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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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•(1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We'll go ahead and start our meeting this morning. This is the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We are here pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, February 10, talking about Bill C-23.

We have with us, in the first panel, two good friends actually. Mr. Casey, it's great to see you. It was great to have a little chat with you this morning. I haven't seen you in a long time, and it's good to see you.

Mr. Bill Casey (Former Member of Parliament, As an Individual): It's great to be back.

The Chair: The Hon. Laurie Hawn is also with us today.

You each have opening statements. I will defer to you.

An hon. member: Point of order...

The Chair: Certainly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): I would just like to say that, if possible, we'd like to spend a few minutes at the end of today's meeting discussing the motion we introduced at our last meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Also, Chair, if I might raise a little piece of business, we were keenly interested in getting the DPP in for the Monday we return. Were we able to lock that in, sir?

The Chair: I was able to do that for you, Mr. Christopherson. He will be joining us with the Quebec chief electoral officer on the Monday we return.

Mr. David Christopherson: Perfect, thank you, sir.

The Chair: We look forward to that. We think that is our last group of witnesses.

Mr. Casey, I was just getting to you and saying if you have an opening statement, we'd love you to go first, for around five minutes. That would be great.

Mr. Bill Casey: Thank you very much.

First of all, I just want to say I was a member of this committee 10 years ago, and I have to say it wasn't nearly as exciting as it is now,

or interesting. It was kind of dull, and nobody much watched it or kept track of it, but you've done a lot to raise the profile.

The Chair: Well, we believe it's the chair, but other than that—

Mr. Bill Casey: I believe it is too, absolutely, it's the leadership of the chair—

The Chair: Please, Mr. Casey, you can start.

Mr. Bill Casey: I believe that Bill C-23, the fair elections act, is an opportunity to correct a very unfair aspect of Elections Canada rules that have been in place for many years.

I'm referring to the set of rules that allow a candidate belonging to a recognized party to begin to raise money, issue tax receipts, and prepare for the next election long before the election is called. A different set of rules governs independent candidates, which prevents them from doing anything in preparation for a campaign until after the election is called.

As a for instance, all of you can issue tax receipts, through your EDAs, to contributors today in order to encourage supporters to make contributions to your anticipated 2015 campaign. An independent candidate running against you in the same riding cannot do this. An independent candidate can only begin to raise money and issue tax receipts after the election is called.

There are two sets of rules and they are very unfair.

I'm sure that some of the members of Parliament at this table had funds left over from their campaign account in the last election. That money was probably transferred to your riding association account, and now those funds are available to be returned to your 2015 campaign account to be used in the next election. If an independent candidate running against you had funds left over in his or her campaign account after the last election, the money had to be surrendered to the Receiver General for Canada. It would not be returned to them if they decide to run again in the next election.

Again, there are two sets of rules.

I'm sure that all of you have signs available and information prepared well ahead of the next election, or you will have. An independent candidate running against you can only commit to any purchase after the election is called; again, two sets of rules.

As an interesting example, I've attached an invitation, from the Internet, to a fundraiser event being held to raise money for the riding of the Honourable Pierre Poilievre in anticipation of the next election. The fee to attend is \$125 per person, and attendees are provided with a tax receipt for \$99. An independent candidate running against him is not allowed to do this. Only after the next election is called is an independent candidate allowed to raise funds and issue tax receipts.

The two sets of rules are very unfair.

I don't mean to pick on the minister, as most MPs from all parties will be raising funds in the coming months in exactly the same way, but it is a good example. Further, \$75 from every \$125 ticket for Minister Poilievre's fall fundraiser will come from the taxpayers of Canada through the tax credit system. An independent candidate running against him cannot access these tax credit benefits in the same way prior to the election being called.

Please ask yourself if you would consider it fair if your opposition in the next election could raise money earlier than you could, raise more money than you could, and could make campaign arrangements earlier than you for the next election. Ask yourself if you would consider it fair if you had to forfeit cash left over from your campaign, but all the competitors that ran against you could keep theirs.

In fact, I ran as an independent in the 2008 election. The Conservative, Liberal, and NDP candidates in my riding were all able to keep the excess funds from the campaign. As an independent, I was required to surrender my remaining funds.

Again, two sets of rules.

Although these rules have been in place for many years, Bill C-23 seems to exacerbate the disparity. The provision that would generously allow political parties to exempt certain campaign expenses incurred over the previous five years before an election would provide no benefit for independents. I believe this inequitable situation could be corrected relatively easily if independent candidates were allowed to provide a mechanism so they could establish an entity similar to an electoral district association. It would perform the same function as EDAs for party candidates, and most of the problems would be resolved.

In any case, I'm sure that knowledgeable officials would be able to resolve these inequities if directed to do so by this committee. After the election of 1993, and again after the election of 2000, Elections Canada referred to these disparities as draconian and recommended that they be changed. This is the chance to do it. The fair elections act is an opportunity to correct this most unfair aspect of our election rules.

I urge you to amend the bill to ensure that independent candidates are governed by exactly the same rules as party-sponsored candidates.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Hawn, please, you have five minutes or less, sir.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today and tell you about our experiences in the 2006 federal election in Edmonton Centre.

My motivation in being here is the concern we all share for fair elections in Canada and perhaps to dispel the notion some may have that election fraud does not happen in Canada.

None of what I say will be an indictment of Elections Canada, but the simple fact of human nature is that there will always be those who, for their own gain, will want to cheat, whether it is on their taxes, EI claims, insurance claims, or elections. Election fraud will probably always be attempted, and to some extent, will always succeed. Elections Canada's job and our job is to try to stay a step ahead of people who will always try to find new ways to get around the rules and will always try to find new holes when old holes are plugged.

We were concerned about abuse of voter identification cards in 2004. We knew that many people received more than one card, and the availability of extra cards and the lack of other ID requirements created an environment that made fraud much easier. Scrutineers reported many cases of voters using VIC cards and nothing else for ID. We also knew that it was not uncommon for stacks of VIC cards to be left in the lobbies of apartment buildings and condominiums.

Although VIC cards were not intended to be ID in the 2006 election, that's how many people used them. All you needed was a VIC card and a name on the voter's list. That also encouraged some people to try to make a few bucks by selling them. I personally received one phone call during the campaign offering to sell me hundreds of VIC cards. It was in the heat of the campaign. I simply declined rudely and got back to campaigning in what was a typically tight election race in Edmonton Centre. Ultimately, in the 2006 election, we had scrutineer reports, some of which I have given to the clerk, about voters using only VIC cards for ID.

Another hot topic at the moment is vouching. Again, in 2004, we had reports from scrutineers of groups of voters arriving by bus and being vouched for by one person. In 2006, we had scrutineers trained like pit bulls, and we had reports from scrutineers of having turned away van loads of perspective voters and of insisting with DROs who seemed willing to go along with it that we were prepared to take immediate legal action to stop it. Again, in the heat of election day, our interest was on getting through the day without allowing any fraud, intentional or inadvertent, to take place.

The really important circumstance for us in 2006 was the very considerable errors in the Elections Canada voter list. We received an email from a lawyer, who advised that another lawyer had been bragging about the number of times he had voted for the winning candidate in 2004, based on the number of leases he held in the riding, which numbered 14. We weren't given his name, but obviously, that put us on high alert.

Partway through the writ period, my campaign manager, Vitor Marciano, had a conversation with an Elections Canada official who told him that she had already stricken about 700 people off the Edmonton Centre voter list for being clearly improperly registered. She had to discontinue that scrutiny due to other assigned duties, and Mr. Marciano is willing to testify to that information.

We received what was to be the final version of the list five days before the election and we put a team together all night going over the list of some 92,000 voters looking for anomalies. We found them right away, with as many as 20 or 30 people registered to vote from the same address, most of which were obviously non-residential. I would be happy to outline some of the fraudulent addresses during questions.

We immediately went public with a press release, news articles, and other aggressive electronic media. Official complaints were filed with the commissioner of elections by our campaign manager, Vitor Marciano, and by our national campaign co-chair, John Reynolds.

About 400 people were removed from the voter list, and we knew of several hundred more who we just didn't have time to get to. We made it clear that we would challenge suspect voters and that we would seek to press charges against anyone attempting to vote fraudulently. We can never know how many people we deterred from cheating, but we went from losing by 721 votes to winning by 3,600 votes. Obviously, there were other factors at play, but we were determined to win or lose honestly.

At no time did I then, nor will I now, accuse my opponent of participating knowingly in what went on. Simply, there are sometimes volunteers or supporters who are more enthusiastic than the law would normally allow.

I have with me some copies of the questionable listings, some handwritten scrutineer reports, the media release, the official complaints, and the final response from Elections Canada, which I have given to the clerk.

The final response from Elections Canada to our campaign manager was dated November 22, 2006. The investigation concentrated on 93 voters who had cast ballots, 74 of whom were actually contacted, and it was found that 16 had voted in the wrong electoral district. They concluded correctly that this small number of ineligible ballots had not affected the election result, this time, but I would remind the committee that the winning margin in Edmonton Centre in 1993 was 12 votes, and many other elections are won by the tiniest of margins.

If one does some simple math with the 16 out of 74 voters checked against all of the names removed, the number of potential voting errors, intentional or accidental, would number well into the hundreds. Such numbers could, indeed, influence the outcome of an election.

Mr. Chair, my aim today is simply to help people understand that election fraud at some level is, regrettably, part of every election, and we all need to take every measure possible to make sure elections are fair. I know we all want to see voter turnout increase, but personally, I would rather have an election with certainty of the result than an election with a large turnout of questionable voters.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I would be pleased to answer any questions.

• (1110)

The Chair: I thank you both for staying within your time.

We will go to a seven-minute round, starting with Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you both, Mr. Casey and Mr. Hawn, for being here.

Mr. Hawn, I could start my questions with you.

You are probably, with the exception perhaps of Mr. Wrzesnews-kyj, who appeared here yesterday, the first witness we've had who has either some documented alleged or attempted fraud examples to give us, or perhaps you even have some verification of real fraud.

Obviously the critics have been saying that there really is no evidence of fraud whatsoever, therefore why do you need to get rid of vouching? Why do you want to change the system with VICs?

So I'd just like you to expand, if you can Mr. Hawn, on some of the information that you uncovered during the 2006 election, and more specifically, whether or not you think that fraud did occur in your riding of Edmonton Centre, in either the 2004 or 2006 election, and whether or not, under the current provisions to eliminate vouching, that would have an effect on preventing this type of action from happening again.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

I do believe that fraud occurred in 2004 and 2006 in Edmonton Centre, and I don't believe it was just in Edmonton Centre; it would be extremely naive to think that.

Let me give you just some of the examples of the misregistration that we found. Some of it would be accidental, but some of it was, to me, clearly not accidental.

There were about 100 apparently non-existent addresses in Edmonton's downtown core. Some of them were fictional addresses in between two real buildings. Hundreds of people registered to vote under their law offices, medical offices, accounting offices, Government of Canada offices. In some cases, again, there were maybe genuine errors; in other cases, entire families were registered to vote out of where the bread-earner worked.

Dozens of people registered to vote out of office towers but did not list a suite number, simply a street number, to make it look like a residential address. In many cases, these people were also registered to vote in other ridings using their home addresses. In other cases, there were voters living in other ridings but only registered in Edmonton Centre.

Dozens of people registered to vote out of small mailbox locations, from self-storage yards, and there is no legitimate way a person can appear on a list of electors from a self-storage yard. That's just.... I don't believe that's accidental. Eighteen people registered to vote out of a truck stop. People registered to vote out of karaoke bars, lingerie stores, dance lounges, galleries—you name it.

Again, fraud is extremely hard to prove—to prove intent and all that kind of stuff—so it's true to say that there are very few convictions or that sort of thing. But I sat in on the PROC meetings in 2006 just after the election, because of the concerns we had from Edmonton Centre, with Mr. Kingsley and others. We weren't the only ones who were talking about this.

Steven MacKinnon, the Liberal Party national director, stated:

The misuse of voter information cards is quite simply out of control. We have reports of neighbourhoods where individual single-family dwelling mailboxes, not apartments, were systematically de-mailed

—i.e., stolen—

of such cards, and with the greatest of respect to the Chief Electoral Officer when he appeared before you in April, he mischaracterized the entire problem. It is not about using the cards as identification for the purpose of registering, an absurd notion....

It's absurd because if you got the card, obviously you're registered. It's a matter of “using the cards as identification when voting.” Clearly in those days, in 2004 and 2006, although I don't think now, you could show up with a VIC and that's all you needed.

Marcel Guimond, an MP for the Bloc Québécois, stated:

The members around the table have all campaigned and, like me, have had occasion to observe that, in election campaigns, when we enter residential buildings, multiple-unit dwellings, at the entrance, where the mail boxes are, we see a series of voter information cards in the blue recycling bin or else outside scattered across the lawn. In the 2004 election, I brought back approximately 150 to the office of the returning officer.

There was also an exchange between Mr. Kingsley and Mr. Godin, an NDP member. Mr. Kingsley said, “On polling day, the only place she can vote is at the polling station where she is registered by her address. There are no exceptions.” Mr. Godin said back, yes, “Unless she has six cards and goes to very various polling stations.”

Jean-Pierre Kingsley made it clear that in the 2006 general election, the voter information card was an identification card, not a voter identification card. But that in fact was how they were used. I don't think that's the case now.

Bloc Québécois member Pauline Picard stated:

People can go to ten different polling stations with cards that do not belong to them. They can vote in the place of 10 other people by going to different polling stations.

Voter cards can be picked up in various buildings. Often, the person who is delivering them is unable to enter a large building, and simply drops them on the floor. There are boxes full of cards that simply sit there.

Marcel Proulx, member for Hull-Aylmer, stated:

Often, when you visit a multiple-unit building, you knock on the door of an apartment where, according to the voters' list, there should be six occupants. When talking to the person who is inside you are told that there are not six people, because it is a bachelor apartment. There has been only one person living there for the last three, four or five years. It is then that we realize that the names on the list are those of the previous occupants.

Well, for every one of those previous occupants, if their name's on the list, there's a voter ID card in there in their name. Mr. Reid commented about his getting three cards. We had Asian people come in who, through no fault of their own, would fairly routinely get.... Chinese people would get two cards and Vietnamese people would often get three just because of the transposition of names.

Now, we didn't collect a bunch of those, but a couple of people who knew us came in and said, “Look what I got.” They had no intention of using them, and I'm not accusing anybody of anything specific; it's just that the potential for fraud was absolutely clear. You'd have to be awfully naive to think that some people didn't use those. Obviously it was known in the community because of people trying to pawn them off for money.

I could go on with other things that members of other parties have said.

● (1115)

With respect to the requirement for vouching, here is a quote from Steven MacKinnon, national director of the Liberal Party:

I was going to comment on Mr. Hawn's observation about the bus with 40 people. Suffice it to say that we are concerned, as he seems to be, about what we call serial vouching, and we are profoundly troubled by the number of on-site registrations: 55,000 at advance polls, plus 795,000 at election day polls, for a total of 840,000, or an average of over 2,700 people per riding.

It was not just me, it was not just the Conservative candidates who were concerned about this, it was candidates from all parties and officials from all parties.

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I want to get your comments on whether you think that vouching should be retained or eliminated, since the serial vouching provisions have been eliminated but vouching is still allowed on a one-to-one basis.

The Chair: Go ahead, very quickly.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: The rule always was one-for-one vouching, not one-for-forty, so that rule hasn't changed.

Personally, I think there's room for vouching if it stays one-for-one and if the voucher—if that ballot is put aside with the information on it and the identity and the validity of the voucher is verified before that vote is counted.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a very quick question for my colleague, Mr. Hawn.

This was in 2006. Do you have similar stories or accounts from 2008 or 2011?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: No. The reason for that is, prior to 2006, including 2006, the races in Edmonton Centre were extremely tight. We had suspicions, as I said, from 2004, which put us on high alert. That's why we took the pre-emptive actions that we did.

In 2008, we knew it was not going to be as close a race. We still had scrutineers. We did a lot of the same things, but we weren't as concerned about a small amount of inappropriate voting affecting the result.

• (1120)

Mr. Craig Scott: Are you aware that at the moment, under the regime put in place in 2011 in a number of trial locations amounting to about 900,000 people being able to use the VICs, the voter information cards, that you need a second piece of identity? In other words, if somebody received a card that's in the name of a previous occupant, they would have to go out of their way to forge a second piece of ID and they would also have to have the intention.

You indicated that the people you were talking about who were saying, "Look what I received. I received something with two different versions of my name", you said they have no intention of using them. I honestly think that's what the system now is all about, the sense that you virtually can't use them because you have to have both the intention—you have to be willing to risk being discovered and then you have to find a way to forge a second piece of ID using the VIC.

Why would we see this as particularly relevant now?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: What I was covering, and I tried to make that clear, was our experiences in the 2006 election. There were changes made because of what happened to us in 2006, because of the complaint we filed with the commissioner of elections and the conversations we had with Mr. Kingsley.

Mr. Craig Scott: My point, Mr. Hawn, is that the abuse potential that you are reading into the current system, based on your experiences then, don't exist.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I'm sorry. I may not have made myself too clear. What I'm talking about is the fact that election fraud does exist in Canada and people will find a way. You know, we plug holes, and that was a hole that needed to be plugged, and it has been plugged to the maximum extent.

My point is that we need to stay alert for other measures, because people will always find a way. People are very creative and inventive, and folks who want to will always find a way to get around the rules somehow.

Mr. Craig Scott: I guess that is where I differ. I think that essentially the gains for voter fraud of this sort are just so limited that's why the research literature shows that voter impersonation is so limited.

Could I ask Mr. Casey?

Did the minister reply to the letter you included in your materials that we've seen?

Mr. Bill Casey: Actually, I wrote him twice and there was no reply. I didn't get a reply from him or an acknowledgement, which I think is kind of disrespectful, too.

My letter was respectful. It outlined the issues. I did not get a response, with which I was disappointed. I wrote it on February 5. I wrote a second letter and I have yet to receive a response.

Mr. Craig Scott: Given your stature in the pantheon of former MPs, I think that's significant.

Could I please pass on my remaining three and a half minutes to Mr. Rathgeber, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Does he have permission of the committee to do so?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Sure. Mr. Rathgeber, go ahead.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee for that indulgence.

Mr. Casey, first let me say how much I appreciate your advocacy on behalf of independent candidates. I listened with interest about the two sets of rules between party-affiliated candidates and independents, and I couldn't agree more.

In 2006, you were elected as a Conservative candidate in Amherst, Nova Scotia, and in 2008 you were re-elected as an independent. It's conceivable, based on these differential rules, that the Conservative candidate who campaigned against you in 2008 was able to rely on a surplus you might have left him following the 2006 election.

Is that fair to say?

Mr. Bill Casey: It was a substantial surplus, as I recall, and he received it.

In 2008 when I ran, it's kind of ironic that I won the election but I was the only one who had to forfeit my cash balance. Unfortunately it takes cash to run in an election. If I wanted to run again, I would not have that money available that I had left, but all of the candidates who ran against me would have it. It's simple. There are five candidates in my riding. Four are run by one set of rules, and a completely different set of rules applies to the other.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: You can appreciate that in 2015 I face the same dilemma where there'll be a Conservative candidate who will be running to unseat me with money that I raised in 2011.

Mr. Bill Casey: I'm familiar with that.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Based on your inquiries or your research, have you been able to determine any rational explanation for why Elections Canada and the current legislation prohibits non-affiliated candidates from raising money and/or issuing receipts between writ periods?

Mr. Bill Casey: My only conclusion is that it was an oversight when the rules were drafted, because after the 1993 election and then after the 2000 election, Elections Canada made recommendations to change it. In effect in their paper that I got off the Internet, their recommendation after the 2000 election says, and I read:

The fact is that concerns respecting independent candidate's surpluses can be easily addressed without resort to the draconian form of forfeiture that is currently employed.

So they are saying that the current rules are draconian. They are Elections Canada rules. They made a recommendation at that time to change that. They also made a recommendation to change it in 1993, so I don't know why it hasn't changed.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: You may be aware that in 2003 the Supreme Court ruled that the section 3 charter-protected right to vote extends to more than just the right to cast a ballot. The court indicated that a voter must have an opportunity to balance various ideas in his or her own mind before meaningfully participating in an election process.

In your mind—and I realize you're not a lawyer, Mr. Casey—does the prohibition and the clear handicapping of independent candidates promote fair elections? Or in your non-lawyer view, would that be a violation of the right to meaningful participation in an election?

Mr. Bill Casey: It's the most clear aspect of Elections Canada to me and it's the most unfair example. It may not be the most important example of unfairness, but it is the clearest example of unfairness that we allow individuals to run for office but some have a different set of rules than others. That is just simply unfair. If we're going to allow independent candidates to run, if any Canadian wants to run, they should be allowed to run. If they are allowed to run, then they should have the same rules as everybody else. That's not what we have today.

In Elections Canada's words—they couldn't have said it better, I love it—they say they are draconian regulations. I urge you to analyze these and change them. I urge you to bring Elections Canada officials in and ask why they used the word draconian. Why are their own rules draconian, and how should you change them?

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Casey. I couldn't have said it better myself.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rathgeber.

We'll move to Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Hawn, you've emphasized time and time again how fearful you are of fraud. That's what this is all about. Do you believe that Elections Canada has a role to play in preventing fraud from taking place? Do you believe that at the end of the day Elections Canada has a role to prosecute wherever they can when it is believed that fraud has taken place?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, they do. The difficulty, as you know and as everybody around this table knows, is that in the heat of an election it's extremely hard to get that proof.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: But you want Elections Canada to get down to the brass knuckles and prosecute fraud—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: What I want is for this committee, for us as parliamentarians, and for Elections Canada to plug every hole that they can possibly plug, knowing full well that there are going to be inventive people out there who will find some way around it. This will be an ongoing challenge.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Sure, and I agree with that wholeheartedly. Elections Canada also wants to deal with issues related to fraud. They want to do that, and that's one of the reasons why they came up with the recommendation that they need and require the ability to compel a witness, something that provincial jurisdictions actually can do in terms of their independent election officers. Don't you believe that if you want Elections Canada to get to the truth of

the allegations of fraud that, at the very least, they should be able to compel a witness to come forward and tell what has transpired?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: From my understanding, Mr. Lamoureux, Elections Canada has the tools necessary, the police forces have and so on to prosecute whatever the offence is. They have those—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: But if Election Canada tells you that if they had the ability to compel a witness and if that would help them deal with those fraudsters, potential fraudsters, would that not be something you would want to support, given the fact that other agencies have that ability?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That is something this committee should be considering and I know it is as part of the study of bill C-23. So I would leave it to the wisdom of the committee in the final result.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I agree with you, and I hope wisdom will prevail on this particular issue. I somewhat suspect that it might not, but I'm an optimist.

Elections Canada also has a rule to tell people the purpose of those voter identification cards, would you not agree?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Well, they call them voter information cards, not voter identification cards. That just points out that whatever—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Voter information cards....

Hon. Laurie Hawn: —the problem and potential future problem, if the ID requirements aren't properly met....

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: So there's an educational component there for Elections Canada.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Apparently for us, too....

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: For us and for all Canadians, and who best to lead it but Elections Canada, would you not agree?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Elections Canada certainly has a role to play in that, absolutely.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Would you not recognize that the limitations in proposed section 18 will actually put limitations on Elections Canada and the type of things that it wants to do? So for example, if it wants to do a study on what it is that you're suggesting that they do with the idea of coming up with recommendations, if this legislation passes, it will prevent them from doing that.

• (1130)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Well, what we were just talking about was the education of people on where to vote, how to vote, what they need to vote, which is where the voter information card or other forms of ID come from.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Right. But you know at the end of the day, what we're both trying to achieve is justice on the issue. If we want to be able to deal with improving the voter identification or voter whatever it is that you would like to phrase it, then it's best to enable Elections Canada to do the necessary research and advertising so that Canadians and politicians, myself included, are aware of what those cards are all about and their purpose. Correct...?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Fundamentally or philosophically, I don't disagree with that. But again it's not me calling them the voter information card—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: So we'll have to wait—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: —it's the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: We'll have to wait and see if the government actually brings forward those amendments. Again, I'm an optimist. Let's hope they do that.

You know, when we look at the VIC cards.... In Ottawa, I have a one-bedroom apartment. I go there periodically to check the mail. On the window ledges you see all these...what were former tenants, I suspect. They all have IDs, addresses written on them; I suspect they're bills. Who knows what's all there? But I would suggest to you that there are some flaws within those data banks, also government data banks. Do you think that there is a perfect data bank that's out there?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: No, absolutely not. But Elections Canada needs to do everything, and it will never be perfect because people move obviously all the time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That's right.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I don't know what the solution is but they need to scrub the lists much more thoroughly.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That's right. But you know what, you hit the nail right on. All data banks have flaws in them, right?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That means information in all data banks is open to abuse.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That's correct.

So what we should be looking at are ways in which we can change and inform and improve the Canada elections data bank, would you not agree with that?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That would be a big responsibility for Elections Canada and I'm sure they do undertake it to the best of their ability, but it's a continuous responsibility they need to pay attention to.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Right.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I still get mail for Lisa Crawford who you would know is a Liberal staffer.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Absolutely.

So when I think of those VIC cards, let's improve the data bank, try to look at ways in which maybe we can incorporate them, as it's been pointed out. You can't just walk in, say here's the VIC card, let me vote. You have to also provide other forms of identification.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That's a big improvement after 2006.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Would you think that maybe instead of 39 pieces of qualifying ID, why not have 40 and just use it with the consideration that Elections Canada needs to improve the quality of that particular data bank?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Well, back in 2006 when we testified at PROC with the various members of the committee and so on, one of the things that was pointed out was the Quebec system. I don't know if the Quebec system has changed but they had a system at that time of providing various forms of ID. There were a lot of people who sat

in those chairs who said that we should be looking at what Quebec does. It's part of the same thing you're talking about in making sure that however somebody winds up getting identified, that you take away every opportunity you possibly can of someone being misidentified intentionally or accidentally as a voter.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I must say, Mr. Hawn, I'm kind of in favour of you taking membership on this particular committee. I could use some support in some of the things you're saying.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Well, I hope that I haven't been too supportive.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: When you look at it, at the end of the day, I believe, there is a need to see amendments brought forward to improve the legislation.

One of the ideas was why not allow individuals to give an affidavit? So if I go to a place and sign my name off, swear my name off on an affidavit that I live at this particular address and maybe have one piece of ID, I should be able to vote. Do you think the committee should be open to something like that?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Affidavits are part of the system now, and have been for as long as I've known. Affidavits in our experience, certainly in 2006 and we suspect in 2004, were abused. No system is perfect. That can be part of a broader system. There are a whole lot of things that have a role to play.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Okay, thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux. We'll move on to a four-minute round. Mr. Lukiwski, you're starting that off, is that correct?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, thank you very much, Chair, and thank you Mr. Hawn.

Just to follow up a little bit on what Kevin was saying, one of the provisions of the elections act, Bill C-23, is to oblige Elections Canada to advertise and communicate more aggressively with voters as to the hows of voting, as well as the wheres and whens. "How" meaning what kind of ID to present, which would eliminate a lot of the problems with the VICs, but I would also point out that the only true way to eliminate voter fraud—because of the problems everyone has with databases and I fully agree with that—is to produce proper identification, not through vouching, not through voter information cards, but through proper identification.

As an example, someone told me just a day or so ago that if you wanted to renew your Ontario health card now—do you know the process you have to go through? You have to produce three pieces of ID to get your Ontario health card. Every single societal privilege or right that we seem to have, except for voting, requires one to produce proper identification. That's just a normal function of who we are and the times in which we live.

I would just suggest that, getting back to the root of this whole discussion, whether or not vouching should be eliminated, or whether VICs should be allowed.... We have roughly 18 months or slightly less before the next election. If people were educated now as to the kinds of identification that are required, and the options to produce identification that are available, I think a lot of the problems that we see, if there have been problems, would be eliminated. I'd just like to see if you have any comments on that.

• (1135)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I agree totally. We are giving it a lot of publicity through this committee and across the country and so on. Whether it's 39 or 45 or whatever the number is, people know this is coming. I'm sorry, there's virtually no excuse for anybody to not have one or more of those forms of ID. I just don't personally buy that.

If you go, again folks, back in 2006, I'm referring to Quebec, I'm not sure what the specific rules were but a lot of people there were referring to what went on in Quebec. There were a bunch of different forms of ID that were allowed in 2006. In the rest of Canada, you showed up with a VIC card, and that was it. Quebec was taking it, I think, a little more advanced, a little bit more seriously at that time.

Going down the road, the surest way perhaps—probably we can never get there—is biometrics, retinal scans, fingerprints, whatever. That's a little bit more complicated, obviously, in establishing that system, but I agree, fundamentally, as I said in my comment, I would rather have an election with certainty of the vote than an election where we have no idea how many people voted illegitimately.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: How much time, Chair?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Quick comment; you mentioned that you encountered, it seemed to be, some serious attempts at fraud in the 2004 and 2006 elections. I would suggest that probably where fraud is more likely to occur is in those ridings where everyone knows that it's going to be close.

I would assume back in 2004 and 2006 you had your own polling and everyone else in opposition camps had done their polling and knew that it was going to be a tight election. That's where I think that fraud, if it's going to occur, would occur, at least attempted fraud to try to change the outcome of an election in an area or a riding where they knew it was going to be tight. I'd just like a quick comment from you.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That goes again back to my comment. I would never accuse my Liberal opponent in 2004 and 2006 of deliberately doing that, but in a tight race supporters and volunteers are very enthusiastic and sometimes they are more enthusiastic than the law would normally allow. That will happen in tight races.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll go to Mr. Christopherson. You're sharing a bit, I think.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes. Hopefully I will. I do tend to go on. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you both very much. Mr. Casey, good to see you again. Always good to see a former colleague. We served together.

Mr. Hawn, I really wasn't going to comment too much, simply because so far the only parade of people the government can bring in here to allege the argument that there's so much potential fraud are card-carrying Conservatives—and a caucus colleague, no less.

I don't know how much people are going to put on that, not that they're questioning you. I'm not questioning your integrity, sir, at all, but I am pointing out that from 30,000 feet, the best this government could do was to bring in not just another card-carrying Conservative—not just another one—but an actual caucus member who is going to come in and make an argument that none of the experts that have come forward can verify and support. I find that interesting.

In listening to your testimony, sir, I would just mention that when you say you don't personally buy it that people don't have the ID, with the greatest of respect, I urge you to review the testimony of people who have been in here representing homeless Canadians and aboriginal Canadians. All of these people are just as entitled to their vote as you and I are, and they would argue very strongly that there are Canadians in such circumstances that they don't have this kind of ID, and they will not be able to vote. One of the requests we've had from people coming in is, "Please, listen to us. We're telling you that there are fellow Canadians who are not going to be able to vote".

Could there be anything more important than that as we're reviewing this bill? I urge you to review that testimony and perhaps rethink the argument that if you don't have the ID that we all carry here every day, you are not entitled to vote. I urge you to review that, because that's not the testimony we are getting.

I don't have a lot of time. I want to mention too that one of the things that have not been disputed—at least I haven't heard the testimony—is that enumeration is a bad idea. In fact, I've heard all kinds of people make the argument that enumeration works, and I don't know why that's not on the table.

That is my segue to my question for you, Mr. Casey. I jotted down some of your comments. You said this needs more focus; this needs some analysis; bring in the experts to ask them about the issues you have raised. But I need to point out to you that this process doesn't allow that. There is not enough time for us to bring in those experts. Your comments are probably the only focus we're going to get, yet, by rights, we should be holding separate hearings on that clause alone, getting all the experts in to understand why there is that circumstance and what changes we should be making to understand unintended consequences, which this government has no interest in pursuing.

That is what should be happening, but, sir, this process is not allowing that. Maybe you can give us your thoughts on the process that should be in place to allow you to raise this issue and to allow us to dig into the other issues.

● (1140)

Mr. Bill Casey: The thing that comes to my mind is that when I go on the Internet, I can see where Elections Canada brought to the attention of the government—to all governments since 1993—in two written reports that this is the most unfair aspect of Elections Canada, and it has not been addressed. I wonder if the drafters of this bill, the fair elections act, looked at those recommendations and didn't regard them or didn't look at them. Elections Canada has made these recommendations twice and has called them draconian—it has called its own rules draconian—and I repeat that word because it is very effective. There is something wrong in the process when Elections Canada makes those recommendations twice. To me, it's the most obviously unfair aspect of Elections Canada.

I often think they should change the name of the act if they're not going to make that fair. I don't think you can call it the fair elections act if you allow this unfairness to remain.

Your question is about the process. I think there is something lacking in the process if Elections Canada criticizes its own regulations and nothing is done about it.

Mr. David Christopherson: You need to know that the only people who have had input into this are people who carry a Conservative membership card. No other Canadian has had input into this bill except people who carry a Conservative membership card.

My apologies, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid, go ahead for four minutes, if you would, please.

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

Just to set the record straight on one of the things that Mr. Christopherson said, the view I got from 30,000—or maybe it was slightly higher at 31,000 feet.... I seem to recall you mentioned testimony on this very subject, problems that exist with vouching and with voter identification cards being misused, from members of other parties, and you simply went to the testimony they provided in 2006 in this committee. Those included some New Democrats among others. Am I right?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Let me respond to Mr. Christopherson's comments.

First of all, we have 18 months or so to the next election. There are other people out there who should be involved in helping get ID for people like homeless people, and on first nation reserves, and so on. We all have a responsibility to get there. At the end of the day, I think it would be extremely rare that somebody would have a legitimate excuse, maybe not impossible, but rare for somebody to have a legitimate excuse.

Mr. David Christopherson: *[Inaudible—Editor]*

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Christopherson, it's my turn now.

Mr. Christopherson, I'm a fighter pilot. I've done a lot of flying at 30,000 and higher, and I can't see a heck of a lot from 30,000 feet and higher. But when I get down to a low level, I can see what's going on.

Marcel Proulx, who was a Liberal MP; Michel Guimond, who was a Bloc MP; and Mr. Hébert, who is an NDP official.... Mr. Proulx's comment was, "First, the Liberal Party of Canada is also in the process of preparing its list of errors and horror stories. We will table it once it is finished because it is a fairly exhaustive list." Mr. Guimond said, "From the outset, I should say that we are currently compiling, once again, a list of the horror stories from the last election campaign. And I am deliberately calling them horror stories rather than mistakes."

So, Mr. Christopherson, with respect, you can have a view from 30,000 feet, but that's not where it's going on. It's going on at ground level, at sea level, and that's where you have to go to get the stories, that's where the stories came from to us. That's where the stories came from to the members of the other parties in 2006, and they were not dissimilar from the stories that we were telling.

● (1145)

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The other thing I wanted to do is to just mention, in response to Mr. Lamoureux's observation. He said that what we need here, what we need.... He said the crying shame is that the government is preventing us from doing the following things: letting Elections Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer inform people of things like how to become a candidate; how an elector may vote and what days, times, and locations are available for voting; how an elector may establish their identity and residence in order to vote, including the pieces of identification they may use; how to make sure they get on the list.

All these things I'm actually reading are the things that he is mandated to do by this law, that quite frankly he is not doing right now. He is required to do these things under this legislation.

I think, Mr. Lamoureux, you have your facts backwards.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: *[Inaudible—Editor]*

Mr. Scott Reid: Well, okay....

The Chair: Through the witnesses or through the chair, but to each other doesn't really work very well around here....

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, Mr. Lamoureux was certain that he did not say that. The record will show when it's published that he said exactly that, and he has his facts wrong. He just hasn't read the bill. How can anybody who comments on every single bill manage to—

An hon. member: He didn't understand the question.

Mr. Scott Reid: —but this time he's just literally said the opposite of the truth, and I'm just setting the record straight.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. You still have another minute, if you'd like it.

Mr. Scott Reid: Actually, I'll take it.

Mr. Casey, I do want to bring up something with you. I think your point is really good. You drew that to my attention and showed me where the Chief Electoral Officer had in the 2000 election complained about this, and he apparently did so in the 1993 election.

It strikes me that this must be part of the effort that was made—I guess it goes back to the 1980s—to basically shut out third parties. Mr. Figueroa, the head of the Communist Party, fought a courageous battle to get rid of the restrictions that made it hard for very small parties to compete in elections. I gather that the same effort has not yet occurred on behalf of independence. I think you're right. I suspect that this restriction is probably a violation of section 3 of the charter, which states not only that each person has a right to vote, but that everyone is qualified for membership in the House of Commons or our provincial legislature. "Qualified" has to mean something substantive, not that you can run a non-competitive campaign.

Thanks for drawing that to our attention.

The Chair: Any comment on that? A quick one, Mr. Casey, I'm feeling generous today.

Mr. Bill Casey: It's not only unfair to the candidate; it's unfair to contributors. As strange as it may seem, if I was running as an independent, and Mr. Hawn was running for a party, and you wanted to make a contribution to me, to my campaign, you can make it once in the five years leading up to and including the campaign. You can make the same contribution to him five times. You can give him \$5,500 and get tax receipts for it, and I'm restricted to one contribution.

Elections Canada says, just strangely, that contributions to independent candidates are event-based. That means that the contribution limit applies to the event, and once it is reached there can be no more contributions from the same individual to the independent candidate. Contributions to candidates who are supported by a party are calendar-based. That means that the contribution limit is attained for the calendar year, but the same individual can contribute up to his limit again every year before the campaign.

It is very wrong and I hope that you'll make the amendments to make it fair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

I see a little time on our clock, so we'll try two minutes, Mr. Richards and Ms. Latendresse.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hawn, you indicated, I think, in one part of your remarks that in 2004 and 2006, because there was a very tight race, that some of this potential fraud that you think likely occurred—and you indicated this based on the fact that the race was close and people got overenthusiastic, basically—was more of a concern to you than it may have been in 2008, in terms of the election result. I'm sure it was a concern, regardless, but in terms of how it might have been affecting the election results.

What I'm curious about is that, obviously, there would be a number of ridings across the country that would have been in a very similar situation to where you were in terms of a close race. How many ridings do you think there are in the country where these kinds of things could impact a result? Would that be enough that it could in fact change the overall result of an election?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you for the question. You'd have to go and see what the winning margins were, and there were some pretty tight margins.

I will just quote from Mr. Neufeld's report actually, which touches on that:

Times have changed, yet the basic voting services model has not. Most Canadians now vote in urban settings, at central polling locations that house many polling stations. Meanwhile, electoral law and procedures still reflect an assumption that voting occurs at single station locations in separate rural communities.

It continues, "Clearly the model is an antique. It could benefit from significant modernization". As well, "indications of widespread and serious procedural errors in Etobicoke Centre"—which was very close—"and the national audit signal unmistakably that an overhaul is urgently required. However, built-in resistance to changing the mechanics of voting is strong."

The two things people hate most are change and the way things are. There's always going to be resistance, and that's what hopefully this committee will resolve.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Madame Latendresse, you have two minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a very specific question for our two witnesses.

I'd like you to give us your opinion on what happened in 2011, in other words, the extensive electoral fraud and the robocalls aimed at suppressing the votes of Canadians. I'd like you to comment on two recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Well, actually, since he's persona non grata, we're really talking about the commissioner, who is in charge of investigating election fraud and other problems that arise. The commissioner, himself, asked for these powers, pointing out that they would significantly help him tackle election fraud in Canada.

The two powers in question would authorize the commissioner to compel someone to testify and Elections Canada to require political parties to submit documentation to ensure their elections spending is compliant with the Canada Elections Act.

Do you think Bill C-23 should include those two recommendations, which many people have made?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have just under a minute to answer, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Bill Casey: I'm sorry, I thought that question was directed to Mr. Hawn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I can go first if you want me to.

In terms of auditing expenses, obviously we need to audit expenses. We need to audit them very carefully because mistakes are made. Most of the time, I think they are unintentional mistakes. Sometimes they're not, like anything else.

With respect to the Commissioner of Canada Elections' role, I think it's very important that the commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer are in fact separated so that there is clearly a prosecutorial part and an administrative part, if you will. If you mix those two under the one office, and the one person, I don't think you want judge, jury, executioner, hangman, all in the same body.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: He has the power to conduct investigations and has asked very specifically for a power that would make that job much easier.

Why shouldn't he be given that power?

[English]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I'm not sure which specific power. Are you talking about the power to compel, or are you talking about the... Again, from my understanding of the law, and I'm not a lawyer, the authority is there that other prosecutorial or law enforcement agencies have.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Casey, be really quick.

Mr. Bill Casey: I very strongly believe that he should report to Parliament. Period.

The Chair: That will end this panel for today. We thank you both for coming.

It's great to see you again, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Hawn, I know I see you all the time.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: This is a different aspect for sure.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): I was watching the clock and hoping there might be one question possible with unanimous consent.

The Chair: You know that that takes unanimous consent, but I'm trying to go a little quicker today because I've added committee business to the end of the second panel.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I see.

The Chair: That wasn't known to me when we started today.

Ms. Elizabeth May: So the little pleading thing won't get...all right.

The Chair: It's nice to plead, but let's.... I'm going to suspend while we change the panels please.

● (1150) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1200)

The Chair: Let's bring ourselves back to order for the next session.

We have three guests with us now. We have, from my left to right, from Apathy is Boring, Youri Cormier. From the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec—I'll do my best folks—Éliane Laberge, thank you. As well, Adam Shedletzky, who we know has visited us before, is a witness today. We're happy to have you here, too, Adam.

We're going to start with you for opening statements, Adam, and we'll work across that way. Five minutes or less, please, then we'll go to questions after all of the opening statements.

Mr. Adam Shedletzky (Co-Founder, Leadnow.ca): Thank you for inviting the Leadnow community to testify before this committee.

My name is Adam Shedletzky and I'm a co-founder of Leadnow.ca.

Our mission is to help people across Canada deepen our democracy to create a more open, just, and sustainable society.

Canadians from all walks of life have expressed overwhelming opposition to the proposed changes to our elections law. From the 60,000-plus Canadians who have signed our petition, to current and past Chief Electoral Officers, to the Commissioner of Canada Elections, to the 160 Canadian and 19 international political science scholars, to journalists and editorial boards across the country, the response has been clear: the Fair Elections Act is fundamentally unfair. It stacks the deck in favour of the Conservative party and it cannot be fixed. The Leadnow community therefore calls on you to recommend that the House of Commons kill the bill and start over from scratch.

Unfortunately, this committee was unwilling to travel outside the Ottawa bubble to hear from Canadians across the country. I am grateful that through the Leadnow community, I am able to directly convey to this committee the wisdom and concerns of everyday Canadians who shared their perspective with us on Facebook and over email.

To start, we're glad that the prohibition on vouching has received so much critical attention both in the media and here in committee, and that reports indicate that Minister Poilievre may be open to changing course. Yet, unfortunately, the issue of vouching is only one of numerous significant concerns Canadians have with this bill. In fact, Liane Tanguay expressed fear that the debate surrounding vouching is a red herring, that Mr. Poilievre will eventually concede to give the appearance that the final bill is a reasonable compromise.

Liane outlined several of our community's other major concerns, stating that:

There is no good policy reason for the incumbent in a riding to appoint the polling supervisor, who among other things will have custody of advance ballots.... There is no reason to muzzle [Elections Canada] or to exempt fundraising costs from financing limits.

Also, "There is no reason for investigations and their outcomes to be kept from the public."

Gail Silva was specifically concerned that because of this new law, Canadians will never find out what happened in the robocall fraud of 2011. This fear appears to be well founded, as Elections Canada recently decided to postpone their report on the robocall scandal until after the next election.

It is completely outrageous that three years after the robocall fraud of 2011, Canadians still do not know which political operatives played dirty tricks during the last election. In response to this attack on our democracy, Elections Canada requested that Parliament provide our elections watchdog with the power to compel witness testimony, just like the Competition Bureau can. This was partially because political operatives have refused to testify, significantly hampering the ability of Elections Canada to restore Canadians' faith in the integrity of our democracy.

The robocall registry and new penalties for impersonating elections officials do not adequately empower Elections Canada to catch political operatives orchestrating election fraud. Mary Kolz wants to know why our elections watchdog was not given the specifically requested power to compel testimony.

One of Pattie Whitehouse's concerns is that "Removing the ability of Elections Canada to educate Canadians about voting and to encourage us is counterproductive to the goal of increasing voter engagement".

While Minister Poilievre is correct that political parties are generally effective at encouraging Canadians to vote, that is only true insofar as in their interest to do so. Political parties have finite resources. They target those resources at those demographic groups most likely to vote. Youth are by far the least likely to vote, so they are largely ignored.

In fact, only 40% of youth said that political parties reached out to them, versus 75% of Canadians over 65 years old. Elections Canada has found that young people who take courses in government or democracy are 14% more likely to vote than those who do not.

The simple truth is that self-interested political parties are not adequately incentivized to conduct outreach to reverse the alarming trend of declining youth voter turnout. As Katie Omstead and Matthew Olewski state, the crisis in Canadian democracy is one of low voter turnout, especially amongst our youth. In this context, we need to be giving Elections Canada more power and capacity, not less.

Many Canadians have also sent in comments expressing outrage over the lack of consultation with experts, opposition parties, or Canadians before the introduction of a bill that is so fundamental to our democracy. One party ramming through such changes without widespread buy-in would cause Tim Thiessen, for example, to lose faith in our democratic process.

Lastly, people like Meghan Marentette and Holly Pender-Love wish that instead of fighting to protect our rights, we could be having a conversation around bold steps that could revitalize our democracy, such as moving towards online voting or making voting mandatory.

From *The Globe and Mail* editorial board to non-partisan chief electoral officers, to respected academics, to everyday Canadians, the message is clear. This bill is fundamentally flawed. It needs to be

killed. Let's start from scratch, together, to collaboratively draft a truly fair elections law that all Canadians can support.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing your questions.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Laberge.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éliane Laberge (President, Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec, or FECQ, represents 21 college-level student associations across Quebec, with a total of 70,000 members.

Since its creation, the federation's first priority has been to advocate on behalf of CEGEP students. The federation also works to increase student involvement in public debate and government.

Our remarks today are based on the efforts of independent and government organizations working towards a common goal: increasing voter turnout among young people and educating the public.

Also underlying our remarks are observations we've made with the help of our members, especially over the past few weeks, in the lead-up to the provincial election. The federation worked actively to get CEGEP students out to the polls and took the time to speak with thousands of them. We have the benefit of being the same age as our members, so they feel they can be open and honest when they speak to us.

Youth voter turnout during general elections is a matter of great concern to the FECQ. We believe it is imperative for young people to assume their rightful place in public debates and for political parties to take young people into account. Our country's well-being and development are at stake. Excluding a generation, whether indirectly or directly, is one of the worst things a country can do.

Voter turnout among Canadians at federal election time has been steadily dropping since the 1980s. In 2008, just 58% of Canadians went to the polls. The trend is even more evident among 18 to 20 year olds; only 38% of them cast their ballots in 2011.

It's a troubling picture because it's likely to get only worse with time. If young people don't exercise their right to vote at their very first opportunity to do so, they will become less likely to vote later on. In other words, poor turnout among first-time voters leads to poor voter turnout overall, down the road. This is a serious problem that requires all sides to do everything in their power to fix it.

We fear that the passage of the election reforms in Bill C-23, especially the changes to section 18 of the Canada Elections Act, will do nothing to make things better. In fact, they will do the reverse.

The FECQ has noted that voter turnout among youth is determined by four major factors. The first is the view that voting is a duty. The second is a solid grasp of the electoral process. The third is an understanding of politics, the way government works, the issues of the day and the political parties, themselves. And the fourth and final determinant is an interest in politics. All four need to be present. Someone who feels a sense of duty to vote but isn't the slightest bit interested in election issues, or doesn't understand how government works, won't necessarily go out and vote.

Clearly, it's not the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer to make equal efforts on all four fronts. But we do feel he should at least be mandated to help spread the message that voting is a duty, as is currently the case, in addition to informing people about when, where and how to vote. Section 18 of the act shouldn't be amended to diminish the Chief Electoral Officer's scope of activity.

Keeping up public education is imperative. In 2011, Elections Canada commissioned a study to ascertain young people's motivation for voting or not voting. The study revealed that barriers tied to motivation, so determinants one, three and four, were just as much to blame as barriers having to do with access, so determinant two—knowing when, where and how to vote—if not more.

Naturally, some youth cite not having received information on when, where and how to vote as an excuse. But our experience, especially in recent weeks, has led us to realize that that excuse is often used to conceal a lack of political knowledge, trouble understanding the differences between the parties and a poor grasp of the impact voting has. Only when we told students they needn't be embarrassed about not being experts on political matters did they open up about feeling uncomfortable because they knew little about politics or which party they were going to vote for.

We would tell them about tools to help steer them in the right direction, doing more than just giving them factual information. That could mean, for instance, telling them about the Vote Compass tool on CBC's Web site or providing comparisons between the various parties' platforms. We would stress how important it was for them to vote in order to have their say. And that's what would convince them to cast their ballots.

Of course, making sure young people know when, where and how to vote is important, but so is ensuring they know who they are voting for and why. And that can absolutely be done in a non-partisan way. We did it for four weeks. Bear in mind that a young person won't go to the trouble of voting if they don't know who they are voting for.

The Chief Electoral Officer already provides factual information about the voting process. So we don't understand the desire to pass legislation preventing him from eliminating the second barrier to voter turnout—the biggest one, in our view—motivation. The government's decision is even harder to understand given the compelling evidence that shows motivation is indeed a barrier.

●(1210)

Elections Canada commissioned a study showing that the Student Vote program had a positive impact on numerous factors tied to voter turnout. The program helps young people better understand the political issues and parties, develop an interest in politics and realize

that voting is a civic duty, all while introducing them to the voting process. Therefore, the program is active on all four of the fronts that lead to improved voter turnout. The same goes for major public awareness campaigns, which Quebec's chief electoral officer credits with getting 34% of those who see the ads out to the polls.

In conclusion, our position is this. We share the government's concern about providing voters with quality information. Nevertheless, we believe that Elections Canada can, and should, continue to impress upon young voters the idea that voting is a duty, help them better understand our political system and encourage them to become more interested in politics.

Section 18 of the Canada Elections Act should stand in its original form. That would ensure the Chief Electoral Officer retained the independence and freedom to educate the public not just on when, where and how to vote, but also on why voting is important.

Thank you for your consideration. We sincerely hope all the parties will be able to reach some common ground and amend the bill in a way that improves youth voter turnout, not the opposite.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cormier, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Yuri Cormier (Executive Director, Apathy is Boring): Thank you very much for having me here.

I am Dr. Yuri Cormier and I'm the executive director at Apathy is Boring.

[*Translation*]

Apathy is Boring is a national youth-led non-partisan charitable organization that has been working to educate Canadian youth about democracy since 2004.

In keeping with our strict non-partisanship policy, we do not advocate on matters of public policy, and this includes not taking a public stance for or against the Fair Elections Act.

Our goal today is to provide an accurate, impartial and balanced analysis of the youth electoral context in Canada in relation to this bill, with the hope that this will be a valuable addition to the current debate.

●(1215)

[*English*]

Youth voter participation is not a partisan issue. Youth do not form a voting block that sways as a whole one way or another. This in fact has been proven by various studies. One example of this is the student vote program, which has shown that high school mock election results roughly mirror actual electoral results. Also, a recent poll found that 18-to-24-year-olds support Canadian political parties in proportions that are similar to those for other age groups. Even the issues they prioritize are roughly the same as those of older generations, including people over the age of 60.

Despite these similarities between generations, voter turnout in Canada is not evenly distributed amongst age groups. Youth vote at a rate significantly lower than that of their elders. This is happening throughout the western world, not only here in Canada.

[*Translation*]

The other problem is that the decision to vote or not is a habit one develops at an early age. Young people who don't vote in the first two elections in which they are eligible to do so tend not to vote for the rest of their lives.

Study after study has shown that the key factor determining voter participation is motivation. Non-partisan motivational campaigns have had a measurable impact on voter turnout. And the evidence exists to back that up.

[*English*]

We recognize that elected officials and political parties have an important role to play in motivating citizens to vote. That said, non-partisan actors are also key, because they do not have a stake in the outcome of any given election. While political parties may choose to speak to those in their base and to undecided voters—both of which are current voters—non-partisan actors play a fundamental role by encouraging non-voters to become voters, thereby continually renewing the pool of electors and the health of our democracy.

If Elections Canada is no longer empowered to invest in and conduct outreach campaigns that promote voting, who then will actively reach out to non-voting citizens and youth who are deciding for the first time whether or not to vote? Will Elections Canada be able to continue to invest in research projects that aim to understand the trend in youth voter turnout and identify which strategies are cost-effective for turning the trend around?

Another barrier to voting is that youth have high levels of mobility. They move away from home, they go off to college, and they move again to find work—the unemployment rate in Canada for youth is very bad. As a result, these young adults are less often correctly inscribed on the electoral lists.

To make voting easier for youth, Apathy is Boring recommended in a report commissioned in 2008 that Elections Canada could capitalize on changes to ID requirements to increase accessibility to elections. VICs were deemed to be a logical choice, because even before Elections Canada piloted their project with these cards, our research found that many people thought the VIC was an acceptable form of identification because it seemed to contain all the information listed as being acceptable.

Voters may have 39 alternative forms of authorized ID, but the problem is that if high mobility results in someone's address being incorrect on one of these, it usually means that it is incorrect on the remaining ones as well. In such circumstances common to young Canadians, vouching and VICs can indeed facilitate access to voting.

If tighter ID requirements are implemented, it will be indeed crucial to ask this question. What means will be put in place to counter the potentially challenging impacts of tighter voter identification on young eligible voters who are not correctly on the voting list? In attempting to safeguard democracy from administrative risks, how can we also ensure that we do not expose

our democracy to another important risk, that is, the immediate and continued decline of youth voter turnout and the impact this might have on long-term voting habits?

[*Translation*]

A democracy may be very well-administered and free of irregularities, but what worth would it have if this “regularity” came at the expense of citizens opting out of the democratic process?

Apathy is Boring hopes that engaging youth as voters will be an important part of the debate around Bill C-23. We continue to be committed to our non-partisan charitable mission of educating Canadian youth about democracy. And in so doing, we need the support of the many critical stakeholders: government, political parties, electoral agencies, community groups, donors and, of course, youth volunteers.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Cormier.

We'll go to a seven-minute round of questions. We'll try to keep it tight so that we can do the committee business at the end.

I think I have Mr. Reid first.

• (1220)

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

I'm going to start my questions with Dr. Cormier.

Forgive me for saying this, Dr. Cormier, but you look very young to be a doctor.

Mr. Yuri Cormier: It's been two weeks. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Reid: Well done.

The Chair: Are you used to people calling you that?

Mr. Yuri Cormier: No, this is a first. I'm enjoying it.

The Chair: It happened on television, sir. You can get a clip of this.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: There are a whole bunch of things I want to address—you've done a very interesting presentation—but the first thing is just a problem that was identified by the Chief Electoral Officer or by Elections Canada in the 2011 post-election national youth survey report. They went through and tried to determine reasons why young people hadn't voted.

When they're dealing with the side of it that is not attitudinal but rather that involves actual impediments to voting, they do cite difficulty in providing identification and proof of address, but they also cite not receiving a voter card. The obvious point, which is easy to understand, is that those people who are least likely to have a long-term residence that has been established, for which records have been collected and so on, are also those who are least likely to get the voter card.

When they broke down youth into subgroups and looked at underprivileged youth, they found that for ethno-cultural youth, the top reason for not voting was not receiving a voter information card. For unemployed youth who were not in school, the top reason was the same. It was the same as well for youth with disabilities. So it suggests that the voter information card is just unlikely to be a solution to the expansion that the CEO proposes. The voter information card is not likely to actually resolve the problem. I think some other mechanism has to be found.

I offer that as an editorial to you. But I really wanted to ask you about this card you handed out. This is really good. I followed, as everybody did, the Quebec election. I had not seen this until today. But I did see—in fact, I took a photograph of it—an ad put by the Quebec chief electoral officer on the side of a bus, which said, "Notre vote, c'est un pouvoir". There was a big X and it said, "Je vote". I have to say that I don't find that very compelling. I'll bet you nobody went out and voted because of those bus boards.

On the other hand, I look at what you have here—and I gather this was done with the CEO's cooperation? It was a joint effort?

Mr. Youri Cormier: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I notice on here that you have this chart on the back, and your instructions say if you use the QR code, you can get all the answers using the interactive online version. I took out my camera and did exactly that. I then tried using the part about finding your polling station. I clicked on the pink bits, on the interactive site, and I was brought to something where I could fill in my postal code and get a polling station.

I can't determine what accuracy this has, but I'm really impressed. I wonder if you could tell us more about this effort, which, as far as I know, is not being replicated at the federal level and perhaps should be.

Mr. Youri Cormier: Yes. We talk about accessibility and we talk about motivation. This card tries to do both.

On one side, we're giving arguments as to why people should vote, and why their vote matters, and on the other side we're obviously trying to create all the mechanisms that are needed for someone who's never voted before to know how to vote. I think the interactive part of it is probably the nicest part of it. It just allows you to click your way through a fairly complicated ordeal.

You had a question with regard to VICs. The entire question, in fact, is just that we need to put as many different tools as possible on the table. If one of those tools works, that's great. If that one doesn't work, then there's another one and another one and another one.

So my goal, eventually, is to get this out. Obviously for the federal elections in 2015, we're going to go big. We've shown that it actually works really well. What's interesting with this particular version is that it was done in cooperation with the National Association of Friendship Centres, and it was targeted to aboriginal youth in Quebec, who are known to have a very low voter turnout. My partner Nahka is here from the NAFC. Thanks to Twitter and Facebook, we're able to target in ways that we could never do in the past. We know now and we can track that people in Natashquan, Sept-Îles, Val-d'Or, or Chibougamau were reading this information and getting all they needed to vote.

●(1225)

Mr. Scott Reid: If the information has been collated, would you be able to provide the committee with what kinds of results you got and any thoughts you have as to how well it worked and how it could be improved in the future?

Obviously the reason I'm asking is that if one were to try to do something like this at the federal level, we would want to learn from examples. Among the issues that occur to me would be whether you find that it's used more by people in rural or urban areas, which kind of demographic, how far in advance one has to start preparing something like this, and so on.

The Chair: Could you do that for us?

Mr. Youri Cormier: The most important part when it comes to figuring out if something worked or not—the cost-effectiveness—is the partnerships with the electoral agencies. I'll give you an example. Recently, in 2013, we partnered with Elections Canada and Elections BC, to do a registration drive in British Columbia. We sent street teams to bars, to campuses. Everywhere there happened to be youth, we were there registering people to vote. The outcome of that, which we're going to be publishing soon, but we don't have the results yet, is very promising.

What allowed us to measure it was that Elections BC was tracking every single person we registered to vote. When they went to vote, afterwards we could identify what the percentage of voter turnout was for the treatment group, the group we had registered. That is going to be published in the next month.

With regard to this particular project, we're handing in a report to the DGEQ within the next month as well. We could probably table it here, if you'd like a copy of it.

Mr. Scott Reid: We would love that.

Thank you very much. That was very helpful.

The Chair: You have about 25 seconds left.

We could just chat, or I could go to Madame Latendresse.

Mr. Scott Reid: Why don't you go to the NDP.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Madame Latendresse, you have seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: That's quite kind of you, Mr. Reid.

Right off the bat, I want to be perfectly frank and make very clear where I come from.

I want to tell you, Ms. Laberge, that I attended Cégep de Rimouski, so I took part in a number of the FECQ's conferences in the early 2000s. I am very familiar with your organization and the work you do to increase the political involvement of young Quebecers. I think that's extremely important. My own introduction to politics was through student politics, an element that is extremely useful and quite effective.

I very much appreciated your presentation and the four points you outlined. It is said that the main reason young people don't go out to vote is that they don't know where to go. You provided a clarification in that regard, saying it may not necessarily be the real reason. It's an excuse, as you explained so articulately. It is somewhat embarrassing for people to admit they know little about the political system. What's more, young people don't know whether voting is worth the trouble. They aren't engaged in the process. When asked why they didn't vote, they will often say they didn't know where to go. The fact is they could have found the information; they were simply using that as an excuse.

As far as the government's arguments for amending section 18 go, I really have a tough time understanding why the government sees the powers as mutually exclusive. I don't see why the government can't just ask Elections Canada to focus on providing information about when, where and how to vote, while allowing it to continue running programs to encourage Canadians to vote.

Did you have something you'd like to add?

Ms. Éliane Laberge: Yes, and I'd like to come back to something I mentioned in my presentation, if I may.

It's important to understand that providing information on where, when and how to vote is simply not enough. The next logical question that needs to be answered is why vote and for who.

Whenever I would talk to a student on campus during the election campaign, I would ask them four questions. The first was whether they were indeed registered to vote, meaning were they on the voters list. The second was whether they were aware they could cast their ballot on campus. Quebec amended its election act to allow students to vote outside their home riding so they can cast their ballot on their school campus. The third was whether they knew who they were going to vote for. They didn't go into panic mode at that point but often replied that they didn't really know. That's where we lose them. I would tell them to decide before election day because if they didn't, they wouldn't go and vote. And the fourth question was whether they could give me a reason that would make them head to the polls.

I know the argument is that the political parties will address that matter. I just experienced an election campaign, and I can tell you the parties aren't doing it because they have too many people to reach out to during the campaign. What's more, it is certainly no secret that youth aren't big supporters of political parties, and as a result, politicians tend to reach out to that demographic less.

At election time, no effort is made to explain the issues to young people in a digestible clear way. But they need access to other tools to guide them in their decision making, especially those voting for the first time. They aren't familiar with the political parties. What they are interested in are the election issues. And those issues are easily usurped by more controversial ones and political attacks amongst the parties. And that's something else that causes young people to tune out and disengage.

We see that element as part of the whole. Young people have to feel a sense of duty when it comes to voting, they have to understand the electoral and political processes, and they have to be interested in politics. And making all that happen will obviously take a lot of work, not just at election time, but all the time.

We believe Canada's Chief Electoral Officer has a role to play in providing that education to the public. As we see it, that's the only way to raise first-time voter turnout and thus overall voter turnout, which is currently at 58%.

The need for action is urgent, in our view. What will voter turnout look like in 10 years if we don't do something about first-time voter turnout now?

• (1230)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: I agree with you completely.

My next question is for Mr. Shedletzky and has to do with provisions in Bill C-23.

I'd like to talk specifically about the powers that the bill doesn't grant Elections Canada. The ones that come to mind are the authority of the commissioner to compel a witness to testify and the authority of Elections Canada to request documentation from political parties.

Could I get your thoughts on that?

[English]

Mr. Adam Shedletzky: Sure. We think that the Chief Electoral Officer and the commissioner of Canada and all of the independent experts who have studied this know a lot better and are the experts on this. We should be listening to them rather than a party who has an implicit—or at least the perception—of bias. When you look at the Chief Electoral Officer requesting certain things, there is very little rationale other than they want to improve the functioning of our democracy.

So in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it would be our perspective that you would want to give the Chief Electoral Officer and our elections watchdogs the powers they requested. Whether that's to compel parties to provide documentary evidence of receipts of money that they spend, or more importantly in our opinion, the power to compel testimony.

I mean you look at the rest of Canada, I believe seven provinces have the power to compel testimony. Australia has a power to compel testimony. The United States has the power to compel testimony. Just saying that because the police don't have it, Elections Canada shouldn't have it, is not a rationale. The Competition Bureau has it. They used it 26 times last year and very effectively. The Auditor General has it. So in our opinion we generally trust the recommendations of independent and non-partisan experts.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I too, like Mr. Reid, was looking at the card, and it's a very impressive card, I must say. That's one of the things that I truly believe. If you want to get more young people to vote, then get young people engaged and encourage young people to get out and vote. One of the thoughts that came across my mind was the ICR on the back and how something of that nature would go on a voter card, or how our voter cards themselves could actually change, maybe modernize a little.

I have a couple of questions and I wouldn't mind getting a quick comment from the three of you on this. Do you believe that it is important that we keep the current voter information card in principle, and maybe change, or look for ways of modifying it, improving it? Do you think it would be a mistake for us to get rid of that particular card or devalue the card in any way?

• (1235)

Mr. Youri Cormier: It's unfortunately something I can't really comment on because of the nature of my organization.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éliane Laberge: I think it's important to keep the voter information card. Indeed, as we mentioned, one of the barriers that prevents young people from voting is the fact that they are in transition, meaning their permanent and temporary addresses can change. Therefore, simplifying the tools they need to vote is an important step, and these cards are a way of doing that.

As I pointed out earlier, in Quebec, we've been fortunate given that the elections act was amended to allow students to vote directly on campus, regardless of their permanent place of residence. That's one way to simplify the process for voters in transition situations or those who can't easily access other pieces of identification. Methods like the voter information card are necessary for any segment of the population that is more mobile.

Getting rid of the voter information card altogether, without introducing some other tool to help those who have difficulty proving their permanent or temporary address, would be a mistake.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Shedletzky: We also believe that the voter information card is very important and should be maintained. If you look at the evidence, between 36% and 73% of Canadians who were part of a 900,000-person pilot used this card, and there was no reported fraud whatsoever. We need to figure out the balance between making it as easy as possible for people to vote and ensuring with 100% certainty the integrity of every single voter who votes in Canada. There's a balance.

Every single piece of ID has problems. My understanding is that the voter information card is the most accurate form of government ID. I believe that's correct, so if that's the case, then why should we be not permitting that use of ID and permitting other uses of ID? It doesn't make any sense to us.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: It's not a perfect data bank, but there is no such thing as a perfect data bank.

I made a comment that, if you want to get good ideas in terms of how youth should get more engaged, you often go to youth. I recall the benefits of these youth parliaments. You know, I've been a parliamentarian for over 20 years now and I find that the number of youth parliaments seems to be decreasing. I don't know if you have any sense of that, but it seems to be more than just about when to vote and how to vote. It gets them engaged in a very real and intangible way.

I often thought that if Elections Canada did a study on that, maybe Elections Canada should be doing promotions of youth parliaments in order to get young people thinking about politics. They're definitely opinionated if you ask them questions.

If you were posed, and I'll pose the question to you, what would be an initiative that you think Elections Canada could do if it in fact had the authority? The authority is being taken away under proposed section 18, of course. Do you have ideas—or if you want to comment on the youth parliament you can do that—that you think would be important to help encourage youth to be engaged in politics?

Mr. Youri Cormier: I'll start by going back to the previous question and then answer this one as well.

There's something that I can mention with regard to the voter information cards. We found a survey by EKOS that suggested 72% of the people who were allowed to use the VIC as proof of identification thought it made voting easier or much easier. That's something to keep in mind when we know that youth are finding it hard to vote.

With regard to your current question, I think the most important thing for us with regard to our partnership with Elections Canada is their expertise in research and their ability to help us measure our success and our impact. To go back to what I was mentioning a while ago with regard to our Elections BC and Elections Canada partnerships, we were able to measure how far we can get in terms of raising the voter turnout just by interacting with youth and tracking that interaction.

It's worth noting that in American research projects peer-to-peer and in-person campaigns have been shown to raise voter participation by up to 8% or 10%. It's a huge impact. Again, we also know that when youth speak to youth they get a lot more done in terms of getting the vote out. That's something to keep in mind. Also, if there's any way that Elections Canada can help make those interactions happen, then obviously it's going to have an impact.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éliane Laberge: In the FECQ's view, Elections Canada, like the chief electoral officer of Quebec, could be more active when it comes to educating the public. That's an integral part of the equation as far as improving youth voter turnout is concerned. I would say that achieving better voter turnout probably takes as much effort before an election as during. At election time, Elections Canada obviously has to have tools to educate people about the importance of voting, but if it can do more in that regard, then it should.

Getting youth involved in mock parliaments and youth parliaments is essential to help them really understand how our political system works, and to get them excited about the process and interested in it. Programs like Student Vote and its Quebec counterpart, Voters in Training, are also essential because they teach young people what it means to vote, years before they are able to do so.

It is our position that igniting an interest in politics is key if we want people to vote. It has to start close to home. More local education programs are needed in that regard. That's the way to help young people better understand politics at the national level.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to our four-minute round. If we stay good, we'll be able to finish our day with everything intact.

Mr. Richards, you have four minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I think I'll direct my questions mainly to you, Ms. Laberge, just because what I want to discuss essentially relates to students who are away from the home they grew up in and attending post-secondary school. I think you'd probably be best placed to respond.

My understanding from some of the past witnesses we've had at committee is that for those students in particular, it has been pointed out that people feel there may be concerns for them in regard to being able to meet the ID requirements. My understanding is that there doesn't seem to be any issue with proving who they are; all students have a student card or whatever, so there's no issue with proving who they are. I'm led to believe that proving their address of residence is the problem.

I'm just wondering.... For example, one of the pieces is correspondence from a school or an educational institution. There are things like bank statements, bank records, or tax assessments, because most students do of course work during the summer, so there would be tax assessments. These kinds of things are all items that can be used to prove residence. Can you tell me a bit about what the issue is there in terms of why those aren't sufficient for students to be able to prove their residence? Of course, there's also the attestation from a student residence as well, if they live in residence.

Can you just tell me a little bit about why...? If you can, try to keep it brief, because I have a few other questions as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éliane Laberge: I didn't address the identification issue given that we aren't experts on that. That wasn't the focus of our presentation.

But this is what I said earlier.

If the government is going to make as big a change as this so that people can meet the ID requirement on election day, it has to be done the right way and for the right reasons. I said that the federal government could follow Quebec's lead and set up polling stations on campuses. That would be a positive step for voter turnout on federal election day.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: The reason I asked the question is that I'm struggling to see where there would be an issue for a student to be able to prove their residence. Here's how I come to that.

When you're a student and you're attending a post-secondary institution away from home, you have a choice on where you're voting. It's determined by where you consider your residence to be, where your permanent home is. That home is either going to be the home that you grew up in with your parents, where you're going to return in the summer, like in most cases, or it's going to be where you consider now home at the place where you're attending the academic institution, if that's what you consider to be your permanent residence.

What we've heard from many people is that in the case where they are attending the school away, but their parents' home is where they are receiving all their correspondence, to me that would indicate that is in fact their home. I think one of the problems is that Elections Canada is doing a very poor job right now of letting people in those kinds of situations know what all the options are for them, because there are a number of options. There is, of course, a special ballot that someone can have through the mail.

I also believe that they can appear at any returning office anywhere in the country, so at the place they're in school, prior to advance polling day and cast a ballot for their home riding. So there are plenty of opportunities. If your residence is there—

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: —and you're able to prove it, you can cast one there. At school, of course, you would have a residence there, say they're in residence, or you'd move your mailing, obviously, to your permanent residence.

The Chair: I'm rather liking my invisibility.

Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: You were worried about there being too long an answer.

The Chair: Yes.

We'll move on to Mr. Scott for four minutes, please.

Mr. Craig Scott: Great, thank you, and thank you, all three, for such powerful and articulate presentations.

I particularly want to recognize Leadnow with respect to this particular bill. Right from the beginning you helped raise the alarm with Canadians and you said something very important, Mr. Shedletzky, near the beginning of your presentation. You said there are many problems in Bill C-23 and a focus on voter ID risks diverting our attention from those other elements. I'll come back to that because I'd like you to, after I've made a couple of other comments, just to summarize what you think really needs attention beyond the voter ID stuff.

On the encouragement of voting, it's also worth noting that this bill makes it much harder to do experiments with online voting. It's singled out for not just full House of Commons approval and thus, blocking, but Senate blocking of any such pilot projects, which I would have thought from the student perspective is not something all that welcome because I hope students would want us to be ready when the technology and public confidence level is there for online voting to be used at least in a supplementary way.

The last thing is that I very much hope that at some point we will have a fair elections bill that's about fair voting, that's about making every vote count, and that it would include proportional representation within our electoral system, which we know more or less can increase the vote by 2% to 5% as well.

That said, Apathy is Boring, this is an amazing document, this card, but the irony is that if we were to look at this in terms of post Bill C-23, it's not even clear Elections Canada would be able to partner with this at all, because the new language of proposed section 18 talks about an exclusive list of things that Elections Canada can do, and, "The Chief Electoral Officer may provide the public...with information on the following topics only".

Those topics include this side, but they would never include this side:

The future is ours: 50% of the Aboriginal population is under...27. It's up to us to own it.

Elections Canada would be banned from helping with this side. They might even be banned from helping with this side because the language in the existing act of, "The Chief Electoral Officer may implement public education information programs", is removed, and the provision that says "The Chief Electoral Officer may, using any media or other means" is removed. So it's not at all clear that the current provision will even allow partnerships with bodies such as yourselves. I think that should be a real concern given how you are advancing the ball down the field with this kind of stuff.

Back to Mr. Shedletzky. I'm wondering if you could just tell us what you think we should be paying attention to. You have about a minute.

Mr. Adam Shedletzky: Well, in our opinion this bill is a battle between talking points and reason. On the one hand, you have the government saying it is fair and reasonable that Canadians should have to show ID to vote. That's a good talking point. That's what they want to make this bill about. They don't want to make it about not giving the power to compel testimony, about exempting fundraising costs, about muzzling Elections Canada, about not permitting voter-engagement campaigns, or about appointing central polling officers in a partisan manner rather than in a neutral and unbiased way. They want to focus it on their talking point.

I think it's important, and our community thinks it's important, that we focus on the broader bill, the challenges we face in not having an all-party process and of having the perception of bias, in addition to actual bias, in this bill, which is going to stack the deck in the favour of the Conservative Party for 2015. That's why we need to focus on the entirety of this bill and work as hard as we can to stop it.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have one more speaking spot for the government side.

Mr. Lukiwski, go ahead.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you very much, and thank you all for being here.

I honestly don't know the answer to this and that's why I'm going to ask the question.

During your presentations you've all talked, in part, about the need to try to increase voter participation from young people. Elections Canada, over the past number of years, has had initiatives to try to increase voter participation, yet the statistics show the participation of the younger demographic, I think from 18 to 25, has actually gone down, and gone down significantly.

I'm not saying that their advertising is pushing people away, but I'd like to get your views on why you think young people now, after an extensive advertising campaign and voter information campaign from Elections Canada.... It is actually proving to be ineffective.

Mr. Youri Cormier: Yes, I can start with that one.

The question is extremely wide. Obviously, we're seeing something that's international not just here in Canada. A lot of factors are at play including, for example, youth poverty, youth unemployment, and youth education levels. More people are going to school, which has the impact of making people move a lot.

Also, one generation ago our parents were a lot richer than current youth are. There's been a 12% decrease in the accumulated wealth of people under the age of 30 in the past 30 years, despite the economy having grown considerably since then. This is in real numbers and in real, constant, dollars. The impact is that youth don't own homes at the same rate as their parents would have back in the seventies or sixties. That's one of the factors that increase voter participation and civic engagement. There's research that shows that if you're a homeowner, you're more engaged in your community and you're much more likely to be on the registration list because you're stable in your living place.

Now, I will give you an example of what this means in B.C. I don't have the numbers for the federal government, but I encourage you to search them out. People over the age of 60 in B.C. are 91% likely to be correctly on the registration list, whereas that drops to 72% for people who are under the age of 30. The accuracy of the list itself is much lower for younger people. Then, add to that the fact that a lot of young people are simply not on the list at all. In B.C., 55% of youth are either not on the electoral list or incorrectly on the electoral list.

If we're going to talk about getting people out to vote for the federal election in a year from now, we have to start figuring out how we're going to get people to be correctly on the list, and that means a huge brainstorm, nationally, to fix that problem.

The Chair: You have about a minute left.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: One of the provisions in C-23 is the requirement for Elections Canada to communicate with Canadians as to the methods and how to vote. This would address some of the concerns, as you're saying, that a lot of younger people in particular aren't aware not so much as to whether they should be voting, what their constitutional rights are, and the benefits of participating in the voting process, but as to the nuts and bolts of how to. That in itself would be a promotional campaign, because any time you're talking about voting in an election in general, you're promoting the fact that an election is imminent.

In other words, a concentrated campaign directed, perhaps targeted, towards younger voters on the how-tos, the nuts and bolts of what you need to do to be able to vote, when the election would be held, where the voting would be held, how, and what kinds of ID you would need to vote—would that be effective, in your view?

Mr. Youri Cormier: It's only part of the answer, because—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Would that portion be effective?

Mr. Youri Cormier: Would that portion be effective? Not unless there's motivation backing it, so that people want to find out how to vote.... If you don't make that first leap, you're not going to do the extra mile to find out.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éliane Laberge: That was something we observed quite clearly in talking to the thousands of students we met in the past few weeks. If they don't know why they should vote, who they should vote for, as well as when and how to vote, they won't bother to find that information. From a voter's perspective, knowing what the platforms of the various political parties are and why voting matters are equally as important as knowing when, where and how to vote.

• (1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you.

The Chair: I could go on longer on this, but we're going to have a bit of committee business, and I must leave at one o'clock today. I have a Skype interview with a high school class, which I've been looking forward to.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That will get them out to vote.

The Chair: That's it.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: You're doing your part.

The Chair: Okay, make fun of the chair, it works.

So we will adjourn and thank our guests.

No, we won't adjourn, we won't do any of that. We'll suspend while our witnesses leave.

Yes, I better suspend now that I have gavelled. So suspend just for a minute while our witnesses leave. Then we'll come back for committee business very quickly, folks. Thanks.

• (1255)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1255)

The Chair: We're back and we have exactly three minutes until the chair must leave.

Madam Latendresse, I believe it's your motion.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Yes, it is.

The Chair: So would you like to speak to it—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Absolutely.

[*English*]

The Chair: —or are we just going to vote on it?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Actually, I think it's important to explain why it was so important to us to put forward this motion.

The minister has said repeatedly that he wants to wait for the committee's proposed amendments to see what will happen. To my mind, providing all members of Parliament with an update on the committee's work, as well as a summary of what witnesses and experts appearing before us have said, is important in order to make this bill the best it can be.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have no one else on my speaking....

Sure, well, go for it, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I have to say, I'm getting some indication from the government members that they're not going to support this. Now for all the blocks and challenges, and everything else that this government has done in terms of thwarting the work of this committee, real work, to vote against a summary of the testimony...? They have to be kidding, Chair. They have to be kidding.

I would like to hear one of the government members take the floor and defend publicly why we're not going to ask our analysts to give us a summary of the testimony? Are they going to speak?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Certainly.

The Chair: I have Mr. Lamoureux and then Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. David Christopherson: Good. I'd like to speak after Mr. Lukiwski.

The Chair: At one o'clock, I'm going.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, that may be, Chair, but I can't believe that this isn't a motherhood motion and it's just flying through. Of course we're going to do it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, I do have one question.

The mover is saying in this summary “not include any recommendations to the Committee on how to proceed with the legislation”.

Why would you want to exclude that? What's the rationale behind it?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...can't direct the committee on how to vote.

The Chair: I'll go to the mover and get her explanation if you'd like.

Madam Latendresse.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: We would like the Library of Parliament to provide an impartial summary of the evidence the committee has heard thus far. We don't want to direct them in any way. We just want a good summary of what the committee has heard during the course of its study to date.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Again, I have a question of you, Mr. Chair.

The recommendations that would be provided by our analysts, would they not be apolitical in their nature, or do they get the recommendations from government?

The Chair: We're walking new ground here, Mr. Lamoureux...a summary of evidence on a piece of legislation. Normally the witnesses give us their input and then the committee members, who were here taking that evidence, go into clause by clause. That is usually the summary of what we're doing. I'm not certain I can answer your question.

•(1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I don't have a problem in terms of supporting the motion, but in addition to that, I would like to be able to receive whatever recommendations they might have. I am approaching this with an open mind.

The Chair: We thank you for that, and we'll leave you on the speaking list.

We have Mr. Lukiwski next when we meet again.

The meeting is adjourned.

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