australian elections. It's used to elect the leaders of a number of parties.

I think it's a good idea, but I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts. It might very well be a bad idea. I'd appreciate any thoughts you have on the idea of preferential ballots in a world where there are more than two potential options.

Mr. John Hollins: You would like my opinion on preferential balloting?

Mr. Scott Reid: I'd like to hear what you have to say about developing it for this kind of question on electoral reform, where you have more than one plausible option.

Mr. John Hollins: I don't think the challenge would be the preferential balloting. It would be educating the people on the various choices. On mixed-member proportional, we tried to do our education at a grade 6 level. But as soon as you throw mixed-member proportional in, you are up around grade 12. It's tough. How do you get all of these systems and educate all of these people? Are you going to reduce your turnout by confusing the issues? That would be my question when you have more than just the two choices. I don't know. That's the feedback we received.

Mr. Scott Reid: I realize that in some ways this is not fair. You were doing what you were asked to do, and you did it, as far as I can see, with a great deal of competence. I'm just interested in your reaction.

One of the complaints by those who had been advocates for the yes side was that one of the reasons they failed was inadequate education. But I can't imagine how I would have done a better job of educating them than you did. That seems to be a difficult task.

Mr. John Hollins: Thank you. I appreciate that more than you know.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid. You had four seconds left, and I just used the rest of your time.

• (1155)

Mr. Scott Reid: You used it very well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you. I appreciate that, Mr. Chair, since I am running off to another meeting.

Mr. Hollins, I know you didn't use umbrella committees in the Ontario referendum, but what are your thoughts on them? Are they an effective way to approach this?

Mr. John Hollins: I don't have any experience with them whatsoever. I'm just not sure. If I were to consider them, I think I would have to do my homework on them. I don't know who you want educating the public. Do you want a bias, or do you want a non-biased group? I really don't know the answer because I've never been on the biased group. Having been in an unbiased position to deliver this, I've got to tell you that we got a lot of positive feedback on it—not that it wasn't a very big challenge. We had a lot of positive feedback because of the role.

The agency took a hit. That annoyed me afterwards a little bit, because we always do our polling, as I said, and I think we scored.... And I'm guessing at the numbers now. But in our thing we always ask, well, for Elections Ontario, if people see it as a non-biased organization, or if they see it as party-related, or whatever. In this one where we might have scored 90 before, we were running about 50-50 as a representative of the government, and we're not a representative of the government at all. We're an agency apart, the same as our budget's apart, and the CEO's appointment. It's very apart.

That muddied the waters; that annoyed me. Could it have been prevented? I don't think so. I don't think we went out there, but it was seen as our trying to take a mandate of the government and make it work. I don't know if that actually got people to vote against it or not. It could have; I don't know mindsets. I think it's worth investigating just because of the amount of feedback we got.

Mr. David Christopherson: Very good, that's very interesting. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Chair, for your consideration.

The Chair: Mr. Albrecht, you have five minutes.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I don't think I'll need five.

I just have a question relating to the fact that Ontario doesn't have a general legislative framework for referenda and that a specific statute was created for the last referendum. You mentioned something in your earlier remarks about a citizens' assembly that had been convened prior to the crafting of the legislation. Can you just expand on that a bit? Then can you comment on whether you think it's wise to always craft specific legislation for the upcoming referendum or if you think it's better to have a general framework like we're proposing?

Mr. John Hollins: Okay, you've asked a couple of questions. On the citizens assembly, when it got elected in 2003, the government said it would review the electoral system and it would do it following a citizens assembly. So they followed the B.C. model. I think that really lent itself to Mr. Reid's question: instead of putting a bunch of scenarios before the public, let's have a committee of all the people decide what would be the best choice to go up against, first past the post. It did that; it fulfilled that. At the same time, they said if they come up with a different system, they'll have a referendum.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So the citizens assembly didn't have direct input into the crafting of the legislation, just the crafting of the question?

Mr. John Hollins: They didn't have anything to do with the question either, just so you know that, because I remember those days. I needed a question and no one was giving me a question, and it was clear it wasn't going to come from them. It was going to cabinet.

That aside, the second part was around—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It was a question of whether we should have specific legislation for every referendum or whether we should have a general framework that would apply to all, so you remove the subjectivity when you're crafting the legislation.

Mr. John Hollins: I think, from the administrative perspective, if you had a template and you called on that template and could bring it in when you needed it—and the template was to take the political debate out of it—the frequency isn't there. What's going to happen is you're going to have two acts going side by side, and you'll continually try to amend them. When I've lived through that, you never win. I never win as the administrator because inevitably something's out of whack and then it's too late for us to actually implement certain things. I think you put yourself at risk.

That's my experience. Certainly Mr. Mayrand would be a much better advisor on that. He has to live in that world, and the federal acts are so much more complex than the provincial.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you.

The Chair: That's the last speaker on my list. Is there anyone else before we...?

Okay, sure, Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Sir, when we were talking about the registry, you referred to the list of identification cards. Is the Ontario list based basically on the list the federal government or Elections Canada uses?

Mr. John Hollins: Yes, it is, most definitely.

• (1200)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: It is.

Mr. John Hollins: Yes, because of the access to databases they have at the federal level. Honestly, I don't know that, provincially, we could come nearly as accurate—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Oh, excuse me. I think you misunderstood my question, or I didn't explain it. When a voter goes to the poll—

Mr. John Hollins: Sorry, ID—no, we're different.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: An ID, identification card, or...

Mr. John Hollins: Yes.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: What are you using as a list?

Mr. John Hollins: I believe we're different. I think the document list is similar. I think where we might come to a difference—and I don't know for sure, so this is purely opinion—is if you come into the poll, you can bring one or two pieces of ID. We've got your name and address, and we've got your signature to name. So if I've got a hydro bill and you show me a charge card, I think that kind of works.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Basically it's the same.

Mr. John Hollins: Is it? I wasn't sure. I know when it was coming around, you had photo ID and there was a lot of discussion. Quite frankly, I didn't follow it all.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: If somebody doesn't have anything, can a voter from his poll vouch for him?

Mr. John Hollins: No, in Ontario you don't have vouching. But the out clause would be that you can take an affidavit that you're qualified.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I see. Thank you.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Mr. Hollins, thank you very much for coming today and sharing with us your thoughts on this. It's a process we're engaged in, gathering information, and you've helped us with that today.

I'm going to suspend the meeting for a couple of minutes while we change witnesses.

- _____ (Pause) _____
- _____

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, November 19, 2009, there is a question of privilege relating to the mailings sent into the riding of Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Point of order.

Actually, it's more of a point of clarification. I think it's important to get this on the record, because we might run into this situation in future meetings.

On the question of whether or not a member of Parliament is compelled to appear before a committee if they don't want to, you'll recall I raised that at the last meeting. My contention was that a member of Parliament is not compelled to appear if that member does not want to appear. Michel and Marcel both said that they are compelled. In fact, they are not.

I'll read into the record from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Second Edition, 2009*, under the heading "Committee Powers by Committee Type", under the subset "To Send for Persons". I won't read the entire rationale, but I'll cut to the chase. It says, "The same logic explains why a Standing Committee cannot order a Member of the House of Commons or a Senator to appear."

Now, there is a recourse to that, and I'll read that, because it's a process: "If a member of the House refuses an invitation to appear before a Standing Committee, and the Committee decides that such an appearance is necessary, it may so report to the House and then it will be up to the House to decide what measures should be taken."

So there is some recourse. But my point is, as I stated in the last meeting, you cannot force a member of Parliament to appear based on a committee's wishes. It has to go to a higher body.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

On the same point of order, Mr. Guimond, quickly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Lukiwski is right. What I may not have specified is that we need an order of the House to compel a member to appear before a committee. I completely agree with what my colleague, Tom Lukiwski, said in terms of clarifying the matter.

• (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair: Good. That is also my interpretation of that point of order.

Mr. Stoffer, you now understand how a witness feels when we do procedural stuff and make them sit there and wait. This will help you at your own committees, I'm sure.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): No worries.

The Chair: I'd like to offer you an opportunity for an opening statement. If you could keep it to under a couple of hours, that would be great.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, honourable colleagues, *chère collègues*, I thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today to see if we can't work collectively and cooperatively on ending something that I believe needs to stop on all sides. I also want to thank the honourable Speaker of the House of Commons for his ruling on my point of privilege.

I especially want to thank Mr. Tom Lukiwski, who advised me that Mr. Vellacott would be offering an apology. I accepted Mr. Vellacott's apology. It was sincere. It was correct. I've always had the greatest respect for Mr. Vellacott, as I do for all members of the House of Commons. As I have said many times, there hasn't been one member of the House of Commons or one senator in my twelve and a half years of being here who I wouldn't want as my neighbour. We may disagree on issues, but that's beside the point.

So, why are we here today? I got a ten percenter in my riding with Maurice Vellacott's name on it, but he didn't do the work on it. It was done by somebody within the central party of the Conservative Party. To be frank with you, sir, whoever designed this, whoever authorized sending it out, that's the person I would like to meet. If I lived in Yukon, we'd make sure that person had a disability pension right after we met with him. But we can't do that these days. We have to be nice. It's that person who I would like to see apologize, not just to me but to all my colleagues in the House of Commons who received this nonsense.

To be completely frank with you, sir, and I say this in the simplest terms that I know, this was a piece of garbage. But I will say something. "The failed long-gun registry. Hard on farmers and hunters. Useless against real criminals." That is absolutely correct. I've been saying that since 1993, four years before I got into the House of Commons. I have completely opposed the registry since 1997 with every chance I have had, from press conferences to working with Gary Breitkreuz and everybody else. But here is what it says:

Your Member of Parliament, Peter Stoffer, worked to support the registry and end the amnesty. Is that the support you expect from your local MP?

I don't know another way to say this, sir, but it was a bold-faced lie. Somebody within the central party had to have known my voting record, had to have known where I stood on this issue, and still sent it out under the name of a member of Parliament from Saskatchewan. Why did they do it? Is it—sorry about the language—to piss me off? Is it to get me upset? Is it to win my seat? Is it to garner votes among my constituents to get a database and raise funds? I mean, if you wanted to say that I voted against certain items of a budget, that's fair game. If you wanted to send something to my riding talking about the home renovation tax credit, that's fair game. But to send a bold-faced lie into my personal riding...

I work with Tony Rodgers of the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters, who my friend Mr. Kerr knows. They questioned me. They said, "Peter, what's going on? Have you changed your mind? Did the party get hold of you and make you change your opinion?" I had to explain myself to an awful lot of people. As you know, Mr. Chairman, we don't have time to re-explain things that we've already done for twelve and a half years.

At the end of the day, I accepted Mr. Vellacott's apology without reservation. But I still need to hear from the person who designed this and who ultimately authorized this to be sent into my riding. That's the individual or group of individuals who I would like to see and hear from directly.

Second, when it comes to the use of ten percenters—and I know the Board of Internal Economy and others are discussing this at this time—I have a personal opinion, but I don't have a party position. As you know, I'm not a member of the board, and I'm not an officer of the House of Commons, but I believe—and all parties are guilty of this—it's time that not only this committee but Parliament itself should have a serious discussion on the future use of ten percenters, the content of those ten percenters, and maybe, just maybe, we should have a little more decorum, not just in the House, but in the message we send across the country.

Mr. Chairman, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to release whatever frustration I had before. I want to thank the members of the committee very much for their time as well.

I'm prepared and willing to answer questions in both official languages.

Merci beaucoup.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

I know you to be a very collegial man, and I understand your point today.

If you'd like to table a copy of that document with the committee, you may also do so.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: The reason I didn't, sir, is that it's only in English.

The Chair: Okay. You can table it with us.

Mr. Scott Reid: On a point of order, he can table it; we just can't distribute it until we get it translated.

The Chair: We can't distribute it to members. That's fine.

We'll hear from Madam Jennings, first off. Can we stick to five-minute rounds at the beginning here and see how we do?

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Sure, that's not a problem.

Thank you very much for agreeing to come before this meeting, Mr. Stoffer, and thank you very much for your heartfelt statement.

I have two questions. One, in Mr. Vellacott's apology, did Mr. Vellacott explain how his name came to be attached to that ten percenter? My understanding is that under the rules of the House for householder ten percenters, the member actually has to sign off on it. That's the first question.

On the second question, you've suggested that it's perhaps time for the House, through its different committees, whether it's before the Board of Internal Economy or the House itself, to take a second look at ten percenters. You may be aware that the leader of the official opposition, Mr. Michael Ignatieff, has taken a very clear position on the issue of ten percenters. That is, the Liberal Party, the Liberal caucus, would like to see them limited to the member's own riding. I'd like to know if you have an opinion as to the position that has been taken by the Liberal Party.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: To the first question regarding Mr. Vellacott and the signing off on it, I know that what we do in our own caucus is the member of Parliament has to approve it to the party before it

goes out, if you want your name on a particular ten percenter to go to a particular area. You have to see it—this is for our own party—you have to sign off, and then off it goes out.

I don't know how the Conservative Party works, but in the apology Mr. Vellacott indicated that he would be talking to the people who obviously draft these and send them out to make sure that kind of error doesn't happen again. Whether the Conservative Party has a policy where they actually have to see it before they sign it, I don't know. That's a question for the Conservative Party.

Regarding Mr. Ignatieff's statement on limiting ten percenters strictly to their own riding, I have my own personal view. I don't use ten percenters. I haven't used them for several years. I did in the past, no question, but I don't do them because I found with the cost, it took a lot of time for our staff to do them.

But I believe that debate should happen within the Board of Internal Economy and the officers of it. There are 308 of us. I sit in seat 309, which is a real honour and privilege. I just have one opinion, but I think the board, the leaders, can get together and make that honest assessment and judgment down the road.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Do I have time left?

The Chair: You have a couple of minutes.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: You do agree that a member has to sign a document that authorizes the sending of a ten percenter. Now, if a member wilfully signs the document for the House services for the printing, etc., without having seen the actual content, that does not excuse that member. They have then handed over the authority to someone else to decide the content and they're trusting that the content will not breach another member's privileges. So there is still a certain responsibility on the part of the member.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: To put it bluntly, again, I can't speak for the Conservative Party and how they operate. I can just let you know that within our own party, when we agree to send out ten percenters on a particular issue to a particular riding across the country, we would actually see it, make sure the content is what we approve of, and then we sign off on it. I can't speak for other parties and how they do it.

The other issue, of course, is that at the end of the day members of Parliament are responsible for everything in and out of their business offices here in Ottawa and their constituency office. If one of our staff screws up, we're responsible. At the end of the day, any document, phone call, e-mail, or whatever that comes from our offices, we are ultimately responsible for the content, tone, and for everything else. That's just part of our responsibility as members of Parliament, and even senators, for that matter.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski.

• (1215)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Chair.

Not to be disrespectful at all, but do you want to be addressed as Mr. Stoffer? I sense that makes you uncomfortable as much as anything else.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: It's Peter, and it does, yes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Peter, thank you for being here.

First, let me say I totally agree with you that incorrect information should never be allowed to be sent out into any of the ridings, period.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: We've probably all received them—maybe not all, but I know I have. I've received ten percenters from your party—actually, not ten percenters, in the sense they come in an envelope from your leader. And not always, but on occasion, because they've been doing it for five years, the information has been incorrect.

I've never raised a point of privilege because I've ignored them. But never have I had an issue that was as fundamental as the one you reference, and that's the gun registry. You know that's a hot-button item in parts of Canada. It certainly is in Saskatchewan. It is in many parts of rural Canada. It certainly is where you live. So I can completely understand why you would have been upset, to say the least, when you got something that was so contrary to your stated position for so many years. It shouldn't be allowed to happen.

You referenced the fact that you'd like to get the person or persons who designed it and talk to them, but what else would you like to rectify the situation? Do you want to see another piece go into your riding rectifying and correcting the record, so to speak? Mr. Vellacott has apologized. You've accepted it. That's very gracious of you, and also of him to offer the apology. But is there anything else you think needs to be done to rectify the situation that prompted your point of privilege?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Perhaps I'll expand that question. I thank you very much for it, by the way.

I've seen ten percenters that went into Bloc ridings after they voted against a particular motion, when it came to some sort of crime bill. And I thought, wow, that's heavy. And then I just saw a recent one on anti-Semitism in some ridings in Quebec, and I said, whoa, where are we going with this?

Generally, sir, what I would do if I had my way is to have us stop the practice of attacking one another and attacking our voting records. If you want to send information to my riding on the good things the Conservative Party has done, go for it. Fill it up. But if you want to attack me or attack a voting record, I could flip it right back.

For example, Mr. Armstrong, a brand-new member of Parliament, voted against an issue for safety in St. John's yesterday. Now, I easily could have done a ten percenter and slammed him, thinking how dare he oppose a safety measure for Newfoundland. But it would have been stupid of me to do that. It would have been a waste of taxpayers' money. It would have been a waste of my staff's time. And why the hell would I do that to a brand-new member of Parliament? It's not appropriate to do that.

I think the House leaders, the whips, whoever, should get together and set some kind of a guideline, an approach to say that if we send these ten percenters to the ridings, then let's have a little bit of civility around them. People look at us during question period, as you know. They look at us as if it's *Romper Room* for adults. We don't need to extend that childish behaviour.

I'm just as guilty as the next guy. I'm not innocent here in this. But we all need to work together and tone down that nastiness.

You just talked about voting. We want to encourage people to exercise their democratic opportunities. But if we keep sending out this nastiness from all sides, we're just going to turn off the voters. We're wasting taxpayers' money. And I think we could do it a better way, sir.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I appreciate your opinion on that, but I specifically want to talk about your situation and this incident. That's what we're charged with trying to rectify.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Precisely.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: So is there anything specifically that you would like to see to try to rectify the situation that prompted you to raise the point of privilege?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Vellacott's people have already picked up on his apology. And many of the people in my riding consider the case closed. But what they don't understand is that this could still happen, not just to me but to somebody else. So I need to be assured for my own satisfaction that whoever in party central did the design, did the work—I'll use your party as an example because it came from there—that they understand this is completely unacceptable at any level for any person, and that they are assured this will never happen again. If I get that assurance, I'll be satisfied.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay. Thank you very much, Peter.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you, sir. Tom is a good guy. I like Tom.

The Chair: Monsieur Guimond.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My dear colleague, as you quite rightly pointed out, right now, only one party has ten percenters that are being strongly contested, especially when it comes to points of privilege raised in the House. There is you, who we are hearing from. There is another. A decision is coming. It should be made this afternoon, and it concerns Mr. Cotler and anti-Semitic remarks.

As you noted, we, the Bloc Québécois, got a taste of the same medicine this summer from Conservatives. Among other things, there is talk of a bill that seeks to impose minimum sentences. The members of the Bloc Québécois are against that bill because of the minimum sentences, not because of its intended purpose, which is to protect children. We were flooded with ten percenters from Conservatives in our ridings, saying that the Bloc Québécois was against protecting children. Images were used showing an empty park swing and the shadow of a three-year-old child walking with an adult who looked to be around sixty.

• (1220)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That is shameful.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Is it a pedophile? Is it the child's grandfather?

That is what we endured, Mr. Chair. You are absolutely right. That happened to us this summer. We did not denounce the move when we resumed sitting in September, but it was this summer that we were flooded with that message. Something has to be done because that is totally unacceptable. That kind of behaviour should be penalized: the person who sent the document should face a penalty. It is too easy to do what Mr. Vellacott did and apologize to the House, especially since he probably did not see—you said it, it is within the central party of the Conservatives—the ten percenter that was sent to your riding.

In any case, you are absolutely right. Thank you for raising a point of privilege. In your case, it is the gun registry. Unfortunately, we are not on the same side. If the Conservatives had sent a ten percenter to your riding commending you for your support of getting rid of the registry, you probably would not have raised that point of privilege.

We need to ask whether it is normal to flood the ridings of colleagues with these ten percenters. I will end with this point. This summer, in the span of two-and-a-half weeks, I received 11 at home. I received an English-only ten percenter from someone by the name of Norlock, in Ontario, and my riding is 99.8% francophone. I got a bilingual one from Mr. Galipeau, and the other nine were happily sent out by Josée Verner, Lawrence Cannon and Maxime Bernier.

If the Conservatives think they are helping their cause by sending out such things.... You should see how many emails we received. And this is the party that is supposed to be the guardian of the public purse. Because I am on the Board of Internal Economy, I cannot reveal how much these ten percenters have cost to date or how much spending has gone up.

If you, the Conservatives, think that you will see a political gain from this kind of activity, you have another thing coming.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you have an answer, Peter?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Yes, I have, very briefly.

Mr. Guimond, thank you very much. You, sir, are a long-serving member of the House, and I will put on the record that in my twelve and a half years as an MP I have received ten percenters from the Liberal Party, I have received them from the former PC Party, I've received them even from myself.

An hon. member: And it was critical.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: As you know, I'm sometimes critical of my own party in a very open way too.

But I will put on record, and I say this with the greatest respect for the Conservative Party, that I hadn't noticed the level that I've seen since 2006. Since 2006 I have noticed that the rhetoric has been heated up. It's a little bit nastier—I don't know another word for it—than I had ever seen in the past.

I don't know why that is. I would recommend, if I were advising any party—Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Bloc—to tone it down, to talk about the positive things you do, and to lay off the attacks on

individuals. Mr. Cotler, for example, a personal friend, a long-time human rights advocate, has received more awards from Israel than I think everybody in Canada combined, and to link him in any way—even to suggest that he and his party may be that way—is beyond the pale, and it needs to stop.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A little earlier, we heard about Mr. Vellacott's apology. I was there in the House of Commons. You can check the blues, but if memory serves, he basically said that had he read the ten percenter carefully, he might not have signed off on it and that it did come across his desk. He said it came from somewhere else. Do you recall what his exact words were? It was not really him who wrote it, and it was as if he did not give any thought to the importance of the document that came across his desk.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Godin, I don't recall precisely. I know that he said he would be discussing with the party information that goes out in the future.

I will also put on the record that Mr. Vellacott cannot have been here as long as I've been here and not have wonderful qualities. He is a decent member of Parliament. He's a decent guy. I just think his name happened to be on a ten percenter, which I think, if he had it to do over again, he wouldn't do.

As to the words he actually said, he apologized without reservation and said that he would be talking to his party regarding the content of what goes out in the future. Now, whether he actually saw the one going out, I don't know.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Talking to his party on the content means it's not his content. If it was his content, why should he go to talk to his party?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: To be completely frank with you, sir, I can't put words in Mr. Vellacott's mouth. My suggestion is that if you wish to speak to him directly, I'm sure he'd be happy to explain it. I really don't know what he was—

Mr. Yvon Godin: The bill he was talking about on the firearms registry was a private member's bill. It was not a Conservative bill.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Bill C-391 comes from Candice Hoepfner, yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It was from a member of Parliament; it was a private member's bill. The party was writing a ten percenter that was sent across the country by one of their members on what was a private member's bill. It was more on events of the government, then, because it is coming from the party.

You said you were more or less satisfied, and I want to hear more about that. Was it a ten percenter?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: In my riding, it was, yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: When a ten percenter goes out, how many people do you think get it?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I know I got calls from people in Musquodoboit Harbour, in Fall River, in Eastern Passage, and in Preston. Those are the extremes of my riding, so an awful lot went out, because 10% of the riding would be Musquodoboit Harbour. It must have gone out to more than just 10%.

It's called a ten percenter, but you can send out more. We could send out a ten percenter every day.

Mr. Yvon Godin: How do you know that people in your riding are pretty happy with the apology? The only place they could have seen it, if they had been in front of a television, was on CPAC.

Was it on the national news, after that, that he was apologizing?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Was he on the CBC?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Was he on ATV, CTV?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Was it in all of the newspapers in your riding?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No, sir. What happened was that once the apology was made, I called back all of the 28 people who contacted me checking my opinion on the gun registry and sent them the apology.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That was 28 people?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: There were 28 people I responded to. The anglers and hunters association, for example, received it, and they spoke on behalf of their members. But these are all people I worked with on the registry issue: police officers.... There is a neurosurgeon who is a trap and skeet shooter who called me up and said, "What in hell are you doing now?" I called them all back and I sent them the apology. Also, there was a small story about it in one of our local papers.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is it possible, though, that other people who did not call you have made up their minds about what you have done, and they don't know about what happened?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: The thing is that any time you send out a piece of paper.... We all know that some of our householders and ten percenters end up in the trash. They get it in the mailbox, and out it goes. A successful ten percenter or householder is one in which they see your face and name for two seconds and throw it away. That's considered a successful one.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But you were not the hunter on the piece of paper.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: This one did not go in the garbage.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No, exactly. But the reality is, sir, that it's out there, and people may, at the next election time, say "Maybe he thinks this way, maybe he doesn't; I may exercise my vote...." But I can't speak individually for a constituent.

Mr. Yvon Godin: My question is very clear. A ten percenter could go to thousands and thousands of people. Do you agree?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Eventually, yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: A ten percenter in your riding could go to thousands of people. If you call back 28 people, you will agree with me that this will not cover where the ten percenters went.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Right.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Then your privilege has been infringed.

● (1230)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Yes. And actually Garry Breitkreuz is a good buddy of mine, and I worked with him, and I said, "Look, I'll speak to my party, I'll speak to people on this issue, I will see if we can't get more New Democrats who think my way to vote on a simple bill", which eventually we were able to do. And I thought if they treat me like this, imagine what they do to people who really like the registry.

So basically there is the work that I've been doing over the years trying to promote the end of the registry, because I believe there's a different way that we can handle certain gun crime in the legislation of this country, there's a different way of doing it, instead of the one that we had with us from Mr. Allan Rock. And all of a sudden these people now question my ability and are thinking that maybe I wasn't telling the truth and was just being a political opportunist. That's where the privilege comes in. And then they're reading, "No, no, all of what I said for 25 years is correct. This is an unfortunate error, and it's a lie." "Well, I don't know. It comes from the government; they wouldn't do that on purpose, would they?" I go, "Well..." What can I say?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

That's once around. I'm willing to take more speakers. I have one on the list. But we know if we go one more time around, we'll have very little time at the end of the meeting with which to talk about what we're doing. It's the choice of the group.

Madame DeBellefeuille, you're the one I have on my list.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I would like to ask a question.

The Chair: You have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Stoffer, thank you for being here.

Regardless of the ten percenters, it is a matter of principles. This week in the House of Commons, I heard a lot of things that surprised me, as a woman. Mr. Vellacott, for example, seemed to be attacking women. Immediately, I wondered what he would say if his riding received ten percenters saying that he was discriminating against women. That is my perception, my belief. It may be a matter of opinion. I could have easily responded with an accusation. Unemployed workers were also treated like no-good bastards. We could take advantage of that to attack the Conservative member who said it. How can an elected representative treat the unemployed and those who are losing their jobs like no-good bastards?

The member apologized, but one could think that he believed what he said. Given your experience and Mr. Cotler's, that kind of comment makes me think that we are so far gone that we need to question people and set boundaries. Communicating with voters through householders is a privilege. So the fact that that privilege was used to launch vile attacks on a member regarding their beliefs means that we really need to stop and look at the problem, discuss it and set new boundaries.

I am very disappointed by these events. Thank you for your remarks. I hope that your testimony and that of others will prompt the Board of Internal Economy to define more appropriate parameters for the use of ten percenters.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madame, and sir, if I may say in conclusion, thank you all very much, and you're absolutely right: this was an unfortunate circumstance, but out of every unfortunate circumstance there are ways at the end of the day that maybe we can learn something from all of this collectively—not individually but collectively. And maybe, just maybe, we can actually be nicer to one another, and the information that we send across the country using taxpayers' money can be of a kind that either we're building our own party or we're sending out messages about what we've done, or maybe we moved a motion or bill that was very happy.

I looked at Mr. Watson the other day. He moved the unanimous motion on adoption. Fantastic! Now, if he sent that into the riding and said, "You know, your member of Parliament, as a Conservative member, I did this. We got consent from everyone, and this is a great thing for adoptive parents"—beautiful. That's great. If for whatever reason somebody decided to vote against it, like the Bloc did on the issue of the children, that's the Bloc's decision, or the Conservatives', the NDP's, or the Liberals'. How we vote is always important, it's always on the record, but to go and slam people repeatedly on that with taxpayers' money I think needs to cease. I think at the end of the day this committee and others will get together and maybe have a couple of beers, or a glass of red wine from the Niagara region—may I say they have very good wine there—or the Annapolis Valley, and maybe start looking at each other and realize, you know, we're not bad folks. As Bob Dylan says, we sell things from a different point of view.

At the end of the day, we have to be responsible to the taxpayer, and responsible to each other, because tit for tat never works in this game.

Again, I thank the honourable members, and Mr. Chairman, your committee, and you, sir, for the opportunity, and hopefully at the end of the day something good can come out of it. I thank you so much for your time.

Merci beaucoup.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you for coming today, Mr. Stoffer. It's been very good to hear.

We will suspend and go in camera to talk about what report this committee will do and how we will deal with the question.

Thank you very much for coming. It was a class act, Peter.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

- _____ (Pause) _____
- _____

[Public proceedings resume]

• (1240)

The Chair: We are now in public.

I believe, Mr. Godin, you have a notice of motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, and it reads as follows:

Given that the Member of Parliament for Saskatoon-Wanuskewin used his mailing privileges to send misinformation and untruths to the riding of the Member of Parliament for Sackville-Eastern Shore, be it so moved that the Member for Saskatoon-Wanuskewin reimburse the House of Commons from his member's budget and/or the Conservative Caucus Services budget for the cost of this mailing.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, before we go further I have to rule that motion out of order. It goes well beyond the mandate of this committee and the matter we're speaking of on privilege.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is there an explanation for why?

The Chair: Yes, it goes beyond the mandate that we're allowed to do here. It is, in fact, asking for something this committee cannot do.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But we're writing a report to be sent to the House of Commons, and that could be part of our report. If the House accepts the report, that means they accept what we have said to them. The House could refuse the report.

The Chair: Sir, that could very well be part of the report, if we were at the point where we were writing the report. You've given us a notice of motion, and the motion doesn't say that. The motion asks for things to happen that are beyond the mandate of this committee to do.

Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, I think we have more witnesses that we should be hearing. I think we should probably invite Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): On a point of order, is this issue...?

The Chair: I've ruled against it at this moment, so we're not on the motion, that's for sure. We're on committee business.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: We're on committee business.

I think we should hear more witnesses. One of the witnesses we should hear is the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, to understand exactly how it happened this way.

• (1245)

Mr. Scott Reid: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Proulx, I have a point of order.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Should we go back in camera?

Mr. Scott Reid: Isn't the conduct of future business normally done in camera?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: We're on business, it's not future business. It's the business of the point of privilege that we've been discussing. It's not new business.

Mr. Scott Reid: I follow that. All I'm saying is that normally, when we start discussing who we're going to have as witnesses and that kind of thing, that is done at an in camera meeting. I think Mr. Guimond's point is that may not be binding upon us. That may well be the case, and if that's the case and it's the will of the committee to stay in public, we can do that. But I raised a point of order because normally it is conducted in camera.

Mr. Michel Guimond: We had a majority motion.

The Chair: I agree with you. If you'd let me answer the point of order first, I'll let you speak, sir, because I do learn from what you say.

You're right, I have moved that we should be in camera if we're discussing the business of the committee. A motion has been put to be in public, and the majority has voted on that.

Mr. Michel Guimond: A democracy.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, I know, but the Bloc Québécois believes it can revisit certain pieces of democracy forever and ever, when it comes to whether Quebeckers want to separate from Canada. So it's my position, Mr. Chair, that this is a different piece of business.

An hon. member: This is exactly what we are trying to fight back.

The Chair: Order.

I'll be as collegial as I can on this.

We've ruled this motion out of order. It's out of the way at the moment. We're back to committee business. It is usual that committee business is done in camera, but the majority has voted that we will not do it in camera.

If you're moving a point of order that we move back into camera, then we could vote again on it. But at this moment I'm just trying to give you the lay of the land as to where we are.

Mr. Guimond, on that same point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I am Mr. Lauzon. We look alike, but not that much.

[*English*]

I thought we had decided to be in public to consider this motion. That's what I thought we voted on.

It was just that. I would like to make a motion that we go back in camera to discuss committee business and who we want to call as witnesses, etc. If you're going to be talking about personalities and that, I don't think it is advisable to be doing so in the public forum.

The Chair: I will tell you that is my interpretation, that we go in public to talk about Mr. Godin's motion.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I'm not sure that's what you want to do.

The Chair: It is now over, but again it is the will of the committee. Should we be in public or in camera?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I would like to make—

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, on the same topic, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That is the easiest way to do it. I agree with your assessment that now that we're disposed of this, we should normally be in camera. However, if the committee members want this to be in public, simply forward another motion that this current piece of business we're discussing be in public, and then we'll vote on that.

The Chair: Okay. Do I have a motion...?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: If I may conclude, the only reason I'm saying this is that there has been a precedent we've long observed in this committee that committee business be in camera. If the majority of the members want to go public for this particular point of discussion, let's just follow a process.

The Chair: A motion to go public or in camera is not debatable, so I will assume that one has now been put on the floor.

We'll vote again. Those wishing to be in public?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: We are in public.

The Chair: We are in public, so the motion would be to go in camera.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: We've cleared that one up, so we're remaining in public.

I will get right back to you, because we are still on you. I will now get back to Mr. Proulx's point on the discussion that he was having about committee business.

Just as a warning, we're now in public on committee business. Go ahead.

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

As I was saying, I realize that we cannot subpoena him. We cannot force him, but we should invite the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin to testify in front of this committee to explain what the situation is.

Second, I think we should call in as witnesses the person or persons within the Conservative Party who looked after preparing this, if that is the case. If the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin says he didn't prepare it, let's get the persons or the person who did in here. They can tell us why they did this, why they believed that he had voted contrary to what he actually did, or what the intent was in sending this out, so that we can get to the bottom of this and understand exactly what the procedure was all about, sir.

● (1250)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lukiwski on the same point of committee business or something like it.

It's a motion? Great.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: What is the motion again?

The Chair: The motion is that we invite Mr. Maurice Vellacott, and that we invite some persons unknown to our committee.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: All right. I'm not sure how we deal with the vote on persons unknown. I guess that's my process question here.

Mr. Michel Guimond: I hope we'll find the name of the unknown.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: The will of the committee will ultimately decide on the conducting of business here. I would point out again just what the Speaker said. He wanted us to deal with the point of privilege, and I point out for the record that Mr. Stoffer here said that he is satisfied. He asked for two things, if I recall correctly. He said that he would like to speak to—he didn't necessarily say bring before the committee—the person or the persons who put this together, because I think he wants to have a one-on-one with them.

Also, he wants assurances that this type of action—in other words, sending out incorrect information in ten percenters—never happens again. I think that's the crux of the issue here. Without question, as I said for the record, and I will say again, at no time should a ten percenter or any other form of communication on the taxpayer's dime be allowed to be sent out to anyone's riding if the information contained in that communiqué is incorrect. It shouldn't happen.

I have stated again for the record that I have received—I won't call them ten percenters, because the incorrect information from the NDP was in a letter form—incorrect information. I have copies of those. I have also received missives from the Liberal Party over the five years that have contained incorrect information. If you want to go down that road, I'll gladly bring those to the committee, but I don't think that's the point.

The Chair: I'll also rule that going that far is way out of this committee's mandate again.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I agree with you.

All I'm saying is we focus in on what the Speaker wanted us to resolve on the point of privilege. The one who is aggrieved, affected by this, Mr. Stoffer, said he is satisfied. He's looking for two things. One of them is to get assurances from a person or persons that this will not happen again. If those assurances could be given to Mr. Stoffer, he would be satisfied then, in my opinion, from what I heard. The issue was dealt with and it's over.

The Chair: Mr. Guimond, on the same point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: In order to improve my knowledge of English, contrary to most of the unilingual anglophones here, I try to listen to what was said in English directly. As for the others, those who want to continue to speak just one language, that is their right....

This is what I understood, and I would like the clerk to provide us with the blues of Mr. Stoffer's testimony as soon as possible—I would think we would have them at our offices. Mr. Stoffer said he was satisfied with our colleague Mr. Vellacott's apology. Yet he wants an apology from the person who authorized or who wrote the document. He did not seem satisfied with respect to the content. Regardless, if he had been satisfied.... He continued, he agreed to appear before us.

I want to see the blues because he asked for an apology from the person who authorized or who wrote the document.

The Chair: Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I will be very brief. I just wanted to second what Mr. Guimond said. I think we should be able to look at the

blues where he said that the person who should apologize is the individual who wrote and produced the document. Someone in the Conservative party needs to apologize. He was not satisfied.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Lukiwski, and then I'll wrap it up.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I agree. Let's see the blues and see what he said.

I'm not disagreeing with that whatsoever. What he also said—and he obviously said it tongue in cheek—is that where he comes from he'd normally like to talk to the person who put this out because that person would then go on disability immediately after that discussion. He was obviously speaking tongue in cheek.

•(1255)

The Chair: I doubt he meant that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: But I would like to see the blues. I honestly don't know whether he asked for an apology or said he would like to talk to the person who did this. I interpreted that he wanted a one-on-one with the person. But let's see the blues and see what he said. I was very sincere.

Mr. Chair, if I can—

The Chair: I'll let you finish.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I was very sincere when I asked Mr. Stoffer what he wanted to see done to rectify this. If he wants an apology, fair ball, but let's check the blues and see exactly what he asked for. Frankly, I thought he was going to say he wanted something to be sent out into his riding setting the record straight. I think that would be a legitimate request, but he didn't say that. He just said he wanted to talk to the person and he also wanted assurances that this would never happen again. I think those are both very legitimate requests.

The Chair: Mr. Guimond, please be very quick.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Through you, Mr. Chair, I would like to tell Mr. Lukiwski that he is a master of butchering statements. He takes the parts of a sentence that suit him: Mr. Stoffer is satisfied. He stops there and fails to mention the rest of the sentence when Mr. Stoffer said that he was angry with the person....

I am beginning to understand the tactic, because Mr. Lukiwski uses it regularly in the House with points of privilege. He refers only to parts of a sentence. But we will get the blues, I am going to read them, and I am going to ask him whether he still thinks that Mr. Stoffer is a man who is satisfied.

[*English*]

The Chair: We've already all agreed about the checking of the blues.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I've just been on the receiving end of a personal attack from Mr. Guimond. Let me say, for the record once again, that I agreed to seeing the blues to see what he asked for. There is no incomplete sentence there.

The Chair: I think we're all at the same thought, but I'll give Mr. Proulx one more chance.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: We're going to look at the blues, but in the meantime I'm back to my request. When you jokingly said let's invite an unknown person, I think you were carrying it a little bit too far. You very well know that, in the case of the Conservative Party, it's probably the director or manager of caucus services or director or manager of printed materials—whatever you want to call it. We all know there's one person in charge of something. It doesn't come out of the blues. That will be the other person who I would want invited as a witness to this committee.

The motion is on the table—the first one: let's invite. I know we can't use any more severe language in regard to Mr. Vellacott. Let's invite him, and let's also invite the director of Conservative caucus services.

The Chair: I need clarification before I can vote on this motion. During the discussion on this motion it was said that we'd better check our facts against the blues. If you would allow me, I will take it upon myself to discuss the blues with the clerk. If indeed Mr. Stoffer has not asked for these things....

Mr. Stoffer has asked us to address his point of privilege. My understanding from reading his motion of privilege that he read in the House was that if he and his constituents got an apology then this matter would die. If those things have been accounted for, this matter of privilege should then be closed.

However, let's see if under questioning today Mr. Stoffer asked for anything else. If indeed he did, then this committee will endeavour to do so.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I disagree with you, but you're the chair. This is not a Stoffer committee; this is the procedure and House affairs committee.

The Chair: Right, to which a motion of privilege has been sent. It's our job to deal with that.

Mr. Godin, very quickly, please. I know you're going to tell me I'm incorrect.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm going to try not to be dishonest.

The Chair: Are you assuming someone else is?

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, but you're saying “honestly”. I'm not going to try to be dishonest.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm not the chair; you're the chair. I was referring to what you said.

My interpretation is that when a point of privilege is sent by the House to the committee it then belongs to the committee; it doesn't belong to Peter Stoffer. We have to deal with it. We have to look at it.

We have the right to study it and make recommendations to the House, and that's what we will do.

The Chair: Or not.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Or not, but we will make that decision here.

• (1300)

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: To be correct, I think when a motion is transferred by the House, the House is saying it doesn't want to deal with it because it has other business, so it sends off the authority to deal with the matter. It's only a delegated authority. It has to come back to the House for concurrence, which is the point of concurrence motions. The actual privilege remains that of Mr. Stoffer, as opposed to the privileges of the committee itself.

The Chair: That is my interpretation too, but we will do some more homework on this. If it's all right with the committee, at our next meeting we'll discuss how we will do this in the future.

Our next meeting, on Tuesday, is a full meeting. We'll set aside a small amount of time at the end to deal with how we'll move on this issue. We will probably deal with it in the second meeting of next week.

I'm looking for some nods that I'm on the right track.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: May I make the suggestion that we discuss this at the start of the next meeting?

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Who are the witnesses at the next meeting?

The Chair: There are the three provincial chief electoral officers.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Let's invite them for 15 or 20 minutes after the start of the meeting—

The Chair: So during a limited piece at the beginning of the next meeting.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: —or half an hour, or whatever.

The Chair: Fine, let's do it that way.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Great. Is there anything else for the committee today?

Seeing nothing, I thank you all. I'll see you next Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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