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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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• (1505)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)):

The meeting is officially open. Before we get started in earnest, I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting today on the traditional territory of the Songhees, Esquimalt, and Coast Salish first nations. We're very happy to be here on Vancouver Island. It's a beautiful place, and you're lucky to live here. We're lucky to be visiting as part of this tour.

I'll explain briefly how we go about things.

We have a panel of two today. We have Mr. Keith Archer, the chief electoral officer here in B.C., and we have Craig Henschel, who is a member of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

Each panellist will present for 10 minutes. Then we'll have a round of questions whereby each MP on the committee will have five minutes to engage with the witnesses, and those five minutes include questions and answers. If at the end of five minutes the witness is unable to answer because of time constraints, fear not, you can address the questions the next time you have the mike. Your views can be heard. We retain enough flexibility for that to happen. That's essentially how we operate.

I would remind the members that if we're at four minutes and 30 seconds into your allotted time, it could be used for a statement or a rapid question with a rapid answer, so that we can respect the time limit.

Without further ado, we'll start with Mr. Archer, for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Keith Archer (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections BC):

Thanks, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. Welcome to Victoria.

My name is Keith Archer. I'm the chief electoral officer in British Columbia, a position I've held since 2011. Prior to this appointment, I was a professor of political science at the University of Calgary. Mr. Kelly reminded me that he was a student in one of my classes back in the early 1990s.

Let me begin by setting out the terms of reference for my comments here today.

As chief electoral officer for British Columbia, my obligation is to administer electoral processes in British Columbia. As an electoral administrator, my role is to ensure that, whatever electoral system is used in my jurisdiction, it is administered to the highest professional

standards, ensuring that all eligible voters can fairly and effectively exercise their franchise.

My remarks, therefore, do not take a view of one electoral system over another. My office would as readily administer a general election using single member plurality as it would any number of other alternative systems, such as proportional, mixed member proportional, or runoff systems. That's the role of my office.

An additional question that arises in discussions of electoral reform is whether changing the fundamental rules of the electoral process requires some level of public consultation. If so, should that consultation involve some type of public input process such as is being undertaken by this legislative committee conducting hearings across the country, or should it involve some kind of public input, for example, through the administration of a plebiscite or a referendum on the issue?

In my jurisdiction, the Election Act is silent on this topic, which means, of course, that from a legal perspective, the standard legislative rules apply. Since the Election Act is silent on this topic, then as the chief electoral officer, I'm not in a position to comment on the merits of any form of public consultation. The decision on whether and how to engage the public in a consultation on electoral reform is a matter for government and the legislative assembly; therefore, I will not be commenting on the merits of public consultation.

Now that I've outlined what I won't be speaking about and my reasons for doing so, let me turn to the things that I am prepared to discuss; namely, once the government and the legislature have decided to consult the public through a referendum or a plebiscite, what issues you may wish to consider.

Elections BC has administered three referendums and a plebiscite since 2005, and I would like to draw upon those experiences to highlight a number of issues worth considering.

First, why use a referendum or a plebiscite? Referendums and plebiscites are discretionary instruments of public consultations. A referendum is usually binding on governments; a plebiscite is not. Referendums and plebiscites are used when governments consider that an expression of public opinion is desirable.

Two of the referendums conducted in British Columbia in the past 11 years were on the question of electoral reform. The other referendum was on a proposal to rescind the HST and to return to a tax structure that included a GST and a PST. A plebiscite was held in metro Vancouver on transportation and transit options. Each of the referendums and the plebiscite had a different origin.

The 2005 referendum on electoral reform flowed from the recommendations of a citizens' assembly on that topic. The government had committed that, if the citizens' assembly recommended changing the electoral system and recommended a single alternative, it would consult the electorate through a referendum in conjunction with a 2005 general election.

The 2009 referendum on electoral reform was held because the government recognized, following the vote in 2005, that the electorate was unaware of the electoral districts that would be in use under the proposed alternative electoral system, that is, BC-STV, as it was known. Therefore, it charged the Electoral Boundaries Commission to propose new electoral districts using both SMP and BC-STV, and the commission did so. These districts then added some context to the referendum vote in 2009.

• (1510)

The 2011 referendum on the HST began under the Recall and Initiative Act, legislation that's unique to British Columbia. In the end, however, balloting was administered under the Referendum Act.

The 2015 plebiscite came about because a new source of funding was being proposed by the metro Vancouver mayors' council to fund transportation and transit in the metro area. The provincial government had committed that any such new funding would be subject to public consultation, and the plebiscite option was chosen for that purpose.

So the discretionary character of referendums and plebiscites means that the starting points may differ.

Second, what's a voting threshold or a decision rule? Well, the Referendum Act in British Columbia states that if more than 50% of the validly cast ballots vote the same way on a question, the result is binding on government. However, the act also provides that this rule is subject to change through regulation.

Recent experience in B.C. has shown a number of voting thresholds in operation. For the 2005 and 2009 referendums on electoral reform, the voting thresholds involved what I would describe as double supermajorities; that is, there were two thresholds. First, at least 60% of valid votes needed to be cast in favour of the change, and second, in at least 60% of electoral districts, more than 50% of the valid votes had to be cast in favour of change.

Parenthetically, in 2005, the second threshold was met, but the first was not. In 2009, neither of those thresholds were met. Therefore, the result was not binding on government, and of course, in the end, the electoral system was not changed.

For the HST referendum and the plebiscite on transportation and transit, a simple majority of votes was required for the question to be passed. This was achieved in the former, but not in the latter.

A third question is, how are electors informed about the process? Electoral events at the federal and provincial levels involve candidates offering differing perspectives and agendas, and political parties helping to communicate the message of their group. Over time, rules have been established for the financing of electoral competitions, including rules for disclosure, and in some instances, limits on expenditures and contributions.

Similar questions arise with referendums and plebiscites. For example, are there formally registered proponent and opponent groups? Are there limits on what each group can spend on advertising? Is there a particular public education role for the election agency? Are there disclosure requirements? Are there limits on contributions?

A variety of rules have been used in recent experience in B.C. In some instances, such as the second referendum on electoral reform and the HST referendum, there were registered yes and no groups and public funding allocated to those groups. In other instances, such as the first referendum on electoral reform, there was a requirement to register as an advertising sponsor, but no public funding was provided. In the recent plebiscite, there was no registration of advertising sponsors and no public funding.

Fourth, how are the ballots cast? Balloting in a referendum or a plebiscite can occur either in conjunction with or separate from a general election, and can either be in-person paper balloting or through an alternative balloting method, such as postal voting or telephone or Internet voting.

British Columbia has used paper balloting in conjunction with general elections for the referendums in 2005 and 2009. This has been described as using a thin layer on top of the general administrative procedures for the elections. The cost of using this method is very modest, but of course, there is limited flexibility in terms of the time at which the event can take place.

British Columbia has experienced relatively consistent turnout no matter which method of voting has been used. For example, turnout was 57.4% and 51% in the referendums in 2005 and 2009 when they were conducted in conjunction with general elections, and 52.7% and 48.6% for the HST referendum and the plebiscite, both of which were conducted with mail-in balloting.

• (1515)

In 2005, Elections BC's total costs in administering the general elections were \$22.9 million, or just over \$8 per registered voter. The cost of the referendum was just over \$1 million, or an additional 37¢ per registered voter, so this thin layer is very inexpensive to administer. The cost of administering the HST mail-in ballots was just over \$8 million, or about \$2.63 per registered voter. The cost of the plebiscite in 2015 was \$5.4 million, or \$3.44 per registered voter.

The last thing I'll mention is a comment on Internet voting. I chaired an independent panel on Internet voting, which submitted a report to our legislative assembly in 2014. That report is available on the Elections BC website. I'm happy to make it available to the committee for your reference. I don't have time to discuss the report in my introductory remarks, but would be happy to do so in response to members' questions.

Mr. Chair, that concludes my introductory remarks.

● (1520)

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

We'll now go to Mr. Henschel, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Craig Henschel (Member, BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, and welcome to Victoria.

[*English*]

My name is Craig Henschel. Thanks for asking me here this afternoon.

In 2004 I had the honour and privilege of serving for 11 months on the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform with 159 other randomly selected voters. Diana Byford and other assembly members are also here. She will be speaking more about the assembly process in the second session today.

I brought copies of our final report in French and English for the committee to examine, and I think you have them, as well as a small brochure that I've put together for the second referendum to try to educate voters about BC-STV.

I would like to try to give you a sense of our decision-making process and how we reached our 95% consensus for STV, the single transferable vote, in British Columbia.

One of our 50 public hearings was held in Valemount, a beautiful remote rural town of 1,000 people on the eastern edge of British Columbia. One gentleman there told us that he'd been voting in Valemount for 20 or 30 years and that he had never voted for an MLA who had won. He wanted someone he actually voted for to represent him in Victoria. I came away from that encounter understanding that exclusion.

The feeling of being excluded is a major failing of our electoral systems. Shouldn't we all have a say over the laws and policies that affect us? Isn't that what democracy is all about, citizens having a say over their own lives?

We also understood from other speakers that in rural areas, having someone local representing the area's voters was critical. To represent voters faithfully, the MLA or MP has to be able to see the world through local eyes, with local information and local understanding, and take this perspective into their party caucuses, legislative committees, and ultimately into the legislature when voting on the laws and policies that will affect those voters. Assembly members had heard similar frustrations from voters all over the province.

We looked at the results from several elections and found that an average of about 50% of voters didn't actually vote for their MLA. This came as a big surprise to us. We also noticed that MLAs were often elected by vastly different numbers of voters. MLAs who won with a 30% plurality might be representing half the number of voters of an MLA who won with a 60% plurality. Each MLA gets one full vote in the legislature, so this just wasn't fair. Some voters had twice the legislative power of other voters.

When half the voters don't have representation and the half who do have different amounts, it shouldn't be a surprise that election results often don't match voters' desires. If we could solve the problems of exclusion and unequal representation, we could solve the problem of disproportionality.

The single transferable vote solves this problem directly. STV uses multiple MPs in a district to represent multiple points of view. This greatly reduces the amount of voter exclusion, while at the same time keeping MPs as local as possible. STV is a preferential ballot, so that strategic voting isn't necessary and so that the voter can give the counting system a clear portrait of their desires. STV also uses a fair counting system that elects each MP in a district with about the same number of votes.

By dealing with exclusion and fairness right from the start, band-aid solutions like compensatory, non-local, party-list MPs are not required.

The flaw with first-past-the-post local representation is that only 50% of voters actually get local representation. The other 50% of voters aren't represented at all. The flaw with MMP local representation is that the district sizes have to be increased by 50% to 100%, which gives the MP less time with each constituent. The single transferable vote actually improves local representation by giving it to more voters and keeping the same voter-to-MP ratio, so MPs can spend the same amount of time with constituents as they do now.

We also wanted more choice. We absolutely didn't want political parties deciding who our MPs would be. Most of the assembly really liked multi-member districts. Multi-member districts are fantastic. The law commission rejected STV out of hand because it had multi-member districts, and I think that was a huge error. Multi-member districts are fantastic, and in my written brief to you, I go over the different details about them.

● (1525)

I am sure you've heard that women's representation improves with proportional systems, but it is critical to understand the electoral mechanism that makes this possible, and the key is multi-member districts. Academic studies have shown that in single member districts, where a party puts forward a single candidate, it tends to put forward a male of the dominant cultural group. In jurisdictions where parties put forward multiple candidates, they tend to diversify their slates with more gender balance and more diversity.

STV has a far greater potential for increasing women's representation than MMP does, with its single member districts. This was very important to the assembly, which greatly benefited from being gender balanced itself.

It is a really good idea in your deliberations and your process of making decisions to take specific designs of electoral systems for a spin. Try them out. Poke the tires. This is especially the case with MMP, because there are so many variations: open lists, closed lists, hybrid lists, voter-ordered lists, regions or no regions. If you are not looking at specific systems, it is very difficult to compare them and understand what is going on.

When the assembly designed the best MMP system for British Columbia and compared it to the best STV system for British Columbia, STV was favoured 80% over MMP at 20%. When we compared STV to first past the post, STV was favoured by 93% of assembly members over first past the post at 7%. This consensus was achieved not because the assembly members were practised negotiators, but because STV is so much better than any of the alternatives. The assembly then reached a 95% consensus to recommend that the single transferable vote be adopted for British Columbia.

As I understand it, the B.C. Citizens' Assembly has been the most extensive voter-based examination of electoral systems in history. If you choose to recommend STV to the minister, it will be accompanied by significant voter legitimacy. Is it possible that the B.C. Citizens' Assembly got it right? I think we did.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start our round of questions with Mr. DeCoursey, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Archer and Mr. Henschel. Thank you, everyone, for being here today and allowing us to visit and spend time in your beautiful city. It is my first time here on Vancouver Island, and I can say I've enjoyed the visual beauty of the place as well as the warm welcome we received earlier today.

Mr. Henschel, if I could spend some time with you, I'd love to dig into the process and the conversations that took place within the citizens' assembly. The place I'd like to start is the trade-offs between parties being able to deliver clear visions of their policy agenda in an election, as they are generally able to do through an SMP, first-past-the-post system versus the trade-offs that take place afterwards in a coalition or minority government.

Some would say that understanding where a party stands on a clear vision and knowing how we can hold it accountable is a value that we want to pursue. Others say, "No, we want parties to compromise, and if they have to do that behind closed doors, that's the way we want to go."

Take me through the conversation in the citizens' assembly.

Mr. Craig Henschel: We had two different types of conversations: in the whole group, 160 people in one go, and in small discussion groups with 12 people in each room.

A key thing for us was... We had Ken Carty, who presented to you. In the big room, he talked about the stability of first past the post. Then we all went to smaller rooms and talked about the instability as policy lurches back and forth. We live in British Columbia and have seen the government go between Liberal and NDP. That's our experience, as voters, that policy lurches and is often brought about by governments that didn't have the support of most of the voters. They had majority seats, but minority support.

When we were looking at proportional systems, we knew that probably two different parties would come together and cobble together a true coalition majority. We really liked the idea that instead of having a party leader and a party with less than 50% support, and instead of them going off in one direction that most of us didn't want them to go in, they would have to pause for a moment and talk with other coalition partners, at least the other coalition leader, and go through issues, talk about them, discuss them, and come to better solutions.

We really liked the idea that policy would come from more talking and less quick acting because, as you probably heard, when there is a policy lurch one way or the other, there is an enormous amount of disruption that can happen in society.

• (1530)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: In your final decision-making votes within the assembly, there was a clear preference toward STV over MMP, and then a clear preference toward STV over first past the post. Why was there the referendum?

Mr. Craig Henschel: That was part of the mandate of government. That wasn't our choice.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Was there a conversation around whether a referendum was the best way to go?

Mr. Craig Henschel: The referendum was set at the same time the assembly was established. But at that time, we didn't know that it was going to be a double 60% supermajority. When we all signed up, we thought it was a usual 50% majority referendum. We were only told about the double 60% several months into our process, and we all just sat there thinking that this proposal was doomed. We didn't think it would work, although we really did like the requirement to get 50% in the different districts. That forced us to make sure we satisfied the requirements and needs of rural voters, which we could have avoided otherwise.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Do you have any thoughts on how the B. C. model would translate to a Canadian model, given the unique characteristics of Canada's north, or Canada's "norths", as we've heard as recently as yesterday, as well as some of the northern ridings in some of the provinces?

Mr. Craig Henschel: Yes. That was a huge issue for us, obviously.

If you look at the map, there are huge areas—and Nathan knows—of the province and it looks daunting. How can you add districts together, a three member district of the north? How is that going to work? Mostly it's rocks and trees. The people are along small stretches of highways, basically. The province is not as big as we think it is by looking at the map. There has to be a real sense of how long it takes and how difficult it is to communicate with people.

We have the Internet. We have Skype. We have video conferencing. We have scheduling. We thought we could manage a large district. The assembly members from those areas wanted multi-member districts, because they wanted representation. It was hugely important.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Reid now, please.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Henschel, I'll start with you. First of all, I concur with your observation that remote ridings are frequently ridings that have a single centre that has the majority of the population. We just came from Yukon, where something in the neighbourhood of two-thirds of the population are in the capital. It's not universally true, but it certainly is a feature of a number of northern ridings.

There are also rural ridings—I, myself, represent one—where people are spread very thinly over the ground in what is geographically a smaller area. But in practice, visiting your constituents.... In my case, I have no municipality with more than 10,000 people, no town with more than 10,000 people. That creates a different kind of problem. It's less spectacular on a map but very real. I simply mention this as something that is worthy of everybody's consideration on this committee as we move forward.

I think you answered the question about the 60% number instead of a pure majority. I have always thought that was a mistake. It sounds as if you're saying it was a mistake. I get the impression, from reading the Speech from the Throne following that referendum which took place in the election that the government recognized they had a legitimacy problem. The majority had voted in favour of something. They couldn't act on it, and that forced them to have the second referendum.

That's one thing—you can comment on that, if you wish—but what I wanted to ask this. In Prince Edward Island right now they're looking at having a referendum—they call it a plebiscite—in which they have a number of options listed. New Zealand used this when they went to electoral reform, and they used it again recently when they reconsidered whether what they had done was the right thing. What are your thoughts on that kind of referendum compared with simply one option versus the status quo?

• (1535)

Mr. Craig Henschel: As you know, because you've been doing this for two or three months, with just a full-on education, this is a complicated topic. Just the simple mechanics of the system are complicated. How they flesh out when you work through them and look at how they're going to work for voters, MPs, and governance, that's super complicated and the average voter is not going to spend the time doing that.

Having a referendum about which system to have doesn't work. Maybe a better solution to find out what voters are thinking is to ask them about different values, in a polling sense or through the census guys in Canada. They could ask voters what their values are, what values they hold as important, and then take that advice and find a system that works for them.

We had a lot of people at our public hearings say, "These are our values. We don't know how to get there. You're the experts. Get us there."

That's what I would suggest.

Mr. Scott Reid: Let me ask this question. I know this is not something that sounds like a road you'd want to go down, but let's say you'd been asked to come up with the best STV system you could, and also the best MMP system, so that voters could choose between those two and the status quo. I think these are the two most credible options versus the status quo.

Would that have been feasible for a group like the citizens' assembly to do?

Mr. Craig Henschel: Well, that's exactly what we did do. That was exactly the process we used to determine that we preferred STV. We had two months in the summer with a new thing—it was online blogging, cool—and we just hammered out the two different systems and then we came up with the final designs in our plenary sessions and pitted them against each other. We'd been debating this all summer because we knew those were the only two alternatives for British Columbia. It was in that comparison of the best systems to address the values of British Columbians that we made those votes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Professor Archer, you stated that the form of the referendum—mail-in versus the paper ballot at a polling station—did not affect turnout. Did it affect the cost of conducting the stand-alone referendum? Would it have been more expensive having balloting stations and all the normal paraphernalia of an election, or would it have been the same cost?

Mr. Keith Archer: One of the arguments that has been used in British Columbia for the mail-in ballot is its cost-effectiveness. Our budget for the last provincial general election was about \$35 million. The HST referendum that was conducted with mail-in balloting was just over \$8 million. It's a much less expensive option and in British Columbia we have confidence in the integrity of a referendum process that uses mail-in ballots.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you both.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid.

We'll go now to Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): I thank our witnesses and the crowd here. I am happy to be in Victoria with you today.

I want to explain the empty chair here. My colleague and good friend Nathan Cullen is a little busy right now, because the government just announced an LNG project with the company Petronas, and he has to give some interviews on that.

I am now going to switch to French.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Henschel. I wish I had more than five minutes to ask you questions.

I find your citizen assembly concept very interesting. The NDP had suggested this process, but it wasn't accepted.

I would like to get a better understanding of your enthusiasm for multi-member constituencies. You seemed to be saying earlier that they were fantastic. You mentioned that your written brief explained this concept in more detail.

Could you take a minute or a minute and a half to tell us why—and to what extent—constituencies with several MPs are the best solution?

• (1540)

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Henschel: The one thing to remember is that a single MP is not going to be able to represent everyone in that district, because there are many different opinions in a district. To represent multiple points of view, you really need multiple MPs. In that circumstance, you have to figure out a way to elect them.

In a multi-member district, different parties will be putting forward probably one more candidate than they expect will win, because if the election goes their way they'll want to be able to take advantage of that. That gives voters a very interesting opportunity to have a say in the candidate selection process of the parties—all voters—because with the preferential ballot, they'll be able to rank the different candidates in the multi-member district.

It's great for voters. It may be harder for MPs, but maybe not. For voters, you can have a say in it. If there is an MP who is doing a lousy job or who has done something that people don't like, voters can say that they will not rank them at all and they'll rank someone else, so that's very good.

You can keep people accountable if you have an MP who you voted for, but if you didn't vote for your MP and they're running again, how do you hold that MP accountable? You can't withhold the vote you never gave them in the first place, but in a multi-member district where more voters have a representative who they voted for, they can hold them accountable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: The Prime Minister said during the election campaign that the 2015 election would be the last to use the first past the post system. Many systems have been put forward, including mixed member proportional, closed list, open list and STV, or single transferable vote.

One advantage of the current system is that it's very simple to understand. A five-year-old could navigate it easily. But some people fear that a system like STV is essentially a mathematical calculations affair. We can even imagine that people would meet in an isolated

room, do mathematical calculations and decide the outcome of elections.

Why did your citizens assembly decide that this wasn't a problem?

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Henschel: We tried out voting with STV and we could manage to count to three. It's not really hard.

During the first referendum, I think it was, I went to a high school assembly in north Vancouver. I had first-past-the-post ballots—for pizza, of course, because it was a high school—and STV ballots, with instructions on how to vote. I handed them out without any talking or dialogue at all about them. The teachers knew how to count STV ballots, and the voting went off perfectly. Instead of having all pepperoni pizzas for the entire school—

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: They had choices.

Mr. Craig Henschel: —they got a bunch of choices.

That's one of the things we loved about multi-member districts. It was easy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: We have heard many opinions on constituencies with several MPs. We've talked about ridings with three, four, five or seven members, depending on whether they are in an urban or rural area.

Would we keep ridings with a single MP?

Mr. Cullen's riding is 330 square kilometres, while mine is 11 square kilometres. The reality isn't the same.

• (1545)

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Henschel: The understanding we got from rural assembly members was that they wanted multi-member districts because multi-member districts would give representation to more of them, and it would give more of them the ability to hold their MLAs accountable and to have the choice of which MLA they would want.

We really liked the idea of the ballot being a portrait of yourself. When you fill it in, you can see that you're an education supporter, but you're kind of favouring this party or that other party, or you're a resource kind of person and you're favouring this party rather than the other party. The ballot lets us express ourselves with regard to what we feel about being a Canadian. It's a statement that we get to make about ourselves and our country once every four years. I think people feel that's important.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Henschel and Mr. Archer, members of the audience, colleagues and members of the support team, good afternoon.

Mr. Archer, when the issue of electoral reform came up, why was a double 60% standard set for the referendum?

[English]

Mr. Keith Archer: The decision rule on the referendum is established by regulation, and that's a matter for the government to determine. It's not something the election agency is responsible for determining, and I suspect the legislation at the federal level would be similar.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Okay.

This brings us to an extraordinary outcome. Imagine that a majority of the population wanted reform, but it didn't happen. Yet you could obtain a proportional system and be at the forefront in terms of the electoral system in Canada.

Dozens and dozens of stakeholders are coming to insist on not holding a referendum by invoking the fear of losing because of the double 60% standard. They find the situation impossible.

When I hear this argument, I tell myself that if we made Quebec independent without holding a referendum first for fear of not winning, no doubt it would not fly.

A referendum is a consultation process. Constitutionally, the government doesn't need the support of any party to proceed with the reform of its choosing. The same is true for a party in power in Quebec that wants to declare independence. Under the constitutional rules, it could be done without a referendum.

This affects the legitimacy. But in my opinion, legitimacy goes hand in hand with a simple majority. I'd like to know what Mr. Henschel thinks.

You spoke very briefly about the double 60% standard that you experienced here, but I'd like you to expand on that.

[English]

Mr. Craig Henschel: I think it's clear to everybody that the double 60% supermajority required was an attempt to stop the reform from happening. It was planned. They had the best intentions when they set up the assembly.

Gordon Campbell lost the 1996 election, and I remember that election night. He had the most votes. The Liberals had the most votes and the NDP formed a majority government. He was furious. He said, "Never again."

In the next election, the Liberals won 77 of 79 seats. It was a huge majority and it left no official opposition. We knew in British Columbia that the electoral system just didn't work. It got the wrong answers, and it made governance difficult. There was a unanimous vote in the legislature to set up the assembly, and then they got to thinking that maybe that was not such a good idea.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Henschel, I find the concept of citizen assembly really interesting.

Do you think it's difficult, once a system engages 95% of assembly members, to obtain the support of the majority of the population in this regard?

How much time does it take? What action is necessary? Is it difficult or is the standard really too high for the referendum you blocked?

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. Craig Henschel: Academic studies were done and people were polled after both referendums. What they found from both referendums is that the more voters understood about STV, the more they liked it.

In the first referendum, a lot of voters knew about the assembly. They knew that voters had found the system and that it was coming from voters. In the next referendum, with the wording of the referendum and how it was portrayed, it seemed like we were some kind of lobby group bringing forth this idea. It had been several years since those failed elections, so that was an enormous problem.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

I didn't quite understand what you said in response to the question of my colleague Alexandre Boulerice.

Should we choose a proportional system or ridings with several MPs, what would we do with Mr. Cullen's riding? Would we leave it as is or would we combine it with others?

[English]

Mr. Craig Henschel: On the assembly, people who lived in the Skeena—Bulkley Valley area wanted to be merged with other districts. They wanted a multi-member district. Fifty per cent of people up there are not represented at all, let alone represented locally. For the guys who are represented locally, it's great for them, but for the other half of the voters, they don't have someone in government representing their point of view.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, gentlemen.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you to everyone here in the room, and of course to Mr. Archer and Mr. Henschel.

Just because of the gasp that went up when Mr. Boulerice said there had been an announcement, we're anticipating an announcement at 5:15, so we don't have an announcement yet on the LNG, and we proceed to focus on our task, which is democratic reform.

I have a number of questions for you, Mr. Henschel. First of all, the work of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly has been discussed by a number of academic experts who have appeared before this committee. It's always expressed with the greatest respect and deference to the enormous amount of work that average citizens did in that province. I want to thank Diana Byford, who is here, and you, Mr. Henschel. It was 11 months of your lives and a very real dedication that is above and beyond, so thank you for that.

I know you've been very clear that the reason the B.C. Citizens' Assembly shows an STV system for the whole province is that you felt that was the very best system, even for large ridings. But do you think there's any merit in taking a different view when we look at all of Canada—and we have three territories, Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut—and the distances, the cultural differences, and geographical identity, which are distinct?

As much as I would love to imagine it, I have a hard time imagining that we wouldn't need some form of hybrid system for Canada. I'd like your reaction to that and any thoughts you might have about the difficulties of taking the B.C. Citizens' Assembly's recommendation nationally.

Mr. Craig Henschel: In Canada, the electoral system is province by province. It needs to be self-contained within the provinces, so we don't mess with those requirements. Nunavut, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories are individual elements with one MP, so I think those are going to be single member districts, clearly.

The message we got from rural voters in these geographically large but usually population small districts was that they wanted local representation. It was so important for them to have local representation. To deny those voters better local representation, which STV gives, and provide it in the cities seems to be against what the whole thing was.

In the assembly, we had to struggle to satisfy the needs of the rural voters to have better local representation and STV provides that.

Ms. Elizabeth May: In terms of looking at that, the mixed member proportional system—I'll just play devil's advocate with you—certainly gives voters everywhere more effectiveness to their vote. While they have their single member district, they also know their vote is counting toward the group of MPs who will be elected through an open or closed list, or whatever. Their preference will count in a way that it doesn't now.

Can you explain why it was so clear to you that wasn't the way to go to represent voters rural or urban?

• (1555)

Mr. Craig Henschel: Yes. If you look at MMP, MMP is better than what we have now. You get the same results on the local side; still, 50% of the voters will not be represented locally. The districts will be 50% larger, or twice as large, with a single MP doing the local representation and all the constituency work. That will be difficult for them.

Half of the voters are going to be represented on the local side. The other half of the voters have to be represented on the party side. Somehow you have to figure out how to get those voters—really, only—sorting out who's going to get elected on the party side.

On the party side, if you're not using regions within the province, you're going to have a region the size of British Columbia. Those MPs, representing half the voters, are going to be anywhere in that whole region, so that's not very local.

If you have small regions, they might be in a region of 10 MPs, so they'll be in a region of 10 MPs for that half of the voters. That half of the voters is getting a very different representation experience

than that of the voters who have single member district representation.

Ms. Elizabeth May: You made a brief comment that I didn't take down properly. I got the sense that you thought the law commission had made a mistake by dismissing STV out of hand and perhaps misunderstood something the citizens' assembly had done. Can you explain that?

Mr. Craig Henschel: Yes. If you read through the law commission report, I think I counted 13 times where it says that their goal was to add an element of proportionality to our current system. By definition, that's either MMP or MMM. That's where they started. In their discussion of the different systems, they described STV in a reasonable way. Then they decided, in one sentence, that they were not choosing STV, because there was multi-member districts. Of course, not having multi-member districts... Single member districts is the root cause of so many of our electoral problems.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): My question is similar, going along the lines of accountability. I think it is quite important to have accountability, and I understand that STV can bring you accountability, or at least it can help you not lose the accountability you currently have. With the size of the riding growing larger than what it is right now... With STV, however, rural ridings would probably quadruple in size.

Mr. Craig Henschel: They would triple, probably.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: In that situation, you could hold them accountable and not vote for the same person come next election. But how about accessibility to your local member? Many people have a really hard time accessing their member as it is. When you grow a riding to that size, I can't fathom how members would be able to get to all their constituents.

Also, how do you decide which member goes where? Maybe you could spread them out so that it would work, but who decides that? Wouldn't everybody just run to the city centre and set up shop all in the same place? How would we avoid that happening?

Mr. Craig Henschel: We talked about this extensively. When you group districts together and have a multi-member district, instead of being able to be elected with a small plurality of 30% or 40% of the voters and leaving 70% or 60% or 50% of voters unrepresented, in an STV election in a three member district, only 25% of voters maybe are not going to be represented. There are many more voters the candidates have to campaign for to get votes from.

On the difficulties of getting an MP to help you out, the constituency services part of it right now, if there are more MPs to choose from, finding one should be easier. If there is a choice of MPs, that's fantastic for voters, especially if there are different issues that need to be addressed. If it's an immigration issue, a business issue, or a family services issue, if you have different MPs with different specialties and different concerns, that's much better for voters.

•(1600)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Sure, and they belong to different parties, which is enticing as well. However, if the person is 20 miles away or even further, it still becomes quite a task for someone to get out there because it's so far.

Mr. Craig Henschel: That's a very interesting question. We discussed it on the assembly. Shoni Field, an assembly member, looked at Ireland and their multi-member districts, and she plotted out everyone's home who was a TD, a member, in Ireland in the district. She found that they're not all clumped together in small centres. They're all spread out because they have to get votes. They're desperate for votes and they have to really spread out to get them. So you can't be from just one neighbourhood or one city.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I've heard that as well. Part of me would like to believe that everyone would take their own territory, but part of me also fears there would be a lot of competition for certain areas and demographics.

Going along that line of competition, what would the election look like under an STV model? We've been talking a lot about our politics and looking at the U.S. debate last night and seeing how everything has become so confrontational. Under an STV-style campaign model—I'm trying to picture it in my head—wouldn't it actually add to the competition? You'd have intra-party competition as well as competition with other parties. Everyone would be trying to knock each other off the ballot, because everyone would be in competition, essentially, at that point.

Mr. Craig Henschel: There are two aspects to that. The assembly members really like the idea of more competition, and Canada is paying more attention to voters to get the vote. We also recognize that, because of the preferential ballot, if you want to get elected, you can't say horrible things about the other candidates, because you may need their support. You might need support from their followers. The tenor of elections, the tone, should improve even though the competition increases.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Gentlemen, I'm very pleased to be here. I can assure you that I'm in one of the most beautiful cities in the country. I know what I'm talking about: I'm from Quebec City, the most beautiful city.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gérard Deltell: In fact, it's not me saying that. It's Madam May, a personality well known and well appreciated here, who said that in Quebec City. I just wanted to recall that. Mr. Reid said exactly the same thing. I'd say we have a consensus on that—

A voice: I say it's Victoria.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: —even if I was surprised to see so many palm trees around here. I asked, “Is this Canada or not?”

First of all, Mr. Henschel, what is interesting with you folks is that in British Columbia you have had a good experience with a referendum and also with the new electoral system. There are only three provinces—P.E.I., Ontario, and British Columbia—that have had this experience, so it's a great opportunity for us to learn from you.

Mr. Henschel, you were very concerned, to say the least, about the supermajority after the last referendum, but on the other hand, you seem to be a bit open to having a referendum. Am I right?

Mr. Craig Henschel: The only purpose of having a referendum is to not have electoral reform, unless you can clearly define a way to educate voters about the choices and options that are put before them, and I don't see how that's possible. That's exactly why the citizens' assembly was created. We spent 11 months learning about the system, hearing from the public, and deliberating.

If a way to convince voters to read and learn about electoral systems can be found, then perhaps that would work. Otherwise, voters are going to just take what the campaign spin is on the different questions.

•(1605)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If you are not open to having a referendum on one of the most important, if not the most important, institutions in our democratic system, which is the way to elect people.... Everything else belongs to that electoral system. International affairs, the leader, the prime minister, and the cabinet: everything belongs to the way we elect people. This is the most important and most precious institution in any democratic system.

If it's not important to have a referendum on that issue, what is important to you to have a referendum on?

Mr. Craig Henschel: Well, what's not important to me to have a referendum on is human rights—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: At all? Not on any issue?

Mr. Craig Henschel: It's not important for me to have a referendum on what I consider to be a human right. I consider it a human right to be represented in government. I think voters have the right to representation. I think we all have a right to have a say in the laws and policies that affect us.

I don't think that thinking about having a referendum to include women in the franchise to vote would be acceptable, or that the Chinese would have a vote, or that the indigenous people would have a vote. I don't think it's acceptable to say that we need to have a referendum to see if we're going to give the rest of the population, the rest of the 50% of Canadians, representation. I think representation is a human right.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If you know what is good for people, why not ask them what they think about that?

Mr. Craig Henschel: Well that's exactly what the citizens' assembly was. The citizens' assembly was the legislature unanimously asking voters what the best system was and in a way that they could respond in an informed, deliberative way.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: How many people participated in your assembly?

Mr. Craig Henschel: There were 160 randomly chosen voters, a male and a female from every district and—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Is that 150?

Mr. Craig Henschel: It was 160.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: There were 160 people who participated in the assembly, and you said that this is what the people thought was good for them.

Mr. Craig Henschel: Absolutely.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay. In Quebec we had a referendum, and 93% of the population participated in this referendum. That's democracy.

Mr. Craig Henschel: That's a much simpler question, with all due respect. Electoral systems are complicated. I know that separation is very complicated—

M. Gérard Deltell: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Craig Henschel: —but the referendums in Quebec were on issues that you could decide on as a personal value. The mechanics of electoral systems are going to be impossible to educate voters about.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Why?

Mr. Craig Henschel: We can have a referendum about the values we may want to see in the electoral system, but I think the actual answer is going to be very difficult for voters.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Why do you think it's impossible to educate people? Don't you think people are intelligent enough to understand what is good and what is wrong for them?

Mr. Craig Henschel: I know that average voters are extremely intelligent and extremely dedicated and want to do the best for the country, because I worked with 150 other randomly selected voters, and they were all dedicated. They all had very intelligent comments and opportunities to speak their minds. I trusted them implicitly, but there has to be a way to get the information to them and to have opportunities for them to deliberate and make decisions on what they think.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: This is the responsibility of a serious government.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, your time is up. That was a good discussion.

I'll now give the floor to Mrs. Romanado, or rather Mr. Aldag.
[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Thank you.

To begin, I'd like to thank everybody for coming out. We have an ever-growing crowd here in Victoria. I'd also like to thank everybody for keeping the wonderful weather you ordered for the Royals in place for the committee members. Many have joined us here for the first time. We had a brief walkabout, and it was a fantastic 20 minutes on the waterfront before we came back in.

Mr. Henschel, I want to acknowledge and thank you for the work you've done. You've been involved in electoral reform for more than a decade.

In the spirit of transparency, Mr. Henschel was part of a town hall in a neighbouring riding in the Lower Mainland. I represent Cloverdale—Langley City, so I was invited to be a speaker, and we had a great discussion that day. Then I had my own town hall in my own riding, and Mr. Henschel came to speak at that one and provided some great insight and experience. I'm pleased that you're here today and are able to speak about the experience that came from your experience with the B.C. Citizens' Assembly, because I think there are a lot of lessons we can learn.

That being said, I'm going to turn my attention to Mr. Archer for a bit.

I'd like to explore the question of referendums. As everybody knows, they come up from time to time in this discussion.

I have lived in British Columbia for many years. I was away for two years and then returned in 2005, so I was around for the referendums on electoral systems, the HST, and most recently, transit on the Lower Mainland. After each one of them, I'll tell you, I felt like I needed a bit of mouthwash, because they left a really bad taste in my mouth.

It's not that I feel that the people of B.C. got any of them wrong. They all had the opportunity and they spoke, but my experience was that each one became a question of something other than what was being asked. As an example, the transit one was very much about TransLink management and not about how to fund transit expansion.

I have two questions on referendums. We've been told by our Chief Electoral Officer that a Canadian referendum would cost \$300 million. I was trying to do the calculation. If we use \$8 per person, that doesn't seem out of line. What was the lowest-cost version you had? I don't want anybody to think I'm advocating for a referendum. It's just that I think, in the spirit of this discussion, that we need to be open to all options. What was the lowest cost you had, and was that for the mail-in one? The \$300 million figure may be high, or it may be low. I'm just not sure what figure we were given. Could you maybe repeat what the range of the per person cost was?

• (1610)

Mr. Keith Archer: Sure. The costs I talked about in my original statement looked at the costs of what we call the thin layer, held in conjunction with the general election, and that was in place in 2005 and 2009. I brought the data from 2005.

Mr. John Aldag: Right.

Mr. Keith Archer: For that event, the additional cost to administer the referendum per registered voter was 37¢.

Mr. John Aldag: Was it that cheap just because it was laid onto a process that was already out there, as opposed to having—

Mr. Keith Archer: Exactly. We were already hiring all of our district electoral officers, who in turn were hiring all of their field staff, so the event was moving forward. Much of the additional cost was public education expenditures, so that people were aware that this was part of the electoral process for those events.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Was the high one the \$8? Was that the HST one?

Mr. Keith Archer: The \$8 cost was the cost per registered voter for the general election. We've parsed those two costs. There was the general election, assuming there was no additional referendum put in place. The total cost of the event was that cost plus the 37¢ per registered voter for the referendum costs. The cost for the mail-in ballots for the HST referendum was \$2.63 per registered voter. That was for the plebiscite in 2011. For the plebiscite in 2015, our cost per registered voter was \$3.44.

Mr. John Aldag: I'm trying to think of the best bang for the taxpayer's dollar. I'm hearing that if we needed or wanted to go to a referendum question, to do it with an existing election process.

Mr. Keith Archer: If you're trying to minimize the additional expenditure for that consultation process, yes, then do it in conjunction with a general election. I think I've heard Elections Canada talk about their ability to do this with mail-in balloting, as well. I think there are a number of options that are possible.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. John Aldag: Is that it? Whoa. I thought I was at the start of it.

The Chair: Actually, it was over five minutes, and they were good questions, quality questions.

Mr. Cullen.

•(1615)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Witnesses, let me apologize for having to come in and out. I was very keen on hearing your testimony, but circumstances have intervened, and we're awaiting a potentially difficult government decision on something else.

A promise was made to...and this is the frame, I think, in which this conversation needs to operate for us. We're changing the electoral system. The question is to what and how. There are questions of how we make that legitimate and through what process.

I'm going to concern myself solely from the perspective of Canadian voters, what they hope to get, and what we hope to offer at the other end.

In terms of the assumed benefit of moving to a proportional system as you advised here in B.C.—and has been advised by every major citizens' assembly and study that's ever been conducted in this country—what's in it for the voter? What is the known benefit—I don't want to say “assumed”—for moving from the centuries-old

first-past-the-post system to something different and something proportional?

Mr. Craig Henschel: The most obvious benefit is voter satisfaction. If you have a government that is supported by 40% of the voters, then 40% of voters are going to be happy with the policies and laws which are coming from that government, perhaps.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If they're lucky.

Mr. Craig Henschel: If they're lucky. If there's a coalition government with more than 50% voter support, then that's an increase in voter satisfaction. More voters would be happy with the policies and laws that are coming out.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's interesting, because we went through the prospect of a coalition government in this country not that long ago, and it was, I would suggest, demonized by the government that was in at the time. I decided to go back through to see what minority governments have been able to achieve in Canadian law and policy for Canadians, with things like the social safety net, pensions, employment insurance, and the flag. Some of the most progressive and enduring—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Health care.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —policies and ideas that have ever come from Ottawa have come at a time when power has not been concentrated, when it's been, by necessity, shared.

We have in front of you a much smaller but important example of that. This committee is made up more or less on a proportional basis of the last vote in the election, and we get along great.

It wasn't my idea. It was an idea of a young fellow named Daniel Blaikie out of Winnipeg, who has just been elected. He said, “I have this idea for the committee”, and I said, “Daniel, that will never work,” until it did.

I have a question about voter turnout. We were just in a first nations community, and I have a lot that I represent in the northwest. Young people were always asked this question on voter turnout and voter engagement. We've heard a number of things from witnesses from across the spectrum saying people want to see their vote have meaning.

I'll direct this to Mr. Archer and then perhaps, Craig, you can comment as well.

We had a report out just last week from Elections Manitoba, who went through their non-voters and did a survey in their last provincial election. Forty per cent didn't vote, which is typical, and they asked them, why not? Fifty per cent of that group said they would vote if they felt their vote had meaning and would vote under a proportional system. I've never seen a number move like that before. Voting day, online, outside of mandatory maybe, no other suggestion I've heard has ever moved the needle that much.

Has B.C. ever conducted such a study in terms of that voter satisfaction Craig talked about, that power, that feeling of power that their votes are going to make a difference, and across any demographics, young people, first nations, low income, those groups that are traditionally under-represented?

Mr. Keith Archer: Yes, we've been conducting voter surveys since the 2005 provincial election, so we've done three of them now. The results are posted on our website. The results don't ask people the question that.... I'm not sure if this specific question was included in the Manitoba study: Did you not vote because of the character of our electoral system? That's not the question—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The question they asked was why didn't they vote, and the leading reason was people felt that the outcome was already known because they live in such and such a riding and they felt that their vote couldn't make a difference. They put those together and then presupposed on a proportional system and asked would that change people's participation, and then you see the numbers climb.

It would be a good question to ask B.C. voters, I think.

Mr. Keith Archer: Yes, it would.

The question that we have asked is the question as to why people didn't vote, and we tend to get a mix of responses. Some have to do with the convenience of the voting opportunity. Some have to do with administrative issues, not knowing where the voting opportunity was taking place or not being registered to vote, and then some responded about their perception of the quality of the representative. Those kinds of responses tend to come through in our questionnaire.

•(1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll go to Mr. Kelly now.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Thank you, all, for attending today. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here in Victoria for this hearing.

Dr. Archer, in your opening remarks, I believe you said something along the lines that a referendum is a tool used by government to consult voters to determine the level of popular support for a particular policy. Failure to make use of that tool, would you characterize that then as a failure to consult and a failure to determine public support for a government policy or a proposed policy?

Mr. Keith Archer: My comment was actually a direct quote from the Referendum Act, and the quote was that a referendum is used when the government “considers that an expression of public opinion is desirable”.

When the government considers that an expression of public opinion is desirable, they then may engage our services as the election management body to undertake that work. We respond to a government directive once the government has decided that this is desirable.

Mr. Pat Kelly: From that, one might conclude that consultation is undesirable to failure, if there was failure to have a referendum on something as fundamental as changing the voting system.

I understand that the argument has been put forward in other hearings that parties in addition to the Liberals—who won the election with 39% of the popular vote—had promised, or at least had as part of their party's platform, the prospect of electoral reform. Yet in an election, people vote for many different reasons. They vote on

leader, vote on party platform, vote on local representative, and they vote on a whole range of policy issues.

I don't know how many different policy statements each party had in the election, but it ran in the hundreds for some. Is it really fair to say that if a party has, for example, one single line about electoral reform that that constitutes a mandate to change a system that has been in existence for over 150 years and that many Canadians might proudly say is a contributing factor to the society we live in with its recognized high levels of human development, its values of tolerance, and the prosperity that is enjoyed by many?

Mr. Keith Archer: Is that question for me?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Yes, although both of you may feel free to comment.

Mr. Keith Archer: My response is probably briefer. The Election Act wouldn't provide the authority to have a role in determining or ascertaining the degree to which that's the case, and so Elections BC would not take a position on a matter like that.

Mr. Craig Henschel: I think it's an interesting position to take, that a government with 39% support in the country cannot make changes to the electoral system so that future governments will require 50% support to make decisions. That's kind of odd.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I think you've mis-characterized my question. My question was more about whether winning an election that was fought over a huge variety of issues—issues of leadership, issues of fatigue after 10 years of a previous government, a whole variety of motivations that voters had—can be taken as a mandate for this piece that's a fundamental change to Canadian society.

•(1625)

Mr. Craig Henschel: It's the government. It's their promise to change the electoral system. I think that there are an awful lot of people in the country who wanted it changed, and that's the promise the government made—

Mr. Pat Kelly: Could that be confirmed through a referendum? If it's so clear—

Mr. Craig Henschel: There was a referendum; it was the election, I expect.

Mr. Pat Kelly: No, that was not a referendum; we had an election.

Mr. Craig Henschel: Personally, I think it's important for people to realize that there's going to be an election coming up in 2019. If the choice of an electoral change is made and the country does not want it, I expect the government will suffer from that. If they bring in change that voters do want, they will do well from that. So there is a referendum coming on whatever you come up with and on what the government comes up with as a change, and that will be the next election.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you so much.

[Translation]

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

[English]

I'm from the south shore of Montreal, so it is a real pleasure for me to be here in Victoria for the first time.

Thank you so much for the huge audience. Who knew that electoral reform would be the hot ticket in town on a sunny Tuesday afternoon in Victoria? Thank you also to our two panellists for being here today.

I'll start with Mr. Archer.

Our Chief Electoral Officer just tabled in the House today his final report on electoral reform. Some of the recommendations that he put forth are things that we've heard over our 30 meetings now over the course of the summer. Some of these would increase participation and accessibility, such as maybe moving the date of elections to a weekend. They also talked about using the voter identification card as a piece of ID because that was an issue in the past election.

I'd like to get your feedback on how we can possibly leverage some technology to address some of the issues that we're facing. I know you've put online voting in your report and I will read it. If you could touch on it briefly, please. I don't want to go too far into it, because I have some questions for Mr. Henschel.

Mr. Keith Archer: I think there's a lot we can do to increase the accessibility of the ballot. One of the things that's in place in provincial elections here in British Columbia which is not available at the federal level is the ability of voters to attend any voting place to cast their ballot. If you live in Prince George and are visiting Vancouver during the election period, you can find a voting place in Vancouver and cast your ballot there if you wish. That's a non-technology accessibility option that is quite useful here in British Columbia.

One of the issues that has received a lot of our attention recently has been the quality of the voters list for younger electors. What we find, and this is true at the federal level as well, is our coverage is very high for people 35 years of age and above. About 95% of British Columbians 35 and above are on the voters list. About 66% of voters 18 to 25 are on the voters list. We have a challenge in this province and in this country to get people on the voters list and to do it relatively early in the process.

I see there was a recommendation from Mr. Mayrand today indicating that he would like to have the ability to have a provisional voters list for 16- and 17-year-olds to ease that transition of getting younger people onto the voters list. That's a recommendation that we have before our provincial government as well. It was recently implemented in Nova Scotia. They are now working out their partnership with the Ministry of Education to try to get political education into the high schools within that province.

Many of my initiatives in this regard are initiatives that are really not technology-based, so it's not really addressing that question of Internet voting, which I'd be happy to take up with you off-line.

• (1630)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much.

Mr. Henschel, I did read your submission with great interest. I want to clear the air. I'm a member of Parliament who actually has no

preconceived notion of what electoral system we should or shouldn't use. I'm blank. I'm listening to Canadians, and that's how I'm working in this.

There was a lot of information in here with hypotheses that using an STV system would address. You talk a bit about no more disappearing MPs. You talk about how magically things will be hunky-dory if we adopt STV. The reality is, when we become elected, we're no longer the Liberal member of Parliament; we're the member of Parliament. Regardless of whether someone voted for me or didn't vote for me, I'm still the member of Parliament for my riding, so when they come in the door I represent everyone equally. I don't even want to know if you voted for me, quite frankly, I just want to help you.

We sit about 140 days a year. Like you, we were sitting most of the summer. Unfortunately, we weren't there, but part of the job is to represent Canadians and be where we need to be.

Looking at it from a voter perspective, if there are multiple members of Parliament possibly from different parties working in the same riding, do you not think there's going to be severe competition? Do you honestly think that, if there is another member in the same riding I'm in, I'm not going to be withholding information about the needs of constituents, because the other member will want to make sure that they have that information for the next election. I'm just trying to think about the realities of politics and the impact on the citizens.

The Chair: A brief answer if you can.

Mr. Craig Henschel: STV works very well in Ireland for constituency services like that, and the TDs there seem to manage to act co-operatively to resolve those questions and important issues that the voters have.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

The Chair: This has been a very good exchange. One of the reasons is, first of all, there's a big crowd in the audience and that is motivational, I think, for everybody, so thank you for being here. Also because we had as witnesses two individuals who have been involved in elections, electoral reform, on the ground in a practical way, and I think we've benefited greatly from that perspective.

We're going to take a five-minute break before we go to our next panel.

Thank you very much to the witnesses.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: We are going to resume with the second panel.

We have three panellists: Antony Hodgson, from Fair Voting BC; Diana Byford, who is with the B.C. Citizens' Assembly; and our former colleague, the Honourable John Duncan.

Nice to see you again, Mr. Duncan.

We'll start with Mr. Antony Hodgson, for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Antony Hodgson (Fair Voting BC): Hello. Welcome to Victoria.

On behalf of Fair Voting BC and our thousands of supporters across the province, I'm very honoured to have this opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. I especially want to thank you for all the time you are taking, the travelling you're going through. Your efforts have the potential to make an incredibly positive long-term change for our democracy.

In my comments I'd like to make three key points. First, our existing voting system is simply not compatible with our democratic ideals or with our national purpose and aspirations as embodied in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Second, the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform was both thoughtful and wise in recommending that we adopt the single transferrable vote. Finally, the rural-urban proportional representation model that we co-developed with Fair Vote Canada combines the best features of STV with well-liked features of MMP and we seriously recommend that you consider it.

Our charter guarantees us two key rights: equal treatment and effective representation. But our voting system discriminates against many, with the result that over half the voters have not voted for their MP. According to the political theorist Hanna Pitkin, the term "representation" is actually quite well defined. It has three key components: authorization, acting in the best interests of the one represented, and accountability. I know these are all important to you.

Our voting system delivers on none of these. A voter who has not voted for his or her MP did not authorize that MP to act. The MP will routinely vote against the voter's wishes, and the voter has no means to hold the MP to account since the voter has already voted against that person to no effect. Such a voter is therefore not represented in a meaningful way in legislative matters, which is an MP's principal role. From this denial of representation flow all the symptoms of political dysfunction that many previous witnesses have articulated.

What would it mean for us to take these charter rights seriously? Ironically, even in our pre-charter days, from Canada's beginnings, our voting system was intended to ensure that, as Sir John A. Macdonald put it, "different interests, classes and localities should be fairly represented". When these intentions are demonstrably not being met, we must update our system.

As Chief Justice McLachlin reminded us in the Saskatchewan electoral boundaries reference case, the Canadian tradition is "one of evolutionary democracy moving in uneven steps"—unfortunately—"toward the goal of universal suffrage and more effective representation".

She defined for us in that case and in a previous one what our charter right to vote means, saying that it cannot be less than to guarantee to citizens their full democratic rights in the government of the country.

She goes on to say, "Ours is a representative democracy. Each citizen is entitled to be represented in government. Representation comprehends the idea of having a voice in the deliberations of government".

One cannot have a voice without having an MP that one supports and voted for to be that voice.

As the political scientist David Plotke said, "The opposite of representation is exclusion", and exclusion is not a Canadian ideal.

Once we understand the charter imperative of authentic representation, we can appreciate the wisdom of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly in recommending STV, which is widely regarded as maximizing voter choice. Uniquely amongst the various proportional voting systems, STV asks voters to endorse specific candidates and only gives a vote to a candidate if a voter specifically names them. With STV, the vast majority of voters will satisfy the three conditions of being represented: They have explicitly authorized their MP by naming him or her; their MP will be the one who the voter believes is most likely to act in their best interests; and they can hold their MP accountable in the next election, because withholding their vote directly decreases the MP's support and increases another's.

● (1645)

In our submission, we point out that STV has the highest direct representation score of all the systems considered, on the order of about 90% or above. Despite this unmatched strength of STV, some are concerned that the threshold for election can be too high and that the districts can be too large in the more rural areas.

The rural-urban PR model combines multi-member ridings in the more populated areas with a few single member ridings where deemed necessary, and adds a small pop-up layer to decrease the threshold for election. These features substantially address these concerns.

In summary, we must adopt proportional voting to satisfy our charter rights to equality and effective representation. The citizens' assembly recommended STV because it maximizes direct representation of voters and does the most to strengthen the link between constituents and their MPs. The rural-urban model is highly flexible, scores well on all measures, and can be refined over time, staying responsive to voters through the electoral boundaries commission process.

These proportional models, among others, can deliver on the government's promise to make every vote count and the minister's call for an electoral system that provides a stronger link between the democratic will of Canadians and election results.

Thank you.

● (1650)

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

We'll go now to Ms. Byford.

Ms. Diana Byford (B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform): Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, you are on a journey that I have already undertaken. In 2004 I was privileged to be a member of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. As you've heard previously, 160 ordinary citizens randomly selected from every riding in this province, including two first nations people, came together to examine our current first-past-the-post system to see if it met the needs of the people or if it needed to be changed.

We worked for 11 months. The first three months were an intensive learning phase. We were taught about various different systems, how they worked, the pros and cons, and where they were used in the world. We also learned about how demographics and geographics play an important part and can have a large impact on outcomes. People from other countries came to tell us about how their systems worked for them and spoke of consequences when they had, in some cases, changed their systems.

Following the learning phase, we went into public meetings. We had 50 public meetings held across the province where panels of five to 12 assembly members attended. People came in large numbers to speak about what was important to them. Some came and spoke about specific systems, some about what they hoped a new system would change or provide, and some even came to say that no change was needed.

We also received and read over 1,600 written submissions, more than most commissions get. Our understanding was that between 100 and 200 is more usual, so that just goes to show the passion that was out there when we were working on the assembly.

When these meetings were over, the assembly gathered again for a weekend to correlate and exchange the information that we had garnered and to put forward the names of some speakers who it was felt should address the assembly as a whole. We began our fall deliberations by hearing from nine of the recommended speakers selected after consultation by a small group of assembly members from the information that had been provided. They represented a variety of proposals, most advocating for some form of change, but one spoke passionately about the current first-past-the-post system.

We then re-examined the various systems and quickly narrowed them down to the only two that seemed to offer the best solution to the conclusions we had reached from our learnings, from the hearings, and from the written submissions. We spent the next two weekends designing these systems, MMP and STV, to fit the needs of this province. Having done that, we deliberated on the merits of both and after voting, we recommended that the electorate be offered BC-STV in a provincial referendum to be held in May 2005 at the next provincial election.

You've heard some of this before, but I know it doesn't hurt to bring it back to you.

The B.C. government had not made any provision for public education on our choice, so a number of assembly members who were able to took it upon themselves to do so. Not everyone, of course, could do this. It was done on our own time and money. We spoke to groups and organizations. We debated sometimes and we provided answers to many, many questions. This we did from December 2004, when our report was delivered to the legislature,

until the referendum in May 2005. My last speaking engagement was the evening before that election.

The government had two 60% requirements, which you've also heard about: 60% of the votes cast in favour, and 60% of the ridings at 50% plus one. The results were: votes cast, 57.69%, ridings, 77 out of 79 or 92%, yet it was declared to have failed. My personal opinion is that the Government of B.C. failed the people. I also believe that our success in reaching these numbers came from the fact that this recommended change came from ordinary citizens as opposed to political groups or institutions. I know you are a political group. I apologize. No insult is intended.

● (1655)

Even though I know there is no perfect system, I still believe that we offered the people of B.C. the one system that best suited the concerns we had learned about. People have said that STV is not a proportional system because it uses ranked ballots. However, not only is it proportional, as I know you are aware, but it is the only system that gives voters the ability to elect all MPs or MLAs while political parties do not have any say.

I would like to finish by saying that although we were taught by professors and other experts, we were not led by them. We reached our own conclusions through many hours of discussion and deliberation among ourselves.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Byford.

We'll go now to the Honourable John Duncan, for 10 minutes, please.

Hon. John Duncan (As an Individual): Thank you very much. I'm pleased to be here today.

I'm not here as an expert in electoral systems, but did serve as an MP on northern Vancouver Island for 19 years. I believe I'm an expert in the challenges of representing a large rural riding, so that's what I'd like to discuss today.

Many of the electoral systems that you've been discussing require electoral districts to get larger, in some cases, much larger. I want to impress upon you the very real impact this has on the relationship between voters and the people who represent them. Today I drove two and a half hours so that I could deliver this five-minute speech and answer some of your questions. When I'm done here, I will repeat the drive home. This is very typical of the kind of thing I had to do regularly to juggle community events in my riding.

For one Parliament I also represented the entire Sunshine Coast on the adjacent mainland. Attending a meeting in Sechelt or Gibsons, or both, would require two ferries each way and an overnight stay, and essentially ate up two days; or else I would fly in a small commuter aircraft that could not be relied on and which left me without a vehicle. The most reliable travel was to fly to Vancouver from Campbell River or Courtenay, rent a car and take the Gibsons ferry from Horseshoe Bay, and return. Add to this the eight-hour-plus travel from my riding to Ottawa and you begin to get a glimpse of the challenges that large ridings present.

I could provide a level of service in opposition that the time constraints of the burden of being in government would have made impossible. Please do not underestimate the significance of this. A member of Parliament must meet constituents where they live, and see and hear first-hand the problems they're dealing with. I have the experience of having an idea discussed at a community event in Port McNeill be subsequently implemented in a federal budget. Larger ridings will only lessen these opportunities.

Multi-member ridings also present a problem. I very much agree with what you had to say on that front, Sherry. If the seven ridings on Vancouver Island were merged into one seven member riding with half of the population in Victoria, what are the chances that someone in Port Hardy will have their concerns taken seriously? It is possible, even probable, that most or all MPs would be from one corner of the riding. Proportionality for parties would be improved, but only by sacrificing proportionality for communities.

This is the consequence of living in a big country, and there is no country in the world whose experience can guide us. Looking at countries with full democracies, as defined by the Democracy Index, which is produced by *The Economist* magazine, we see there is no geographically large country with a proportional system in place. The largest fully democratic country with a proportional system to make the list is Spain, which has an area that is 5% the size of Canada. The bottom line is that size matters, and so does our political culture, our regional tensions, and all the things that make Canada unique. The fact is you can't predict how a new electoral system will affect Port Hardy or any other community in Canada. That is why you must proceed with caution and make sure you have the buy-in of an electorate that fully understands what is being proposed as an alternative to our current electoral system.

I do believe we have achieved an incredible country with strong democratic roots, and major change should not go forward without the blessing of a referendum. Canada has the highest ranking on the Democracy Index of any large country identified as being a full democracy. This is not to be sneezed at.

Every province contemplating major electoral changes carried out a referendum: B.C., Ontario, and P.E.I.

● (1700)

Politicians are elected to make many decisions, but not about how they they are hired. This is a conflict of interest. Gordon Gibson, the former B.C. Liberal leader and former adviser to former prime minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, by the way, stated this very well in *The Globe and Mail* on Saturday, September 17, just 10 days ago. Gordon Gibson represents in many ways the Liberal label in British Columbia over the last 30 years. He has engaged in political and

public discourse for that entire time. His advice is valued highly by British Columbians, and this committee should also value his sage advice.

That concludes my remarks.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

We'll go to Mr. DeCoursey to launch a round of questions, please.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you to our three presenters. Mr. Hodgson and Ms. Byford, thank you for the tremendous amount of work done by the Citizen's Assembly. It's quite a fascinating process to read through, and I commend you and all your colleagues on that process. Mr. Duncan, thank you for your service to Canada and for your testimony here today.

I want to explore with Ms. Byford and other members here the idea of engaging Canadians in the electoral process, those Canadians who may not usually take part in the process. I will preface that by digging into some comments that you made, Mr. Hodgson, in paraphrasing our chief justice talking about Canada's democratic pursuits sometimes and even toward the idea of universal suffrage. In that, I can see the idea of engaging more Canadians, those who don't usually vote in the electoral process, as a worthy cause.

Ms. Byford, of the 161 members, including your chair, Jack Blaney, who sat on the citizens' assembly, do you recall if there were there any there who weren't regular voters?

Ms. Diana Byford: We did ask the question, do you vote? I can't remember anybody who didn't put their hand up.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Okay. You had a group that was engaged in electoral politics and in the electoral process.

● (1705)

Ms. Diana Byford: They were engaged inasmuch as they went and voted, yes.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Were there conversations that took place during the citizens' assembly about how electoral change could help enfranchise those who don't come out to vote?

Ms. Diana Byford: There were a number of discussions around that, which came up throughout the period. There were questions that we asked during our learning sessions. There were questions that came up during our public meetings and in the fall in our deliberations when we were trying to sort through everything that we had learned, yes.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Could you give us a little flavour of what those conversations entailed?

Ms. Diana Byford: We're going back 12 years now, and it's a little hard to go back to all the individual conversations. All I can say is that we decided that whether we changed the system or not, we would have no guarantee it would increase the number of people who voted. That was a question beyond our mandate, and we decided that we would get on with our job and hope that the change of system might encourage more people to vote.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hodgson, on the proposal that you put forward as part of Fair Voting BC's proposal, is there consideration in there as to how electoral reform will better engage Canadians who don't see themselves acting in the electoral process currently?

Mr. Antony Hodgson: I think so, and it's primarily through the mechanisms that Craig Henschel spoke to earlier, which is to ensure that as many voters as possible are represented by an MP of their choosing. I was at Don Davies' town hall last weekend, and Vancouver councillor Andrea Reimer was speaking. She was talking about how when she was a young woman she was heavily engaged. She talked about being involved as early as kindergarten in a nap strike. That was her first introduction to protest, but as she grew into a young woman she was engaged in a number of political struggles. At one point, she got to the age where she was allowed to vote, and she did all this studying about who she should vote for. She started having conversations with her friends. These were all activist friends, and people devoting dozens of hours per week to political causes. She was shocked to realize she was the only one who was planning to vote. She asked why. They said it didn't matter, and that their vote didn't get listened to. They were not likely to get the person who was going to take their point of view, so why bother, because activism was the most effective way to participate in politics.

That is a corrosive message to send to our young people.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Is it fair to say there are perhaps two reasons why people don't go to vote and they sometimes get conflated? We've heard plenty of testimony for me to agree there are people who feel their vote doesn't count. They cannot elect the person they would like to elect.

There is also a sentiment out there of "I'm not going to vote because my vote doesn't count, because every politician is the same and all the parties are the same." It speaks to a larger democratic malaise that we should be attuned to as representatives of the electorate.

Mr. Antony Hodgson: Absolutely. Again, I think it all fundamentally comes back to the same issue of a lack of representation. As I am sure you've heard from many other people, with the way we do nominations in this country, we end up putting one person forward from each party. On average, that is biased in favour of the "male, pale, and stale" stereotype. I am very pleased to see that this is not true here at this table, but statistically there certainly is that bias.

I think young people in particular are not represented in government as much as they should be.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid, go ahead, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: I get to follow up on the "male, pale, and stale". I think I am just going to leave that one alone, actually.

First, John Duncan is an old friend and a former colleague. John and I go back almost a quarter of a century. The first time we met was back in 1992. You were a brand new MP. John, please forgive me for the fact that I am going to ask my questions of the other witnesses.

Mr. Hodgson, I want to start with you. Your organization, in co-operation with Fair Vote Canada—I don't know to what degree you are different organizations and to what degree you are the same, but that is not relevant to the question I'm asking—has talked about, among other things, the rural-urban potential model. As you may know, there is a professor at the University of Waterloo, Byron Weber Becker, who has modelled a number of different versions of this. I actually have his models here—I've been lugging this brick around with me—and they are very interesting and very informative. At some point, hopefully I am going to convince the committee to take these in as testimony. We are hoping he will actually be a witness.

Having said all of that, one of the problems we face is that we have serious constraints on us that may make the rural-urban model problematic. I ask this because your organization has come forward with this. It has many things to recommend it, but, number one, we are required under our mandate to produce a system that could be in place for 2019.

Number two, any system that requires redistribution—as do some of the versions he has proposed—involves a two-year redistribution process. The Chief Electoral Officer, when asked about this, said it takes 24 months and gave us a detailed breakdown.

Number three, if we try to resolve the problem not by redistributing, at least not in the rural areas, but rather by adding top-up seats for each province, we run into constitutional issues relating to the proportionate representation of the provinces. It is actually laid out in the Constitution, and I think that is a very significant limit. We would have to go to the Supreme Court and confirm whether the top-up we are proposing is constitutional and whether we have a reference case. Otherwise, it would be uncertain.

Having said that, is there a way to overcome the second and third limit while still allowing us to achieve the 2019 deadline, using this model, as opposed to abandoning it and moving to either STV or MMP?

• (1710)

Mr. Antony Hodgson: Certainly. Thank you for the question. Byron and I have worked very closely on these models, so we've had a lot of input back and forth on these.

You are right that if there is a boundary redistribution process, there is time required for that. That would be required for every model, with the possible exception of STV—

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm sorry.

The former chief electoral officer, Mr. Kingsley, indicated to us it was his belief that if we were simply squishing together two or three or some number, we could have a much more expedited process, and it wouldn't take 24 months.

Mr. Antony Hodgson: Understood. STV is the only model, with the exception of dual member proportional, which is being considered in Prince Edward Island, or a 50:50 MMP model where you are simply grouping together adjacent ridings.... The 60:40 MMP model would require a redistribution process.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

Mr. Antony Hodgson: The rural-urban model would likewise require defining new electoral boundaries. The rural-urban model does have potential, because the number of top-up seats is relatively limited, about 15% or 12%, if you use more multi-member ridings. You could, in fact, do essentially an STV grouping process and then define regions covering some adjacent STV districts with additional top-up MPs.

I think those are the ways in which that might work out.

In terms of the constitutional issue, I am not a constitutional scholar, so I don't know, but if the numbers are all rising by 12% and you keep that constant across the country, I don't see that anybody would have cause to complain.

Mr. Scott Reid: The practical difficulty with that is that some of the smaller provinces, given the numbers in places like P.E.I. and Newfoundland make this hard to accomplish. I'm not saying it's insurmountable, but it's just something I think you'd want to test out to make sure it's okay.

Could I have a moment for Ms. Byford?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Ms. Byford, you served on the citizens' assembly here in British Columbia. Your testimony was relevant because there has been a positive response to the idea that we should have a national citizens' assembly. That may or may not be a good idea, but let's say it were to be taken as a serious possibility. Participation would entail some sacrifices. If you're talking about something that's national and involves some travel, would that level of participation be a realistic demand to make on a citizen? Are there impediments that make it overly difficult at a human level?

Ms. Diana Byford: Nationally, it would become a real problem, simply because of the amount of travel that would be involved in addition to the time spent on the assembly. I'm not saying it shouldn't be considered, but I see it as a problem. For myself, if I were selected to be a participant in such an assembly and it was going to be held in, say, Ottawa, I would have to decline. I wouldn't want to, but I would have to decline.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, and thank you for the extra time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Sure. That was a good question.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair, and my thanks to our panel.

First, let me start by thanking all of you for your commitment to serve our country. What this boils down to is an effort to serve, to seek a way to benefit our citizens more broadly. My thanks to John for serving, to Diane for your time, and to Antony for all of your ideas, including your tragicomic remark that our nominations often favour the "male, pale, and stale".

You suggested a polarity almost, Antony, between representation and exclusion. I think that's a helpful way to look at the experience

of many voters. At every open mike night we have conducted so far, and in many of the thousands of responses we've received on the survey we've put up, people expressed that they try to participate, they vote, they do all the things they're supposed to, and then the results come back and they find that more than half of the votes cast elected nobody. Is that the core issue you're trying to fix?

Someone once said the opposite of love isn't hate, it's ambivalence. I sometimes worry it's not just that people are turned off our politics. They just become ambivalent towards it. Is that true or am I stretching it?

Mr. Antony Hodgson: I think that's exactly right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: John, I think the question you're getting at of putting this question to voters in the form of a referendum is about legitimizing the process. Is it a question of legitimacy for you?

Hon. John Duncan: Absolutely.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You sat around the cabinet table. Did the cabinet at any point consider putting a similar question to voters when your government was changing the voting system?

Hon. John Duncan: It was never a discussion I was party to.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The tradition in Canada, and I think it was a good one, was that we should always have multi-party support for the idea of changing the voting system, because those involved are affected by it. Yet, when we attempted to do that with your government under the Fair Elections Act, it was rejected and some important changes affecting the ability of people to vote were left hanging.

You'll remember your colleague Gerry Ritz, who was the agriculture minister when the Canadian Wheat Board and its existence was being debated. The wheat board held a plebiscite, which I know you're in favour of as a tool. Minister Ritz repeatedly said the plebiscite would have no bearing on his legislation, which was written to dismantle the wheat board. He said that the Conservatives campaigned on a platform to eliminate the monopoly, and were given a majority mandate to do so by voters. Do you see the contradiction here? The farmers affected by the dismantling of a long-serving institution on the Prairies held a plebiscite confirming that they wanted to keep the wheat board. Your government's response, however, was to say, "We have the mandate already. Your plebiscite is irrelevant." Similarly, the government now tells us that even though 63% or 64% of the people sitting in Parliament campaigned on a promise to change the voting system, there is no mandate to make this change.

Hon. John Duncan: What I would like to say is that the prairie provinces and British Columbia are not the same entity.

We have a long populist history in British Columbia, and we've dealt with a lot of referendums. The words were used today that this is too complicated for a referendum. Well, we got very engaged in the Charlottetown referendum as a population, and thank goodness we collectively made the right decision.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I wasn't asking about complexity, and my argument wasn't about—

Hon. John Duncan: But others are making that point.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I know, but I asked about mandate.

Hon. John Duncan: Things are not too complicated for the population.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I understand that. I heard you say it.

I asked a question about mandates, which at one point has been offered.... When parties run on a promise and you like the promise, you say they have a mandate to do it. When you don't like the promise, you say, "Oh, that was just one of many promises they don't have a mandate to do."

• (1720)

Hon. John Duncan: Well, I happen to agree with Gordon Gibson that this is probably the most fundamental constitutional question that we have, how we elect our representatives. When he listed his three constitutional quagmires that the Prime Minister should stay away from, this was number one on his list.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So how—

Hon. John Duncan: He is very familiar with citizens' assemblies, having been involved in the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia in 2004-05—

The Chair: Wrap-up the question, please.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Happily, we've brought constitutional experts before this committee and confirmed that the changes we're considering are not constitutional amendments.

Ms. Byford, I know you wanted to make one comment there. You had your hand up.

The Chair: Very briefly, please.

Ms. Diana Byford: My brief comment is that when we were on the assembly, we were told that governments, provincial or federal, have the power to change the voting system any time they choose without consulting anyone.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Ste-Marie, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

I think our current panel clearly illustrates the situation we're seeing in terms of this desire for electoral reform. On one hand, there's the desire to move towards a kind of proportional voting to reduce the gap between the number of seats and the percentage of votes each party receives in elections. It's a strong desire, especially from you. On the other hand, there's the issue of the links between MPs and their ridings. The Canadian federation has very large ridings. We've been told that a more proportional system would diminish the link between MPs and their constituents.

Elsewhere, there are a large number of proportional voting models. I don't think any two countries have exactly the same system. So we need to determine what the best model would be for us. I think it would be a model that combines the best of both.

So I'd like to consult each of you to find out what we should do in this regard. Do you think the system of transferable votes, which you have chosen for British Columbia, should apply across Canada? Would it be better to switch to a compensatory mixed member proportional system with lists by province? Should we consider leaving rural ridings as they are and creating very large ridings in cities by adding elements of proportional representation? Should we also consider creating a citizens' assembly that would deliberate on this?

I'd like each of you to respond, starting with Mr. Hodgson.

[English]

Mr. Antony Hodgson: That's a good set of questions.

First of all, I would slightly object to the original characterization of making seats match votes on a party basis. That's not really what we're talking about. I'm reminded of that joke about gravity: it's not just a good idea, it's the law. This is what our charter is. Our charter says that each citizen is entitled to effective representation, and it really doesn't say anything at all about parties. That's a symptom of the mismatch that comes from an absence of representation.

In the ideal world, if you take all the voters and divide by the number of MPs—we have about 50,000 votes per MP—what should happen, in our view, for each citizen to be represented is for them to be able to elect their MP over however large a region is necessary for that to happen. If I'm in an area in northern Alberta where there's 70% support, I need one and a half current ridings to get my 50,000 votes. If I'm a Green Party candidate in Vancouver, I need about 10 ridings right now to get that support.

I think we need to honour that as much as possible, and in my view, STV does the best of job of that, the mutli-member districts.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

I'd now like to hear from Ms. Byford and then Mr. Duncan.

[English]

Ms. Diana Byford: When we were looking at it, we obviously had to consider the vast areas in northern B.C. We had speakers who came from those areas or sent us some form of communication about what they wanted. They wanted to be included in the same kind of process that the large populated areas in the south were. They didn't want to be separated, because they didn't want to be called second-class citizens.

When we decided that we were going to choose STV, one of the big things about STV was that if we had the two largest ridings up north combined, they would get two representatives, and those representatives would most likely represent two different parties, simply because the vote up there is almost evenly split. But by a slight margin, under the current system, one party took all the seats in both ridings. Therefore, almost 50% of the people were not represented.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Right. Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Diana Byford: It should translate across the provinces. How it would work in the territories I honestly can't say, because I have no experience.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Mr. Duncan, you can answer the question.

[English]

Hon. John Duncan: What I'm finding in a lot of this discussion is that we're really talking about the fact that people who do not vote for their member of Parliament are somehow not represented. I agree with Ms. Romanado: every MP I know is constantly trying to make their tent bigger. If they're not trying to make their tent bigger, it's shrinking. In my view, people are well represented by members of Parliament who are as close as possible to the communities they live in.

I gave an example for Vancouver Island, with Victoria being the large population. In my own riding, which is one-seventh the size of Germany and less accessible than one-seventh of Germany, with about 25 distinct communities, 90% of the population lives in essentially two of those communities. That's where the MPs would come from, so as for making ridings bigger, people are over-estimating or underestimating the impact this will have on our rural areas.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May, please.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm very pleased to see that so many people from Saanich—Gulf Islands made it all the way to Victoria.

I want to start by thanking all three of our witnesses,

I'm very glad to see my old friend John Duncan here, so if he says something you don't like, be nice.

I'm even happier to see Donna here.

Most of my questions, I have to say, are—

Hon. John Duncan: That's not fair. We worked together on a lot.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I know. We worked together on a lot of stuff, we really did, and I am very happy to see you.

I want to thank all three of you for your service to Canada, including the work you've done, Mr. Hodgson, for Fair Voting BC, and the work you've done, Diana, who has been selfless, and not

because you're part of a salaried position. Diana is also, I am very honoured to say, one of my constituents.

In terms of the commitment you made, I want you to tell the room and my fellow MPs more about what you did after the citizens' assembly was over, in going out and talking about single transferable vote, all on your own time, and how much of that you did. I know this just because I have come to know you through this process.

Ms. Diana Byford: When we discovered that the government had not made any provision for the education of our choice, a number of assembly members got together in person or over the telephone or through the Internet, whatever, and decided that those who could would try to overcome that deficiency. A referendum information office was set up, and they had a few leaflets, but you had to collect them and there were just two offices, one in Vancouver and one in Victoria. How many people can get to Vancouver or Victoria to pick up a pamphlet?

We had a number of people requesting that speakers come to talk to them about this and tell them why we had chosen and what we had chosen, so we decided that we would set up our own network, which we did. I was the person who received all the requests from the island area, and I would find speakers from the assembly, and sometimes we had volunteers; people who came from organizations like Fair Voting BC who were willing to join us in presentations, so we weren't quite the only ones, but we were doing it on our own time and money. I spent at least five days out of seven every week going somewhere. Some days I was out twice a day, in the morning and afternoon or afternoon and evening, speaking to different groups. On two occasions I was out three times speaking to people: morning, afternoon, and evening.

It was interesting. They had all sorts of questions and after one meeting in James Bay here in Victoria, an elderly gentleman came up to me and said his friend dragged him there because he had told him he was not going to vote for this newfangled system we're putting out. He said I had just changed his mind, so it was worth it.

• (1730)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Diana, I want to ask you for advice. In some ways you are just saying if you were asked to go to a citizens' assembly in Ottawa, you wouldn't be able to do it, but in some ways all of us here, members of Parliament in the House of Commons, are a citizens' assembly in Ottawa. It just happens that we're elected as MPs.

What would you recommend we do, having had your experience in achieving consensus among 160-some people? I'm committed that the 12 of us here will achieve consensus. What's your best advice for how we should go about it?

Ms. Diana Byford: You're the committee that the government struck, and you represent a majority of different opinions because you come from different kinds of parties. I would say the job is yours. We don't need a referendum.

Ms. Elizabeth May: To get to another point, which we have sometimes sloughed over as a committee, so forgive me—and I'll ask my grandfather to please forgive me—for making an observation. There's no doubt that when you elect a member of Parliament, the moment the election is over, that member of Parliament works for every constituent. If you call me for an immigration issue or a problem with a pension, I don't care how anyone voted. I go to work for them.

The issue is when we slough over the difference of who gets to form government. You may be very well represented by a member of Parliament who is either a government member or an opposition member, but if you go to them and say it's really important that the government that's created take action on climate change, and there's been a false majority that doesn't want to take action on climate change, people don't feel represented. The majority of Canadians can often feel unrepresented.

How would you differentiate between this very strong attachment we have to local representation and being attached to a riding in a local area and having proportionality?

Ms. Diana Byford: Again, I can only speak about what I've experienced through the assembly from my learning. With STV we felt that in, say, a five member riding, likely among those five, two or three different parties would be represented. More than likely at least one woman would be in the group. Believe it or not, in this day and age, in this century, there are still women who feel intimidated going to speak to a male in authority, so if they have a concern and their MP or MLA is a male, they will hesitate. Many of them don't even end up going with their concern because of that, but if there's a woman in a multi-member riding, they might take that concern to her regardless of which party she represents. Others won't go to you because that's not the party they voted for. They still have the concern but they have this feeling that they're not going to be taken seriously by you because that's not the party they voted for, so that's the other side.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

My first question is for Mr. Duncan.

We've had a few witnesses say that proportionality would really be great for the country, would really be great for government because, luckily we don't have the problem this time around, but in the past, governments have lacked representation among their caucus in different provinces and territories and therefore, perhaps, cannot come up with as representative a cabinet.

How do you feel about that critique that we should be changing from first past the post so governments can better represent the country from coast to coast to coast and have representation all across the board?

• (1735)

Hon. John Duncan: Well there are other options available to a government if they don't have representation in a region. They can put people in cabinet that are not members of Parliament but are acceptable within that region. There are mechanisms.

I'm not arguing for the status quo, however. My point concerns the communities, not making proportional representation discriminatory

to rural communities. My other point relates to the legitimacy of the exercise. I think you have to go well beyond what's currently laid out. In the eyes of the public this is not a legitimate exercise for the government to go ahead with a change to a 150-year-old electoral system.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Otherwise you would favour proportionality as long as we could keep, somehow, if that was possible, the ridings at the size they are right now, especially for rural ridings.

Hon. John Duncan: No, you're not going to get me to say that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: My next question is for Ms. Byford.

Thank you so much for all the hard work that you put into that citizens' assembly. I can't imagine spending that much time, as a citizen, taking on that mandate and volunteering afterwards like you did.

I am interested to know, a lot of people must have been approached for the citizens' assembly, kind of like jury duty or something. A lot of people send back their forms for jury duty, or try to get out of jury duty. At the end, the citizens' assembly, the 160 people that B.C. was able to get together, what was the demographic of those people? Were they of a certain age? Were they of a certain background? What was the room full of?

Ms. Diana Byford: I'm glad you asked that question, because the assembly was a true microcosm of B.C. The age range was from 18 to people in their eighties. They had all kinds of backgrounds. There were all kinds of ethnic groups involved. There were two moms with brand new babies. There were two recently widowed people when we started the assembly. There were people who were dealing with the loss of a job. There were people who were dealing with illnesses, either themselves or somebody in their family. We were a true demographic completely representative of B.C.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Did people tend to open up as to how they voted in the last election? You said mostly they all voted.

Ms. Diana Byford: No.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Did they represent a whole bunch of different parties?

Ms. Diana Byford: No. Politics and our own beliefs never came into our discussion, ever.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's interesting.

Do I have any more time?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think I'll pass.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Deltell now, please.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Mesdames et messieurs, it's a honour for me to meet you.

Mr. Duncan, as a veteran politician, I just want to thank you for having served the people of your riding so well for so many years; two defeats but six victories, so it was not granted to you, it was not an easy ride. Thank you so much, Sir.

Hon. John Duncan: Thank you.

I actually did a little research, I'm the second-longest serving member of Parliament from Vancouver Island in the history of Canada, and the first is from the same area. His name was Alan Webster Neill. He was a Progressive and an Independent, and the Liberals never ran anybody against him because he was so liberal. He served from 1921 to 1945. I'm proud of that. I'm a B.C. guy and a Vancouver Island guy.

[Applause]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Well, I dream of having that kind of applause, but I don't think we'll get it tonight.

Mr. Duncan, so many people raise the issue that in the actual system when someone doesn't win, that voice is silent; he cannot speak. You're a very experienced member of Parliament. When someone knocks at your door and says, "Mr. Duncan, I didn't vote for you," what do you say, "Get out of my office" or "Let's have a chat"?

Hon. John Duncan: It happened very rarely. I actually had people tell me they did vote for me more often than they said they didn't.

Maybe I'm different from other people, but I enjoyed working on behalf of people who did not support me, just to prove to them how wrong they were. That, over time, actually paid significant dividends. Because if you want to survive in the political arena, as I said earlier, if you're not trying to expand your constituency, the people who support you, then it's inevitably shrinking, because you're going to inevitably watch your support base erode if you're not doing everything that you can.

In one election I had a very significant constituency that did not support me and in the next election they endorsed me. That's the kind of thing that is traumatic and it's things that members of Parliament have to do and in order to do it, you have to be engaged at the community level.

● (1740)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: The voice of the people who didn't vote for you is still there and as a very serious MP, the door is always open and their voice is still there in the House of Commons, thanks to you.

Hon. John Duncan: Yes and you have to imbue your staff with the same philosophy.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That's great.

We all recognize also that constitutionally the government has all the power to change the voting system. We all recognize that, but we also recognize the fact that three provinces asked their people in a referendum before deciding to make any change. I'm not the only one who thinks this is right. I will quote someone:

Precedent makes holding a referendum necessary in Canada. Changing the voting system will require popular support.

Who said that? It was not a strong Conservative like me. It was actually a senior cabinet minister, the Honourable Stéphane Dion,

who said that because of the three referendums in three different provinces in Canada, we shall have a referendum. Do you share the same principle?

Hon. John Duncan: I do share that and to insist that there's no constitutional ramifications to doing this without the approval of the people is not correct. There would be ramifications from the provinces, from citizens groups, or from somewhere. I have no doubt this would be challenged.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: There are a lot of people who say that the government was elected with the promise to have electoral reform even if in their 97 pages of programs only three sentences were based on this promise—three sentences in 97 pages. We also had 10 hours of debate with the leader and the question was raised only once by Madam May.

During your campaign, how many people asked you the question and raised the issue of electoral reform? In my case, nobody at all did.

Hon. John Duncan: There were some statements at the all-candidates meetings. It generated some interest, but I can tell you that in 19 years I never had somebody come to me and say, "I want a dual member district." This is not in the conversation. In my opinion with the two referendums we had in British Columbia the people were so fed up with all of the wrangling and all of the discussion about changing the voting system that in the second referendum, they voted actually more strongly than in the first one not to proceed with it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Ms. Byford, my first question is for you.

The experience you had is fantastic, hearing it first-hand. I was doing the calculations and giving it some thought. The last questions on referendum relate to legitimacy. We've also heard some of our witnesses say that another way of gaining legitimacy would be to have a citizens coalition. If we did what B.C. did and had two randomly selected Canadians from each riding, we would have 676 participants. It would involve the kind of national travel that you'd indicated.

When I heard Craig speak, one of the things that seemed to really be an important part of the citizens coalition that you were part of was that you reached consensus. I think you touched on this, but I want to make sure that I'm hearing you right. How practical do you think it would be to have a national citizens coalition? Maybe you could answer that first.

● (1745)

Ms. Diana Byford: One of the things we learned when we first formed and met together at the Wosk Centre was that there had been provision made that if a certain number of members dropped out at the early stages, they were prepared to let us carry on up to a certain point. Beyond that point, the whole process would be stopped because there wouldn't be enough representation from the province to justify any results that came from it.

Putting this on a national level, as I said, I can't imagine the logistics of that. I don't think it would be sustainable for the 11 months like we spent.

Mr. John Aldag: With that, do you think there would be any benefit to exploring provincial and territorial panels? We could do 13 different ones, but I get the sense that we could end up with 13 different solutions and we wouldn't have that kind of consensus. Do you think there are any benefits to trying to do it on a provincial and territorial basis and seeing what we come up with, if anything matches up? Or does it simply seem that, in your opinion, legitimacy not be sought through trying to pursue a citizens' assembly at the national level?

Ms. Diana Byford: There's one thing different I would like to tell you about our citizens' assembly from the ones that were held back east. It was held in the Wosk Centre in Vancouver. I don't know how many of you might be familiar with that place, but it's circular. There are circular tiers of seats. Everybody felt equal. There was no head table. That was really brought home to us how valuable that was, because when we went to Prince George in the summer to go over what we'd heard at the public meetings in Prince George, we sat like this. There was a body at the head table and rows and rows of seats. A lot of us felt that was wrong. We really didn't feel like we were part of the process at times. That centre is an amazing place. It enabled us to settle in and to feel that all voices were equal, all voices were heard. I don't think they have anything similar to that facility in a lot of the provinces. I think that would have a big impact on the results.

In Ontario, as I understand it, they had this kind of set-up and you're lectured to there.

Mr. John Aldag: That's great. Thank you.

I'm going to move to Mr. Hodgson.

We've had a lot of different systems come at us, so I had to go online and find the rural-urban proportional piece again.

Mr. Antony Hodgson: Yes, I'm sorry about adding that.

Mr. John Aldag: Yes. It seems, if I'm understanding what you said and looking at the website, the multiple member ridings would be in urban areas, single member ridings in rural and small areas, and then a small layer of regional top-up seats would be looked at to get the proportionality for those. Further on in the document, they show a map of Alberta. I'm wondering if you've looked at what it would look like in B.C.

Mr. Antony Hodgson: Yes, absolutely. You can go to our website, fairvotingbc.com, and take a look at that under the PR model. We have some maps there of what it looks like.

I would say it's an extremely flexible model. It gives you a lot of choices. This was designed in a cross-country collaboration, and so you get input from across the country. With the B.C. perspective, we're much more inclined to pursue the multi-member ridings because of what we've learned through our own citizens' assembly. There is a greater ratio of multi-member ridings down to smaller.

Mr. John Aldag: I'll just jump in. Sorry, but I'm just trying to get in some more questions.

One of the things I saw is it indicates that you could either add 15% more seats or make the ridings 15% larger. When I did the town

halls—I've done five of them so far—a clear message was that people don't want to see more of us.

Mr. Antony Hodgson: No, fair enough.

Mr. John Aldag: To me that seems that 15% is the only solution.

Mr. Duncan, you talked about the challenges of large ridings. Do you think adding 15% to the area that you represented would be an unreasonable additional burden? Where is that line between what's workable and what's not?

Hon. John Duncan: It's not workable. There have been statements here today about how all of this can be handled because we have these electoral boundaries commissions that do such a great job. Well, we went from six ridings to seven on Vancouver Island. We have the population for seven. They made the northern riding more challenging in that redistribution than what it was before. It's because the last three electoral boundaries commissions—I know now because I investigated—all started in the urban areas and did all their redistribution there, and then moved into the rural constituencies. My advice to them has been consistent: start with the rural constituencies and work towards the cities, because the cities have way more opportunity to be flexible in a constrained space. This is very problematic.

● (1750)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Okay, Mr. Boulerice.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

By way of introduction, I'd like to make a comment first. Then I will ask Mr. Hodgson to react.

I have personally been elected twice. In 2011, I received 51% of the votes and, last year, I got 49% of the votes. Let's say that roughly half the people in my riding did not vote for me. As has already been said, once people are elected, they represent all their constituents. If a constituent comes to my office needing help, my team will try to help that person with the federal administration. We don't want to know who people voted for. That isn't our business. We serve everyone.

However, it would be simplistic to consider that an MP's role is only to provide individual services. We also have another important role to play because we vote in the House of Commons. When I am in the House of Commons, I have only one vote. I can't vote both for war and against war. I can't vote pro-choice and pro-life at the same time. I can't vote to fight greenhouse gas emissions and let big companies continue to pollute. Basically, people who didn't vote for the policies, values and principles that I represent in the House of Commons aren't represented in the decisions I make. The 52% of people who, in recent federal elections, didn't vote for the people who were elected have reason to feel poorly represented or not represented in Parliament.

Mr. Hodgson, I'd like your reaction to that.

[English]

Mr. Antony Hodgson: Thank you again for that.

I absolutely agree that the 50% who did not vote for you are not represented legislatively. I think it's important for us to understand that historically, the constituency responsiveness and responsibilities of MPs really emerged in about the 1960s. For the first 100 years of our confederation, that was not considered a particularly important part, or even a recognized part, of the role of MPs' service.

The primary role of an MP in a Westminster parliamentary system is to pass legislation and to hold the government to account, so it is primarily in that vein that we are talking.

I think it's very useful in your discussions to distinguish between what means could be taken to provide better constituency service. I have no doubt that we should have much larger service budgets for MPs who are in more rural ridings. We should have more offices, more staff, whatever it takes to support them in that role.

However, from a legislative point of view, there was a 2004 case in New Brunswick that you may be familiar with. The Federal Court actually sided with a francophone town. The electoral boundaries commission had put them in an anglophone district and they appealed to the court, saying that members of the provincial parliament could not represent them. The judge had very clear language agreeing with them that they would not be adequately represented by an MPP they did not support.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: In this regard, Mr. Hodgson, to follow up on your answer, earlier you touched on the question of the relationship between the electoral system or the voting system and the rights of citizens under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Could you clarify your thoughts on that? This is one of the first times I've heard this.

[English]

Mr. Antony Hodgson: For the first 100-odd years of our Confederation, we did not have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms in its current form. Two important rights in there are section 3, the right to vote, and section 15, the right to equality.

The first cases evaluating the effect of those new charter provisions on aspects of our electoral system—probably one of the earliest—was the 1986 Dixon case here in B.C. assessing the constitutionality of variations in riding size. At the time, there was a

15-fold difference between the northwest district that included Atlin and a riding in Surrey. Justice McLachlin ruled that was unconstitutional according to the charter, so there's now judgment language, precedent, around the importance of voter parity.

Actually, equality of voting power is only to be disrupted or attenuated in order to provide more effective representation. You've heard a ton of testimony that says that many people are much less effectively represented by our current system, so in our view that can't be countenance.

● (1755)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you to the witnesses for attending our session today.

A number of my colleagues on the panel have already addressed this issue of representation, at least partially, and whether or not a person is still represented by someone who perhaps they didn't vote for.

Members of Parliament have every incentive to represent their constituents as best they can, presumably in order to win over those who didn't vote for them in the previous election. Certainly, we do it through our office activity in representing case work.

There are other ways that a member can do so, by raising issues on behalf of constituents that are important to constituents in caucus, through statements made in the House, and by influencing debate.

I'd like to talk about urbanization, and what that means to riding size in rural locations. We heard a little bit about this, and I'd like the Honourable John Duncan to tell us about this as a person who represented a large riding for so many years.

The way the redistribution of seats typically works is that the relative size of a riding by population doesn't change over time. We add seats to account for population growth. But urbanization, which has been under way for decades and still continues to be a factor, means that rural ridings just continue to grow.

What we've heard from a variety of witnesses, from the first nations community leaders that we met with this morning in Elizabeth May's riding, as well from the people we heard from in Yukon yesterday, sounded to many of us like a desire for proportional representation everywhere except in their ridings, so that we don't actually shrink or dilute their own representation on a local level.

I'd like you to tell us a little more about how urbanization is already a pressure on these larger ridings.

Hon. John Duncan: I can talk about the example of the north island. The southern part of the north island riding is growing very quickly, and the rest is not. What was 90:10 will soon be 92:8 and 94:6 probably.

We had an opportunity in this last redistribution in which British Columbia got six new ridings. I thought that was going to be a major boost to making the ridings on Vancouver Island more serviceable. The electoral boundaries commission I am sorry to say screwed it up, despite a lot of lobbying not to have them do that.

I think urbanization is just a reality. We have to live with it. I don't fight it. Representation by population is vital and elemental to our system. That's just the way it is, but let's not make it worse. Let's not compound it by making our rural ridings bigger.

• (1800)

Mr. Pat Kelly: How do you do proportionality without doing that?

Hon. John Duncan: You can't do proportionality without making rural ridings bigger.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Right.

Hon. John Duncan: You can't do two member ridings without making rural ridings bigger.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Indeed.

Mr. Chair, how's my time?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Pat Kelly: That won't be enough time for a question. I might note that 98% of people who voted in this past election have a representative in Parliament. It may not be your own representative, but neither would it be under most PR models.

The Chair: Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you all for being here this evening. It is quite impressive to see a full room. Ms. May, I think you chartered a boat or something to get all these folks here.

Thank you so much to our three panellists for everything they have been doing in terms of democratic reform. I know it hasn't been easy. I know the B.C. Citizens' Assembly worked tirelessly on the issue.

Over the course of the last couple of months, we've heard that a lot of Canadians felt that their vote didn't count, so we have been tasked to look at the good, the bad, and the ugly of our current electoral system and everything that goes with that. We heard from expert witnesses who said there is no perfect electoral system that is going to address all the boo-boos we currently have in our system.

It's going to take a combination of initiatives to address a lot of these issues. For instance, something such as increasing female participation could include quotas, or it could include reimbursements from Elections Canada to political parties that run more candidates, and so on and so forth, and that has nothing to do with the actual changing of the voting system.

My question is for Mrs. Byford and Mr. Hodgson. In terms of your proposed model, the STV, could you talk to me a bit about what combination of tactics we would need to address all the problems we currently have? Even if we were to address proportional representation or getting that representation in the House through STV or another model, there are other things that we need to do. Could you give us any feedback on that?

Ms. Diana Byford: Actually, I don't really know how to answer that question, because we were simply trying to determine what would work for B.C. and the needs of B.C. This is a much larger issue dealing with the territories and the vast areas of the other provinces. I have no information about how they would be affected, so I am finding it really difficult to formulate an answer to that question.

I don't envy you your task. It is something I'm glad I am not doing at the present time, to be perfectly honest.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I don't have the male and the stale, but I'm definitely pale from the travel.

Mr. Antony Hodgson: I think the fundamental mechanism for addressing the question of how to increase representation of currently under-represented groups is encouraging multi-member nominations from individual parties. That is clearly what has worked in many countries.

On the particular question of how many women are elected under different voting systems, I think STV gets a bad rap, because it is used nationally only in two countries, Ireland and Malta, and both of those have some very significant societal issues around the representation of women. Even so, Ireland's European parliamentary delegation is 55% women elected under STV.

In Western Australia, in 2010 to 2013, the upper house was 47% women at a time when the lower house, the council, was 22%. Their senate is 41% women, 26% in the lower house. This is all because of STV. It's a complete myth that STV is not favourable to the election of women.

In Canada, the political scientists tell us that Canadians have no gender preference in whom they vote for. They will vote for the most qualified person put before them. Where the limitation has been is in the nominations.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I am going to stop you on that. That's a perfect point.

There are two phases: the decision to run for office and put yourself out there, which is kind of scary, to be honest, and winning the actual election. It's winning the nomination or deciding to run, and then winning the election.

From my conversations with fellow females who have run for office, successfully or unsuccessfully, I know that their decision to run had nothing to do with the method of voting. Often it had something to do with the job itself or a family-friendly Parliament, whether it be travel, lack of maternity leave, lack of day care, and so on and so forth, or just balance in general.

I don't think changing the electoral system itself would address that issue. I think we need to work harder at getting under-represented people to want to run for office, including youth and visible minorities, but once they get nominated, do you feel that it is absolutely necessary to have a different voting system to get women to win?

I'll be honest with you. I ran against six other people in a riding which under no circumstance should I have won—an anglo Liberal in a very traditionally Bloc Québécois riding. I did, thank God, but it wasn't the voting system that got me there, in my opinion.

•(1805)

The Chair: Mr. Hodgson.

Mr. Antony Hodgson: That's correct. All I can say is that there's a clear interplay between the nomination processes and the electoral processes. Once people are in front of the electors, the electors will choose the people who they feel are best suited to represent them. You're clearly the one who hit all the right buttons in Montreal.

If we have a broader range of candidates put forward by a party, particularly in the more urban areas, then we will start to see younger voters being able to cast a vote for a candidate who is younger, and that may draw them in. Then, if we use a preferential ballot in many multi-member districts with STV, if their candidate doesn't have enough support to be elected, that preference can be transferred to somebody else of the same political persuasion, so there's an entry route in there that is not present in single-member races.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hodgson, I understand how in MMP every vote is represented because if your candidate doesn't win in the riding your vote is factored into the seat distribution because there's a proportional element.

In STV, is it possible that some people are technically not represented if their candidate doesn't win in the multi-member riding? Is that a correct understanding?

Mr. Antony Hodgson: That's correct.

I think it's come up in a couple of the conversations. The question is what is the right number: three, four, five members? There's a trade-off there for sure.

Practically, in STV systems where we have district sizes averaging about four, we find 90% to 95% of voters will have voted for one of the MPs who got elected, and Byron's simulations will tell you this.

The Chair: Is that a first choice?

Mr. Antony Hodgson: No, not necessarily. If a party is running multiple candidates, their first choice candidate may not have been elected, but they likely would have transferred to another candidate from the same party. That happens a lot.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

This has been a very interesting panel. Again, we've had a great discussion.

We're going to have a different kind of discussion when we come back. We're going into the open mike session.

We're running a bit late. We were originally scheduled to start the open mike at 6:30, but we're going to aim for 7 p.m.

Thank you.

•(1810)

(Pause)

•(1855)

The Chair: I will open the meeting.

We don't have a panel tonight. We have open mike. It's time for all of you as individuals—those of you who wish to do so—to have your say on this important issue for our democracy. We have 80 people, and everybody gets two minutes. You are probably saying to

yourself, “Two minutes. That's not enough”, but this is our seventh city, and it has worked in all the other cities. It's just a question of... All I will say to the audience is, we don't need a preamble to soften the blow. Just let us have it right off the bat, with none of this, “Well, you are doing a good job. Thanks for coming to Victoria.” We can skip that and save a good 20 seconds. Get right to it. We can make it work.

We have two mikes here, and I will call two names, one for each mike. While one person is speaking, the other person has the opportunity to gather their thoughts. When a person leaves the mike after having spoken, I'll invite another person up, so the mike will always be occupied. That way, we will keep it rolling a little faster. If you get cut off when we get to the two-minute mark, please don't be offended. It's the only we can ensure everybody gets to have a say.

I would call Mr. William Russell and Ms. Laura Parker to the mikes, please.

Mr. Russell, the floor is yours for two minutes.

•(1900)

Mr. William Russell (As an Individual): Does it start now?

The Chair: Yes, at the first word the stopwatch starts going.

Mr. William Russell: Okay. My name is Bill Russell. I am a dual citizen of Australia and Canada. I lived in Canada and voted here, and then I went to Australia in 1974, where I lived and became a citizen. I returned to Canada in 2005. I've had a long exposure to both electoral systems and the parliaments of both countries, and as an avid political junkie, I have made two observations that I think might be of use to this discussion.

I'll use two narratives to illustrate a couple of my points. Point one is that the first-past-the-post voting system contributes to a general lack of interest in voting. Why vote when your participation is farcical? I give you the example of the separatist government of Pauline Marois in Quebec, in September 2012. She formed a government with the avowed purpose of breaking up Canada. Seventy-five per cent of the voters turned out. Of those, 32% voted for her party. If we do the math, we see that she got 23% of the registered voters to put her party in power, and that's all thanks to first past the post. I have yet to find a rational justification for its retention. “It's simple” seems to be the common response.

My second story concerns a Jeff Kennett government in Victoria, Australia. He was ultra-conservative and introduced draconian changes to government, ostensibly as a cost-saving measure. He was very unpopular, and crowds were demonstrating in the streets of Melbourne—an estimated 150,000, the biggest crowd I ever saw in 30-odd years in Australia. People and placards were everywhere. One person I saw on the news had a placard that read, “Don't blame me. I didn't vote for him.” It's a message that would carry no particular weight in the first-past-the-post system in Canada, with voting optional. In Victoria, or anywhere else in Australia for that matter, Jeff Kennett could not get elected with less than 50% of the vote—that's 50% of all registered voters. Love him or hate him, Jeff Kennett and his government had the support of the majority of the eligible voters in Victoria. You cannot get into office without it.

I can't make the same claim in Canada. I think we could very well use a proportional voting system and compulsory voting.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was two minutes right on. Perfect.

I invite Mr. Thomas Teuwen to the mike.

Ms. Parker, the floor is yours.

Ms. Laura Parker (As an Individual): Thank you.

I am so glad to see how well this committee is working together. You seem to have put partisanship aside to work on this critical issue of Canadian democracy. This committee is proportional. It represents the votes that each party got in the last election after Minister Monsef gave up the Liberal majority. You are a group of proud members of Parliament putting party politics aside and working together for Canada. You are a Canadian citizen before you are a member of a party. It's important to put aside the partisanship and do what is best for Canada as a whole, and this is possible. Thank you for being a part of it.

I would love to see this kind of government in our country. I believe that under first past the post we do not have this because this system results in winners and losers, and too often it's a winner-take-all game. This creates an "us against them" mentality that is too often witnessed in the behaviour of members of Parliament always having to live up to the name of opposition party or parties.

Canadians are tired of this win or lose game, and we're counting on you, this wonderful committee, to work together to bring in a fairer, made-in-Canada electoral system. What a gift that would be in time for Canada's 150 birthday next year.

As one last note, you mentioned tonight how you each represent your constituency. I would be interested to find out from each of you how many town halls you held with your constituents. Town halls are definitely a tool to consult with the public. Granted, you all have been busy with these meetings, but at least most of you, or all of you except one, can have people sit in for you.

I am fortunate to have Elizabeth May as my MP, and as the only Green MP she has had to attend every committee meeting, and yet she held her usual seven town halls, with two of them focusing on electoral reform.

In one town hall we were fortunate to have met Minister Monsef for a most wonderful meeting on Saturna Island. I would be interested in finding out how many town halls each of you has had in order to hear from your constituents.

The Chair: I'll tell you that I had one, but it was a big one. It was as big as I could have it. I rented a big auditorium. I sent letters to all the high schools in my riding and to history, political science, and economics professors at the local community college. I advertised it in the paper and in my householder. It was pretty successful.

I don't think we have time to go down the whole table, but that was my experience, and I was happy to do that town hall.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Teuwen, go ahead, please.

• (1905)

Mr. Thomas Teuwen (As an Individual): I would ask the Chair to indulge me for just one moment because I would like to

compliment this committee. I think this committee has done an amazing job, so far. I've been watching it online, on CPAC. The process that I'm experiencing here tonight is a process which, quite frankly, makes me proud to be a Canadian. I have never in my life experienced such dedication. You all got up at four o'clock or so this morning to be here.

A voice: It was three o'clock.

Mr. Thomas Teuwen: It was three o'clock. There you go. To me, that matters a lot. It matters because it gives me a sense, for the first time in my life, that people in government care. That is the bottom line in terms of changing our electoral system.

Our electoral system is over 100 years old. We wouldn't practice medicine by a system that's over 100 years old. We wouldn't drive cars that were over 100 years old. We wouldn't do a lot of things in our lives that we did 100 years ago, so why do we cling to an electoral system that's clearly out of date and clearly out of touch with the way that Canadians feel today?

I also believe that proportional representation, for example, in some form of consensus-based governance, is better for business, because what we have now are false majorities that have ideologically driven policy swings that go back and forth on the pendulum, and that makes it difficult for business to plan long term. You don't know whether the science is going to be supported or not. You don't know whether the alternative energy industry is going to be supported or not. For me, that's another important aspect.

I believe that the whole process of what you're doing at the committee is important. I'm thankful for the process, and I look forward to the recommendations in December.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dixon, go ahead, please.

Mr. Theodore Dixon (As an Individual): I would like to, first of all, compliment everyone on being here.. Regardless of what system we come up with, make it simple. I was involved with the Green Party here in B.C. in obtaining the signatures on a petition that got the referendum started in the first place. What I had to do was go into great detail to try and alleviate the concerns of the people whose signatures I was trying to get on the page that was in front of them. I had to go to great lengths to explain it, and there were times when they would say that it was way too complicated.

Make it simple. If you do that, the acceptance rate will be much higher.

I would love to see some reform come through. We've had enough of a system where we determine our governance by the principles of a horse race. That has to stop. This is 2016.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Putt, go ahead, please.

Ms. Katherine Putt (As an Individual): Thank you very much to all the committee members.

I would like to speak in favour of proportional representation. I feel strongly that if we don't change our voting system, we are going to see increasing apathy and decreasing voter turnout. This is a real danger to our democracy, and this doesn't mean only for young people. Many of them are passionate about creating a better world, but they want to put their efforts where they know they can have some effect. That's true of everyone.

I also want to comment on the danger and injustice of a system where a government formed with less than a majority can govern as if the rest of the population didn't count. This is the system we have and it's flawed.

The current system also tends toward polarizing the political debate and toward two main parties, making it harder for less mainstream ideas to find expression in Parliament. This also leads to strategic voting, something which causes people to deny their beliefs and preferences, and produces a false indication of voter sentiment and support.

Last, I'm not in favour of a referendum for such a complex issue. Look at all the time the B.C. Citizens' Assembly spent in their deliberations.

I think the opinions of Canadians are being gathered through this committee process.

Thank you.

• (1910)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rosser.

Mr. Michael Rosser (As an Individual): Thank you.

First of all, I would like to say that I'm in favour of this process because all of my votes at the federal level have not counted. I had to move to a riding that had a candidate that represented me in order to have my vote count. Only one time has my vote ever counted in a federal election.

In general terms, I think a lot of Canadians are dissatisfied with the system because we see too much money in politics, and we see elections being too much about personality. I would like to see them be more about issues and less about money.

There is so much bickering, partisanship, and grandstanding in the House of Commons, it's no wonder Canadians are turned off by the political system.

I think this could help on all of those counts.

I will draw up a suggestion of keeping it simple by voting for a political party, and then there would be a list which each party had that would be taken proportionally from the province.

I'd like to see compulsory voting, with a bit of carrot and a bit of stick. For example, you should be rewarded with maybe \$5 on your taxes when you vote and have a \$25 penalty if you don't.

Perhaps we could vote electronically or by mail-in ballot. That's done in other places.

I know in Switzerland they vote by mail-in ballot every few weeks, and they deal with many issues consequently. Switzerland has the only system like that that I'm aware of. They also have a committee they are ruled by. They elect the committee and they elect a chair.

That's it. I would like to see voting strictly for a party, and then the parties have an electoral list which their entire membership must vote on by a single transferable vote.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Ms. Levey, it's your turn.

Ms. Shelagh Levey (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm not going to take two minutes, but I am going to make a preamble. I want to thank you all for taking on this difficult job, and I want to thank you for doing it over the summer. It wouldn't be so bad if we lived in Hawaii, or even Spain, but you've given up a Canadian summer, and that's particularly impressive.

I'd like to speak to a referendum. Yes, I wanted a referendum. It sounds democratic, but then I began to talk to people, my friends, my family, neighbours, anybody who would discuss proportional representation. I found that they all wanted to get into the 21st century and move on and have a fair vote, but they didn't know much else. Although they were for proportional representation, when I asked about a particular strategy they'd like, there was a blank. In fact, one or two didn't even know what we have now. So I don't see how a referendum would work. I, for one, have changed my mind. I am prepared to accept the recommendations of this committee, particularly my MP's, who is so non-partisan and works so hard for her constituents and for the country. I would accept anything she tells me, and I can tell you I'm not usually a follower.

I wish you all the luck in the world, and I'm not in favour of a referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Who's your MP?

Ms. Shelagh Levey: I'll let you guess.

The Chair: Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Stephanie Ferguson (As an Individual): Thank you.

I would like to start by stating that I am strongly in favour of a proportional voting system. Watching the hearings of this committee has given me hope that we can finally update our system to a proportional one. I worry, though, about these calls for a referendum, which seem intended to kill this opportunity for change and force Canadians to keep wasting their votes for the sake of partisan politics.

I have first-hand experience of a national referendum on changing the voting system through the 2011 U.K. referendum on the alternative vote. The result was 68% for no, which kept the status quo, and 32% for yes, which would have changed the system. I worked for six months as a campaigner for the yes side of the vote. Let me explain that I would not support the alternative vote for Canada. It is still a majoritarian system that fails to address most of the problems with first past the post. I repeatedly encountered people who supported electoral reform but would not vote for the AV system because it was not proportional. The campaign itself was also problematic.

People vote in referendums based on the information they are given. The yes campaign messaging was weak and largely failed to explain the system itself. The no campaign's core messaging strategy was to create fear around change and to spread misinformation about the AV system. They said it was too complicated, that it would cost too much and took too long to count, that it unfairly gave some people more votes than others—all complete myths. There is no reason to think that the same tactics wouldn't be used in a campaign here in Canada.

Referendums tend to favour the status quo, and both sides of the campaign can introduce messaging that can be counterproductive, misleading, or simply false, and a referendum is not the only way to lend legitimacy to a change in the voting system.

I urge you to focus on those methods now and in your recommendations.

Thank you.

● (1915)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Farmer, go ahead.

Mr. David Farmer (As an Individual): My name is David Farmer, and I'm grateful to be here. It's a wonderful opportunity for an exchange of ideas. Let me say right from the start that I have been frustrated for many years with the first-past-the-post system. It polarizes the country and all too often makes it impossible for people to be properly represented. It also has a more subtle effect which I experienced in our own riding. I voted for my MP and I'm very happy with her, so you probably think I shouldn't be complaining. I complain because we have one member of Parliament for the Green Party and many supporters of the Green Party across the country who are somehow not represented. With the immense problems that face us now—the urgency of the climate issues, God knows what else, pipelines and so on—we really need fresh ideas and we are excluding them with the first-past-the-post system.

I believe proportional representation of some kind is absolutely necessary. We've waited 150 years for it. I think it's time to move ahead. We have some wonderful evidence of how much the public would like that system. I was impressed with Diana Byford's account of what they had done. What a wonderful contribution to our society. So there's good evidence. Ms. May tells me there are many other reports that are available that almost universally support proportional representation.

On that basis, good luck to you. I think you know where we want you to go. We look forward to the results.

The Chair: Thank you.

Adriane, you don't remember me, do you? I used to work for Clifford Lincoln.

Ms. Adriane Carr (As an Individual): Oh, did you? What a dear person he was.

Ms. Elizabeth May: And I'm certain he still is.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Ms. Carr.

Ms. Adriane Carr: Thank you.

My name is Adriane Carr. I'm an elected councillor in the city of Vancouver. I'm speaking to you because in 2002 I was working on B. C.'s recall and initiative act, the proponent of an initiative to establish a mixed member proportional representation voting system in British Columbia. I have details about this in a brief, and I'm happy to hand those in at the end.

I wanted to focus on what I learned through my conversations with literally thousands of people in every corner of this province in the collection of 98,165 signatures—I still remember—with the help of about 4,000 other canvassers.

What I learned was that number one, people are extraordinarily frustrated with the current voting system, and it's led to such dismay that in many cases they don't want to vote.

Two, they liked the MMP system for these reasons: It's simple to understand. They liked the idea of just two votes, and some talked to me about this. As opposed to ranking a list of many candidates, two votes seemed very simple: a vote for the party, and a vote for their individual representation. They really liked that their party vote would achieve representation and they really liked the fairness of the outcome. I think fairness is a Canadian attribute.

I want to note that a ranked ballot or alternative vote ballot does not achieve proportionality, and I urge you to make sure you're clear about that. Also, you may not know that an STV system needs at least five—they say even seven—members in the riding to achieve proportionality. Five is sort of a minimum, and five would be like Yukon, Nunavut, the northern halves of all the provinces. It's something for you to consider.

I recommend, in conclusion, an MMP system because it is fair, proportional, and the votes count toward representation. I urge you to make it simple. I believe you can use the same electoral districts. There's no need for riding redistribution. Simply use a top-up system, either through lists, or some people have suggested to me by looking at those members of a party who weren't elected but got very high votes.

There's enough room in Parliament with your \$3-billion renovation to create those extra seats. This is a chance for change. Please, I urge you to do proportional representation.

● (1920)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Robinson, please give us your views.

Ms. Joan Robinson (As an Individual): I've been a returning officer for several elections, and I have been involved in provincial and federal judicial recounts. Most recently, I was returning officer for a province-wide mail-in preferential ballot. I participated in printing the ballots, sending out instructions, counting the ballots, and calculating the results. It was a nightmare. That was one ballot in the province. There are over 50,000 polls federally. I predict that if you wanted to do any kind of different voting count you'd have to sequester the vote counters, for one thing, and it would likely take you two or three months to get the final results.

I'm also going to comment, being a former school teacher, that now the schools have this system that everyone who goes into a sports meet gets a ribbon. There are no losers. That's not real life. We get out, run for Parliament, run for something, get the most votes, vote in the best person, and unbelievably, someone has to be a loser.

We don't need a referendum. We don't need to change our voting system. You have other things to deal with in our Parliament. If you want every vote to count, then make sure that everybody that can vote does votes. That's how to make your votes count.

In closing, I must say how disappointed I am in one of your committee members, who was my former MP, who has spent the entire day on her cellphone. Oh yes you have, and there are obviously a lot things that interest you besides listening to us.

Ms. Elizabeth May: May I speak, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I really want to apologize if you thought I was doing something else. What I just sent out was "Joan Robinson has been returning officer, including from province-wide mail-in ballots. It will be very cumbersome, like first past the post". Then there's the code for this hearing. I am live tweeting every single presenter so that people who aren't in this room will know what you had to say.

The Chair: Mr. Habgood, go ahead please.

●(1925)

Mr. Richard Habgood (As an Individual): Greetings to the ERRE committee. My name is Richard Habgood, and I am the president of the greater Victoria chapter of Fair Vote Canada.

Our chapter would like to start off by acknowledging the work of Wendy Bergerud. Wendy was chosen as a member of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, where she became a committed advocate for proportional representation and electoral reform, right up until her death in March of this year. She served as the president of our local chapter, and she is greatly missed for her wisdom, activism, and warmth.

Vancouver Island's experience with first past the post in 2015 demonstrates multiple ways in which the current system does not uphold the principles referred to the committee for consideration. Around 100,000 Vancouver Island Conservative voters and 100,000 Liberal voters, making up more than two-fifths of all the voters on Vancouver Island, are without a Vancouver Island MP who aligns with their political beliefs. The 2015 election returned six NDP MPs and one Green, while a proportional result would likely have elected three NDP MPs, two Greens, one Conservative, and one Liberal.

Our conclusion is that democracy is not well served when a voting system does not represent the full diversity of a nation. A party that receives less than the majority of votes should not receive, in any way shape or form, 100% of the power. We need change, namely, a proportional representation voting system.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would ask Ms. Diane Guthrie to speak to us.

Ms. Diane Guthrie (As an Individual): It's past time that we turf the outdated first-past-the-post system and switch to some form of proportional representation, as the majority of civilized countries have.

There is no need for a referendum before we bring in proportional representation any more than we needed to have a referendum on giving women the right to vote. Having a fair voting system is a human right. It has been studied enough by experts, who have strongly endorsed it.

Why not have a referendum after we have had an election with proportional representation? Some who are pushing a referendum first are doing it so that their party can hang on to power in future elections. Party allegiance is more important to them than fairness to Canadian voters.

I want to see a parliament that fairly represents all the viewpoints of Canadians and moves toward gender parity.

The government has given our country a chance to change our electoral system. Let's urge them to bring in real proportional representation and not alternative vote, which is neither proportional nor fairer than our current system.

Let's get it done.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Guy Laflam, you can take mike number one.

Mr. Guy Laflam (As an Individual): I thank you for your efforts.

I am in favour of STV, so I hope you will seriously consider it. However, democracy is a work in progress, so you might consider trying the next federal election on some system that is conditional. If it turns out to your liking, ratify it.

I congratulate you for trying.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Najari, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Mehdi Najari (As an Individual): I will be frank. I am not a member of any party, so I am not partisan.

In the last two federal elections, 62% and 67% of registered voters voted. These are not eligible voters. These are registered voters. I don't know what percentage of eligible voters voted.

What did we get? We had 39% of the 62% elect a majority government that did whatever it wanted. It was an elected dictatorship for four years, with omnibus bills that didn't even allow the Parliament of this country to really look at what was being proposed, but they pushed it through like a dictatorship.

In the past election, Mr. Trudeau got elected with 39% of the 67%. He promised us he would make decisions based on evidence and science. He promised that this time they were going to be really decent with first nations people and get their consent when they are doing things on their traditional territory.

What did we get? We got the Site C dam decision. Some 250 members of the Royal Society of Canada, scientists, said that this is the worst project. Mr. Trudeau ignored that and betrayed his promise. He betrayed his promise of respecting aboriginal people.

What can we do? Nothing. For four years, we have another dictatorship. This is not acceptable.

I am a member of the part of society that makes less than \$27,000 a year, that medium income. Who is representing me? You are making \$165,000. You are not even coming close to understanding the reality of my life, and half of the population's. This is not democracy. What I am saying is that this is the first step: to change the electoral system.

More important, you have to become responsible and accountable to us on a regular basis. If you want to be accountable to us, you come every month to us. Meet your constituents, on the record. We put it on the record, and at that time you give us 20 minutes to report about what you have done and listen to our concerns and issues. Listen to the fact that 18% of children in British Columbia are undernourished and living in poverty. Then we are going to have a parliament that is responsible.

• (1930)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jeffers, the mike is yours.

Mr. Mark Jeffers (As an Individual): Electoral reform is extremely important to me. Why? To borrow a phrase, because it's 2016.

My wife and I are both political refugees from the Conservative heartland of Alberta. We moved here five years ago, looking for, among other things, a change of political scenery. Most of my life as a voter, I've had to live with the bitter disappointment of knowing that in a supposedly modern democracy, my vote, like more than half the voters in the last election, did not matter to anyone except myself.

We get phony majorities, no representation for my views, ridiculous results, increasingly aggressive politics, exclusion of women, and a general failure to truly represent all Canadians. I am tired of all this nonsense.

We have a profoundly broken democracy, which, not surprisingly, more and more people are disengaging from because of a sense of futility and hopelessness. Electoral reform and specifically proportional representation is the only acceptable outcome for this process. Why? Because it's fair.

Self-serving interests of politicians and their parties need to be set aside for this historic opportunity. In the last election, three of four national parties campaigned and were elected on platforms of electoral reform. Now they have an unarguable mandate to deliver.

I know there are Conservatives who support proportional representation, yet the party line repeated ad nauseam by them and the media is "referendum", knowing full well that referendums block change and are disturbingly easy to manipulate, as we have recently seen with the Brexit fiasco.

We need more from you. Please do the right thing. We see all around us deteriorating democracies. We now have a chance to fix this very broken democracy. Bringing in proportional representation is just a start. There's much more to do. This is your chance to be on the right side of history. Let's make ours a kinder, gentler, real democracy.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Carmichael, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Craig Carmichael (As an Individual): Thank you.

As an inventor, I pull together disparate facts and ideas and information from all over the place, and I often come up with unique solutions. Over the decades, I've perused the whole way that society and politics operate, and I've come up with quite a number of suggestions as to how we might improve things. We have the core values, equality of life, growth, opportunities to grow to be what we can be, and equality. I've put those together in a website called handsondemocracy.org.

I see what we have here tonight as two pieces of a much larger puzzle. I'll address those now that I've already made my major point. First, a referendum should not be a way for the government to ask the public for their opinion. It should be a way for the public to say what they want the government to do. Referendums should be initiated by the public in practical, easy terms. They should be voted on by the public and then presented. The government doesn't always have the same priorities as the public.

Also, I think the illiterate X voting system really needs to be replaced—the closest-to-the-post-on-the-first-toss voting system. I definitely think that STV is the way to vote, but I would prefer to call it the choice-ranking vote. It's also been called the instant runoff vote. Either of those two names gives a better idea. STV sounds contrived to me. I didn't like it when I first heard it because of that.

Thank you.

• (1935)

The Chair: Those are two good ideas. Thank you very much.

Mr. Arney.

Mr. Jeremy Arney (As an Individual): Contrary to your desires, I'm going to thank you and all your staff for the work you're doing this summer. Thank you very much.

I would like to acknowledge the Songhees Nation on whose land we are now standing. Now I'm going on to be very partisan.

My name is Jeremy Arney. I am the interim leader of the Canadian Action Party. We think the STV is just another form of first past the post, but it goes down through the ranks. That's not acceptable.

MMP, on the other hand, can be adapted to be a Canadian form of doing things. We have in this country 22 registered political parties, and how many are there represented here? That is not the way it should be.

Our suggestion is simply that if you have the MMP, there will be a first past the post, probably from one of your parties, but the list that goes with it should be attached to who is running in the riding. We cannot have 22 members on a list in every riding. Many of the ridings will not have small party candidates, but for those that do, those candidates should be allowed to have a list attached to their party, no matter which one it is. That's my major point.

Small parties are under-represented—we all know that—and yet they have fantastic ideas. One of the fantastic ideas that every single small party, except for the Libertarians, believes in is that the Bank of Canada should be brought back to financing Canada and its needs. There are none of your parties here who will consider that. I don't know why. It makes tremendous economic and logical sense, but for some reason you won't do it.

Small parties will bring new ideas They will reinvigorate Canadian politics. They will reinvigorate the Canadian people. You have an opportunity here for real democratic process for Canadians and I urge you to take it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Proctor, go ahead, please.

Ms. Merran Proctor (As an Individual): Hi, I'm speaking for myself and my women friends. We know you're designing a new electoral system, and we're asking you to build three features into your recommended model: fair proportional representation, the opportunity for visionary policy-making, and collaboration and consensus in this country.

By fair representation we mean genuine proportionality with seats reflected by the vote. We want politicians who can speak to regional issues. We want politicians who can reflect gender, racial diversity, and economic class. Please don't leave the low-income people out of this reform. They're not all on computers. We may also need from you a recommendation on electoral financing.

The second thing is a system that encourages visionary government. We ask that you build a system where parties are clear on what their platforms are and say what they want to do, so that we can encourage them to work together on the priorities of all Canadians, and we can judge if they are doing what they say they're doing.

The third thing is collaboration and consensus, because all of you know that more heads are better than one. We thank you for putting yours together for all this time.

My personal preference would be a mixed member proportional system with regional representation, but all the people in our group agreed on those priorities.

In terms of the vote, three parties ran on improving the electoral system. Let's do it. Let's give it a chance, and then let people at some point say whether they are happy with the way Canada votes. Make it the best system in the world. There are 90 others you have to beat.

• (1940)

The Chair: Well, it's a tall order, but we're up to it.

Is David Charles here? Oh, there he is, okay.

Mr. Trevor Moat (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

I want to pick up on a remark I heard from this panel a little while ago, maybe a couple of hours—I've been here for the whole session—and that was that the first-past-the-post system has served us well for 150 years. Honestly, I beg to differ. Think of what's happened in 150 years. I just made a quick list of things, like the Internet, mobile communications, nuclear power, radar, television, radio, aviation, automobiles, vaccines. All of these things have evolved. Our electoral system hasn't. It's time. It really is time.

For those of you who still think first past the post is viable, it may be the devil we know—and I understand change is difficult to implement—but it is the devil.

I'm old enough to remember the McKenna election in New Brunswick, in I think it was October 1987. Under 60% of the population voted in favour of Mr. McKenna and he won 100% of the seats. Does everybody remember that? It was 60% that won every seat in the House.

Now, when you have a situation like first past the post promotes, such as division, diversity, single-issue voting, then you get these very polar outcomes. Imagine if it had been someone who was not as benevolent and nationally oriented and kind-natured as Frank McKenna. Imagine if it was more of a Donald Trump type, who had a slim majority and a substantial majority of the votes. It could be disastrous. This is what the system promotes.

It's a very disenfranchising system, and it's particularly disenfranchising to the young, as many, many polls have shown over the last number of years.

A new electoral system, whatever it is, needs to have some of the following notions. It needs to be fair, democratic, and very importantly, it needs to be perceived as being so. It needs to be Internet savvy. It needs to be open-sourced. It needs to allow input from the citizens in order to be accountable to the citizens. It needs to be responsive.

I will close with borrowing a notion from Marshall McLuhan: the medium is the message. I'm sure you have thought about this. It's certainly pertinent in today's media. This system is the message here, and as long as we have an archaic, outdated system that promotes this kind of division in our society, we will have these polar arguments, with very poor representation and disenfranchisement. We need to change the system if we want to—

●(1945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Charles.

Mr. David Charles (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm part of that boatload of SGI people who came down today to support our member and to present our views on proportional representation.

I was also a part of the crew that met you this morning at the airport. We're delighted to see you.

I didn't expect to be able to get on the list today, so I came somewhat unprepared, but I want to share with you my views that we need proportional representation. It's going to be up to you to sort out the best that you can do, and I believe you can do it. I want to thank you for all the hard work that you're doing. It can't be easy. Every day must be Groundhog Day for you.

What I'm about to say may also sound like a groundhog because we have had many people say much of what I would like to share with you. I think you've all heard it before.

I do want to make it clear that I do not favour a referendum. Referendums were not used for some of the most important things that Canadians have done. One of them was going to war. Now, they did try a plebiscite to see if we should have conscription. However, when so many thousands of Canadians lost their lives and we sent them off without a referendum, I think we have to think about that.

The second thing I'd like to do is to comment on the Honourable John Duncan's point of view that we should have—I'm searching here for words. I'm sorry. We really need to have a situation where the member of Parliament is the one who is doing all of that work to represent their constituents. You all do a pretty good job of that. I know you were talking about that earlier. We forget, I think, sometimes—and I think Tony Hodgson brought this up—that we have a situation in Parliament where most parties are whipped, so your representation is compromised.

Thank you for what you're doing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead Mr. Layne.

Mr. Larry Layne (As an Individual): Thank you, sir. I would like to thank all of you for hosting a meeting like this.

Earlier, we heard that the provincial citizens' assembly met in a circular arena in Vancouver where all felt their voices were equal. The existing federal election system, first past the post, does not make representation equal to votes cast.

Earlier, we heard a concern raised over the logistics for an MP of a larger rural riding. Ms. May has for the last five years hosted twice a year town halls in at least eight localities. That includes five separate islands. Eighty town halls. It can be done.

Earlier, we heard of a tradition which for 150 years has been voiced as a reason not to change. Many old European countries have proportional voting. You can try proportional voting and refine it for

the next three elections and then call for a vote on a ballot on the third election.

Someone tonight spoke about how long it would take to do one of these proportional votes, but voting electronically would get the results automatically. It's true, though, that not everybody has a computer.

I would like to suggest that no party name appear by the candidates' names on the ballot.

●(1950)

The Chair: Interestingly, I believe that was the case until 1972.

[*Translation*]

I was told it might be earlier, until 1968.

We can discuss this later.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Holloway.

Mr. Gregory Holloway (As an Individual): Thank you.

It's perfectly clear and has been since long before this meeting that there's an enormous passion and wish to move to some kind of proportional representation system. We all observed the struggles that we have listened to today, trying to make things work with MMP and STV. I want to try to think outside the box about some simple, cost-effective alternatives. Generically, the name is weighted voting. Now that can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people and I have to try to be brief. I'd like to explain background, motivation, and so on, but there isn't time. I'm just going to give one example.

I go to the poll and I get a ballot. The ballot contains a list of candidates and asks a simple question: Which one do you like? Now I would ask a second question, which you can consider or not, as you like, which is: Here's a list of parties; which party do you feel represents your point of view? I go to that poll and I see a candidate's name whom I've always admired, Jane Doe. She happens to be affiliated with the purple party, but that doesn't especially matter to me, because maybe I'm a pretty simple-minded voter. I'm for Jane Doe so I'll vote for Jane Doe. Let's suppose the rest of the people in my riding happen to agree and Jane sweeps the riding with 40,000 votes. Okay. A computer records that number of 40,000 and puts it into a little slot.

At the same time, other candidates have not succeeded, and in other ridings other purple candidates have not succeeded. Where another purple candidate has been defeated, or where someone else who didn't get the candidate they wanted happens to say, "I kind of like that purple party", we gather up the weight of purple party votes and store that number away. We bring back the total number of votes that have been defeated in their selection of a candidate but have said "Gee, I kind of like this purple stuff", and we divvy that out among the elected members of the purple party. Jane Doe, who got 40,000 votes, gets another 30,000 and goes to Parliament with 70,000 votes.

The Chair: We have corresponded. Did we not correspond?

Mr. Gregory Holloway: We did correspond a little. I am very pleased to say that you heard something like this—

The Chair: We did, yes, in Joliette, on Friday.

Mr. Gregory Holloway: —but with this important difference of not just counting up members, and there were questions.

I'll tell you what I'll do. I won't say anything more about this. I would like to, if I have any seconds remaining, sir.

The Chair: We are beyond the limit, actually.

Mr. Gregory Holloway: All right. Then let me stop here.

The Chair: Do you have a presentation? Do you have something on paper?

Mr. Gregory Holloway: Yes, sure.

The Chair: If you give it to us, we'll—

Mr. Gregory Holloway: Yes. I'll give it to the women back here.

The Chair: Yes.

You are the second person who has raised that possibility.

Mr. Gregory Holloway: Yes. There are ways.

The Chair: Essentially, if I understand it correctly, and I'll be corrected by my colleagues, you would have the same number of MPs in the House, but if the popular vote distribution didn't reflect the share of seats a party had in the House—let's say their share of seats was less; let's say they had 30% of the seats in the House but 40% of the vote—the individual vote of MPs would be worth a little more than one, so that when people voted—

Mr. Gregory Holloway: Possibly substantially more—

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Mackie, go ahead.

Mr. Robert Mackie (As an Individual): Thank you. My name is Bob MacKie. Years ago when there were Progressive Conservatives, I was president of the Langley—Abbotsford Riding Association. I understand the Conservatives not wanting a majoritarian voting system that would appear to favour the Liberals. Personally, I'm lucky. I voted for and got a great representative, Elizabeth May.

In 2008, almost a million Canadians voted for a Green Party representative. Not one of them got that representative. In our last federal election, for all parties, that was true for nine million Canadians.

There was a time in Langley—Abbotsford when you could have elected a mailbox if it was a Progressive Conservative candidate. This is not good representation.

I am vice-president of Fair Voting BC, and I believe that in a representative democracy the government has a duty and an obligation to all Canadian voters to ensure fair and equal representation.

Duverger's law in political science states that majoritarian voting systems drive us toward a two party system, which I particularly fear as I watch the U.S. election.

Canadians cannot honestly be expected to know the impact of changing the voting system, and they should not be asked to make that decision without knowing.

A simple practical solution is to try out a made-in-Canada proportional representation solution, such as the rural-urban PR voting model. We could then have a referendum, or better, do a \$1-million survey and save \$299 million.

I'll finish with a passage from Arend Lijphart's book *Patterns of Democracy*, which has particular meaning for me because I grew up in Lachine, Quebec, and I vividly remember how close we came in 1995 to having Quebec separate from Canada.

In the most deeply divided societies...majority rule spells majority dictatorship and civil strife rather than democracy. What such societies need is a democratic regime that emphasizes consensus instead of opposition, that includes rather than excludes, and that tries to maximize the size of the ruling majority instead of being satisfied with a bare majority: consensus democracy.

Consensus democracies have multi-party systems and proportional electoral systems.

To the committee, I will say that I know your work has been exhausting. I hope you will all be in our history books or Wikipedia.

The Chair: Thank you.

I don't see Mr. Mitchell.

A voice: He had to catch the ferry back to Salt Spring Island.

• (1955)

The Chair: Okay.

We have Ms. Sharon Gallagher and Mr. James Gallagher. Go ahead, Ms. Gallagher.

Ms. Sharon Gallagher (As an Individual): I guess I'm speaking in a different direction. I personally don't feel like my vote never counted. I happen to be in a riding in which my vote didn't count for the MP. My MP did not represent the party. My vote had the same chance of counting as anyone else's, and I feel that my riding has spoken, and I am part of that team and that community. I'm not going to sit on the couch and pout because I didn't get the one I wanted. I had the opportunity to bang on doors, rally support. I don't think of sitting back and saying, "You have to choose what I want or I'm not represented." In fact, I didn't know that my vote didn't count until a bunch of groups starting telling me my vote didn't count. I'm really trying to understand this. I've done a lot of work on this, and I still think the old system works just fine. It promotes people getting involved and getting off their seats, and convincing people, and becoming aware of the issues.

I think that the mandate of this committee is just to come up with a viable alternative to first past the post versus...I don't think it is necessarily to come up with a solution.... "Viable" is the word I'm saying. What if you can't find a viable solution? Do you have the option of saying, "Sorry, there isn't a viable solution"? What we have is good.

I realize that you're going to have to come to a consensus, and I'm not exactly sure.... I worked in the government my whole career. I understand algorithms. I understand consensus. I have been on big committees and sometimes the solution isn't the best solution; it's a watered-down compromise. I urge you to stand for what you believe in your heart and do the right thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. James Gallagher.

● (2000)

Mr. James Gallagher (As an Individual): Yes, I'm the other half. As a retired school teacher I'm here to—surprise, surprise—be educated. To be educated requires a good listening ear, and that has taken place tonight. I appreciate the panel here for your work, but also for coming together to put this meeting together tonight.

As a Canadian born in Canada, and as a status first nation, I appreciate the opportunity to even vote on these kinds of decisions. It's complicated, very complicated. I would like to see it simplified immensely so that the average person could understand what they are voting for in a referendum, and as a result we would have excellent information from the voting public, from the Canadian citizens, as to which direction to follow.

Overall, I give thanks to this particular country. My wife and I have travelled to various countries, to India, Africa, Israel, and other places, and every time we come back we are almost in tears to come back to Canada. We appreciate this country so much. I just ask that we not mess with it. From a standpoint of being thoroughly educated—as an educator, I can say that—we need to know what we are voting for.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacKinnon, the floor is yours.

Mr. Colin MacKinnon (As an Individual): It's nice to see you all here in Victoria so we can come and present things and talk.

I'm a Canadian and New Zealand dual citizen. I've spent quite a bit of time in New Zealand, in fact the last two MMP elections. I've also studied political science, and I understand the German system. I want to make a good case for you to consider MMP. I feel that it has been sidetracked today by STV, and I feel that a lot is lost by not getting into MMP and that is that second vote.

The first vote...and that's why the Germans brought this system in. They wanted to have a local vote with a proportional system. That local vote is important, and you're getting that, but let's not put too much importance on it, because that second vote is the one that gets you power. There are constituencies that are not land-based constituencies over the whole country, whether they climate change, whether they be LGBT, whether they be handicapped people.... The

Greens in New Zealand have a handicapped person in Parliament. She is part of a list. She is about eighth on the list.

Consequently, you'd have good interests, and you don't just have interests that are coming from background people. They have town halls. All the list MPs have town halls.

All I want to say is, why did the New Zealanders in 2011 reaffirm MMP after 15 years? It was because they feel they have so much more power over their politicians.

I think that's what we need. I hope you look at my papers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Ned Taylor (As an Individual): Hi. My name is Ned. I'm 17, and I was born and raised here in Victoria.

I speak to you today to raise awareness for the unfair voting age we have here in Canada. Our voting age is unfair simply because 16- and 17-year-olds are fully capable of voting. In our laws we recognize that 16-year-olds are capable to drive, and 17-year-olds are capable to be sent to an adult prison and join the military, yet our laws don't recognize that both 16- and 17-year-olds are fully capable of voting. This is not fair.

If I, as a 17-year-old, can join the military, fight, and die for my country, but I can't vote who's running my country, there is clearly a problem there.

I say to all members on this committee, please, when you're talking about electoral reform, talk about the voting age. I want to personally thank Elizabeth for doing exactly that.

As I close, I want to say a quick word to the Conservatives. Canadians don't want a referendum. We had one, and it was called the 2015 election, so please stop playing political games.

Thank you.

● (2005)

The Chair: Mr. Mora, go ahead.

Mr. Pedro Mora (As an Individual): To update the electoral system, which is the subject of the discussion tonight, we must consider at least two related perspectives. First, what are we choosing? Second, how are we choosing whatever we're choosing?

The “what” has been, for almost 150 years, limited to which political leader we choose. That’s called elections. The “what” has not been on specific issues, like free trade agreements, military interventions in foreign countries, support for Israel, and other relevant issues. We the people don’t have access to participate in that decision-making. Very often we find that governments make decisions that are not exactly or not even close to what the majority of Canadians want. Several polls attested to that during our intervention in Afghanistan. People said they didn’t want to send our soldiers there to fight. The government went on and did it anyway.

How we make choices is the procedure, the rules of the game, the arbitrary consensus of a majority. What makes a majority? Is it 60%? Is it first past the post with 20%? That is one side.

The other side is how we vote on issues. When we Canadians realize what the issue is when we vote, when we realize that this is far more important than which political representatives we elect, then and only then will we be on our way to direct democracy. We will then be busy legislating our own rules rather than just debating how to give our power away to politicians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Bradbury.

Mr. John Bradbury (As an Individual): In 2013, Mr. Trudeau was quoted in the *National Post* as saying, “I do not support proportional representation because I believe deeply that every member of Parliament should represent actual Canadians and Canadian communities, not just political parties.” He continues to hold this view.

The problem is that the only alternative to first past the post or proportional representation is ranked balloting. Mr. Broadbent has roundly criticized this position this year saying, “Simply put, ranked ballots in a federal election would be like First Past the Post on steroids—even larger false majorities, results even more outrageously torqued and even more unrepresentative of the popular will”.

According to ThreeHundredEight.com, a non-partisan polling website, the Liberals currently enjoy about 49% support. They project that should an election be called today under first past the post, the Liberals would win 252 seats; under proportional representation, they would win 173 seats; under ranked balloting or alternate voting, they would win 279 seats.

We’ve also been told that suggestions arising from this committee are only suggestions, and that the government is under no obligation to implement them. Mr. Trudeau might just as well have told us we could vote for any party we like, as long as it’s Liberal. The only way Canadians can be sure of getting the electoral system they truly want and not some Trojan Horse disguised as representative electoral reform is to have a referendum.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bradbury.

Mr. Skinner.

●(2010)

Mr. Derek Skinner (As an Individual): Good evening. My name is Derek Skinner.

I want to talk to the legitimacy of the present first-past-the-post system.

I came to this country in the 1950s, and over the past 60 years I’ve watched it degenerate from a magnificent country of personal opportunity to a third-rate resource for adjacent superpowers. This is being facilitated by our outdated, British, first-past-the-post electoral system which enables either a Conservative or a Liberal government, if they have a majority, to facilitate the so-called new world order on a step-by-step basis. In recent times this has led to the Liberal Trudeau senior, in 1974, handing control of Canadian monetary supply over to a cartel of international banks; followed by Conservative Mulroney bringing in the first free trade agreement; followed by the Liberal Chrétien endorsing the North American Free Trade Agreement, which floated the first investor protection clauses. Most recently, we had the Conservative Harper doing his best to implement the North American union under a corporate umbrella. This Tweedledum and Tweedledee charade has to stop, and it must be replaced by a genuine democratic process that includes different voices representative of the number of votes cast.

Thankfully, Mr. Trudeau junior, with his Liberal majority, has responded to the growing public concern by promising to implement a reform to our electoral process. We believe this should be a system of proportional representation. We urge Mr. Trudeau to not fail in his promise to the Canadian public so that we can join the majority of nations that work well with a system of proportional representation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. White, please.

Ms. Alexis White (As an Individual): Thanks, everyone, for being here today. We really appreciate having the opportunity to speak to you directly.

I have to agree with one of the experts who spoke today and said that the referendum is not the way to achieve electoral reform, but quite the contrary. After following the ER committee meetings over several months, it's become quite clear to me that Canadians really need a more democratic consensus electoral system like proportional representation just to make sure that when we vote it will count and that at least our voices will be heard. With the present system that's not happening. We end up massively protesting different things that are happening, and even then we're ignored.

We really feel confident that you here today will be well educated and well equipped to make a really sensible and sound recommendation for all Canadians. We're counting on you to do that.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is Sean Murray here? He's not here, okay.

Ms. Cooley, please.

Ms. Nancy Cooley (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

I am a supporter of a proportional system. I'm also a strong believer in representative democracy.

I think this committee and the government has the authority and the mandate to change the electoral system, and I do not think that a referendum is required to change the system.

I think if you want legitimacy for a change in the system, it would be extremely wise to have a referendum on the system after two elections. The reason I say two is that you have the first election to get the bugs out of whatever the new system is, and you have the second election to have a smooth election. Then people can vote in a referendum with clear understanding and knowledge, and most importantly, experience of the system. I think asking people to vote in a referendum on a system that they don't have any experience with is simply not productive.

The second point I would like to address, which I have not heard raised here tonight, is the question of the percentage of national vote or regional vote that would be required to top up or create elected representatives off a list.

As somebody who has a political science background, one of the things that worries me the most about straight proportional systems is that they can, in a lot of circumstances, give weight to extreme views and very small parties far in excess of their numbers and their representation in the country.

I would like to strongly advise you to look at a base of 10% to 12% as the minimum to be considered. I recognize that is high according to some systems, and I know some people think it's an anti-Green suggestion. That is certainly not my perspective. I happen to be in Ms. May's riding and consider myself extremely blessed to have her as my MP.

I think if you designed a system that removed the need for strategic voting, then you would see a Green Party vote well above that, or at least at that 10% to 12%. I don't think it's a barrier to any of the parties that are running today.

I have two other quick points.

I would like to underline Mr. Duncan's concern about the size of rural ridings. As somebody who has lived in two rural ridings, it is a major issue. I'm sure Mr. Cullen is well aware of the fact that at least in interior British Columbia there are many times in winter when you literally cannot move around in a riding.

My last quick point is that I'm terrified of electronic voting. There is no secure electronic system. If you want to go to something more convenient, please consider a mail-in ballot.

Thank you very much.

● (2015)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Murray, go ahead.

Mr. Sean Murray (As an Individual): I have three things to say.

The first thing is that I'll agree with the young man before that the voting age should be lowered to 17 for the same reasons. For me, 17, and for 16, maybe we'll think about that later.

The second thing I want to emphasize and make sure of is that no matter what change we make, if you win your seat in your riding, you keep it. You won't be arbitrarily displaced by some mechanism.

The third thing is that, ideally, if the Green Party has support from 2% of Canadians, it should have 2% of the seats in Parliament. We need to create some sort of handicapping mechanism to make that work somehow. The details would have to be worked out. If 2% of the population votes for the Green Party, then 2% of the MPs should be Green.

That's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Murray.

Mr. Black—

A voice: Mr. Chairman, on a point of order, I was advised by my member of Parliament to come here this evening, early, to get on the list to speak. This list was compiled in the afternoon and was probably long before 6:45 this evening. I would like that to be taken into consideration if there are people who don't show. Maybe they can get together with the clerk....

The Chair: What's your name, sir?

A voice: Cliff Plumpton.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Black, and then Mr. Slanina.

A voice: You didn't say when the list was cut off.

The Chair: I'm going to consult and get back to you. Go ahead, sir.

● (2020)

Mr. Francis Black (As an Individual): I want to say a couple of different things.

One is that I've had the experience of having the candidate I voted for get elected, and then in the very next election having to go and campaign against that very same candidate. That's happened to me a couple of times. That's when I quit. I no longer belong to any political parties, because I've just given up on being betrayed.

I don't see how any electoral change is going to change that, but I still favour some electoral change. I like the mixed proportional representation system myself. That's what I would support.

One thing I will say about the current system is that it is honest. When I was a member of a political party, I would do things like volunteer as a scrutineer. I've done it several times for no pay and no benefits at all. It was an interesting experience. I found that the members of other political parties were professional. We worked together. We even did the lists for each other, though we were miles apart, supposedly. We took it as a service to democracy, and I think that's an important thing.

One of the things I'm very concerned about as a former scrutineer is voting machines. Some of the systems that you're proposing involve the use of voting machines. As we saw in 2000 in the United States, and again in 2004, some very hinky things can happen with voting machines, and some very bad people can get elected. Therefore, I'm very concerned about that.

I support a post-referendum. I think that is a very good idea. It's an idea that I've heard here, and I think it would add legitimacy to it. I don't think that this is so complicated an issue that a pre-referendum is necessary, but a post-referendum would be a really good idea.

The other thing I would like to ask you to consider is a negative option ballot. A negative option ballot will work in any electoral system, and it's based on my own personal experience of not really being happy with some of the promises and things that politicians are saying. There's often a candidate that I really don't want to see get elected, and I would really like to ask the returning officer for a negative option vote, which would take away a vote.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Black, I think that's a great way to end. You can't do better than that, sir.

Mr. Slanina, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Samuel Slanina (As an Individual): Hi there. I really appreciate having a chance to speak to my members of Parliament.

I would like to speak from personal experience. For the past 10 years or so, I've felt very betrayed by our system, and at times I've felt like giving up.

Do we live in a democracy or has our democracy been taken over by a dictator?

I'm really heartened to see that even though the current Liberal government has the same type of false majority the previous government had, at least there is effort to do what you promised us when you were voted in. I really appreciate that.

I felt very sad when my young daughter, who is in her twenties, went to vote for the first time. I think it was in the election before last. She was all gung-ho. We're in Saanich, and she was really happy that she was going to be able to vote for Elizabeth May. Unfortunately, we were a couple of blocks outside of the riding, and so she wasn't able to.

I had to explain to her that if she wanted to vote for these types of principles, she would have to have to vote strategically, because we have to make sure that the votes are on the side of the issues we're interested in, such as the environment, and so on. We're not going to get that if the vote is split three ways, where 60% of us want something, but the guy with 38% gets in despite the fact that the majority of the people want what the two other groups want.

I think that speaks very much to the issue of minority governments. A lot of people pooh-pooh them, but I think some great things have happened in Canada as a result, like our Canada Health Act, and as Nathan Cullen referred to earlier, our social safety net, and so on. A lot of really wonderful things can happen in a democracy when we get much more collaboration, and people are forced to do that when they have minorities rather than majorities. I think this is a good thing for Canada, and it might be facilitated by proportional representation. Lots of the countries that have this and indeed most advanced democracies like it.

I really like the idea of not having a referendum until we are a couple of times in, so that people have a chance to experience it. In my experience talking to people, most of them have no clue. When I ask people if they saw the leaders debate the previous day, they say that they were too busy watching hockey. Unfortunately, that's the level that most people are at.

I'm really grateful, and I hope that you do have multi-party support for doing what you're doing and reforming the—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Samuel Slanina: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Hunter Lastiwka, go ahead.

● (2025)

Mr. Hunter Lastiwka (As an Individual): Hello, committee.

How are you guys?

The Chair: Good.

Mr. Hunter Lastiwka: My name is Hunter Lastiwka. I'm here at the young age of 15. I go to Stelly's Secondary School out here on the peninsula. I know Ms. May very well.

Over the past few months, I've been working on a project that is trying to engage, empower, and educate youth from grades 9 to grade 12, so that as they come into voting age, whether that is 18 or 17 or 16 going into the future, they are prepared and understand what's going on. Along this process, I have come into PR and explored other options, and I started connecting it to youth nowadays and how the youth are going to affect our voting system into the future.

Going up to my peers in high school, as well as friends who have graduated already and are not attending post-secondary, and friends who are attending post-secondary, I explained how PR would work or how first past the post works, and other different systems. Every single one of them has said that they would vote 100% under proportional representation. They feel that their vote would count most under proportional representation, any type of proportional representation. This stood out to me a lot, and I figured it would stand out to you a lot.

Overall, I would like to point out that I would like youth as well as young voters in Canada to have their opinions heard and greatly considered through this process.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Roger Allen, the floor is yours.

Mr. Roger Allen (As an Individual): I speak against first past the post because this system is fundamentally unfair. Here are some reasons.

A vote of 40% can and often does produce 100% of the power. A vote in one riding, a swing riding, counts far more than a vote in a safe riding. Overall voter turnout is reduced under first past the post because voters in safe ridings feel that their vote is wasted regardless of who they vote for. Psychological factors often play a role in first past the post because voters may favour a minor party but vote strategically for a viable major party that represents the best chance of preventing the election of a party they oppose.

Eventually, with first past the post, Canada will evolve into a U.S.-style, two party state with its attendant faults.

Smaller parties are severely discriminated against in first past the post since voters feel voting for a minor party is a wasted vote. For example, is it really fair that a party can get 10% of the vote and less than 1% of representation in Ottawa? Furthermore, remember that under any system other than first past the post, that minor party would probably get far more votes.

I speak now in favour of any system other than first past the post, although my personal preference is for MMP. Obviously, not all people can be satisfied after an election, but surely it is clear that proportional representation, for example, satisfies far more voters than first past the post. The criticism that a system other than first past the post tends to result in minority governments with less power is misplaced. If that is the case, then I say good.

What most voters want is a government that will or has to listen to other points of view and come to a consensus. After all, nobody wants a Conservative, a Liberal, an NDP, or Green Party policy all the time. With proportional representation, there are checks and

balances, unlike in first past the post where a blank cheque is more or less issued.

Far more countries have a system other than first past the post and have a much higher voter turnout.

Thank you very much.

• (2030)

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Scott.

Mr. Donald Scott (As an Individual): Thanks very much. I'll get right to it.

One of the things I'm interested in is the effectiveness of government and how government can make decisions. One of the criticisms that people have of PR systems is that it's more complex, that it takes too long to make decisions. Yet that doesn't bear out in fact. When it comes to tough decisions—and I'll take climate change as an example—not one first-past-the-post country has made any progress. That's where all the deniers are. They've gone backwards instead of forward.

The only nations that have really made progress are the European nations that are under PR systems, and that's because you have more than two voices. You have a multiple of voices and you have to give them consideration. Most voices gain credibility in the general public so the government can move forward.

On the other hand, when it comes to war, who are the initiators? U.S., U.K., latterly Canada, France as a majoritarian system, and Australia is always jumping in right behind the U.S.—all these are first-past-the-post systems. I think that tells us an awful lot about the strengths of a broader-based system than first past the post.

With respect to the referendum, no referendum is required. Look at your Constitution. The parties are not even mentioned in the Constitution. My experience with referendums goes back to the French language issue in Manitoba, where I was an MLA at the time. We had just passed a law to be able to bring in the campaign's referendums. What was the first thing issued? Some 75% of Manitobans voted to take away French language rights. These constitutional rights were reaffirmed shortly thereafter by the courts. That's the ugliness. Going through that was one of the ugliest experiences of my life.

We all like to think if we get elected that they're voting for us, but an Ipsos poll of a couple of years ago found 74% of the people voting for the party with 24% of the candidates.

I would propose a mixed member proportional system, but I think we need a cut-off on the lists, and I would suggest a five- or six-point cut-off.

The Chair: Okay, that sounds good.

Mr. Donald Scott: I would just ask you to look back to 1991 and 1997, where you'll find two *Globe and Mail* editorials supporting the move towards proportional representation.

The Chair: That's interesting. I didn't know that. Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Barker.

Mr. Martin Barker (As an Individual): Thank you for hearing me speak. Just a little disclaimer: I'm Martin Barker, and I was the candidate for the Conservative Party in Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. I would first like to put to rest a little fallacy. I did not get elected, but I still feel represented by Mr. Alistair MacGregor. Maybe he doesn't hold my views, but I have no problem debating him and I have no qualms about going to him with problems.

On that note, you are represented regardless of the percentage of people. I was a baby voter and not really engaged at all at the time of the Charlottetown accord, and that was a referendum. At that time, I had no idea about politics, but I became engaged in the referendum. I contacted the government to find out more information, and they sent me a little video, a little fluff piece. I was so angry, and when I looked further into it I became angry about everything. I voted against the Charlottetown agreement, but that referendum engaged me in politics. It made me the kind of pseudo-politician I am today.

I think about our government in Canada for 150 years. I know some people disagree, but it has been growing. We've overcome some great problems and issues and the country continues to get better, regardless of who's in power. I think we should take great care about deciding to change our system. It's very easy to stuff the room with partisans. That's not reaching the people of this country.

If we want to engage the people of the country, Canadians, we should have a true debate, one that's in the papers, one that's maybe myself and other politicians discussing what's right and what's happening. Canadians will be engaged. We want greater engagement in Canada, so let's have a referendum.

I'm hearing a lot about mixed proportional, and I don't begrudge the discussion on voter reform. I think it's great. I personally support the system we have now. But if we're going to have legitimate

change, it must be with a referendum. I think Canadians deserve to have a voice and a proper say in the future.

• (2035)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Shari Lukens.

Ms. Shari Lukens (As an Individual): Thank you.

Coincidentally, I also was a candidate in the last federal election, a woman. I stood for what I believed in. I was the Conservative candidate for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke. Thank you for being here.

There is always a winner and a loser, and it's just how you get there. Having been a competitive figure skater for 30 years of my life, it was the person with the most points that won the trophy, and it's still that way today.

Regardless of your choice of voting system, please exercise democracy and hold a referendum. Friends with whom I've spoken regarding changes to our electoral system for the most part are not aware of these meetings. Canadians care about having a voice in this process, and many would like to see a referendum on the issue of electoral reform.

Canada is one of the most respected democracies in the world, so my question is, if the government truly cares and respects what Canadians think, why is it looking to change the way we vote without giving Canadians a say through a referendum?

People talk about democracy. Democracy is having a referendum and allowing Canadians that are eligible to vote to vote on what system they believe is best for them.

I find it very concerning that our Parliament, which has 338 seats, and a majority Liberal government which was elected with less than 40% of the vote, is wanting to sole source the decision. This means that because the Liberals have a majority government, they have enough seats, and therefore votes, to pass whatever voting system they want regardless of what the majority of Canadians want.

In the most recent Ipsos poll, 55% of Canadians approached about electoral reform wanted a referendum. They want a say in how they would elect their next MP. They do not want elected MPs, people in power, telling them how they are going to vote. If the government is truly listening to Canadians, it knows Canadians want a say and they want a referendum.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Shari Lukens: Full disclosure, I'm from Alberta, and we were so happy when the Canadian Wheat Board went down.

The Chair: That's a subject for another town hall.

Ms. Patricia Armitage.

Ms. Patricia Armitage (As an Individual): I'm grateful to speak to you directly on this issue. It's one that's been troubling me for a long time.

I studied political science at university many years ago, and I am also a refugee from Alberta. I spent many elections in Alberta being frustrated because no matter which party I seemed to vote for, I always seemed to vote for the wrong one. I have voted for pretty much every party. I vote for a member, not the party so much, so to me it's really important.

Proportional representation, to me, is our opportunity to actually make people feel like their voices are going to be heard in Parliament. As much as you can say that if I were a Conservative and there was a Conservative government in Ottawa, but I didn't have representation here, that doesn't make me feel any better because my issues here are very different from what they were when I was in Alberta. Therefore, regional representation to me is extremely important. We need to have a voice at the regional level for people of many different parties, not just one.

That's the reason I want proportional representation, and despite what Ms. Lukens says, I'm not convinced that people necessarily want a referendum, but I would be prepared to go for a referendum after the fact. Give it a chance for two or three elections and then ask the people whether they're content with the situation as it is. If you ask them blind and say you want to change the system for something else, if they don't really understand it, they're going to run back to what they know. I think that would be very discouraging.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll hear from Katherine Armitage.

Ms. Katherine Armitage (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm also a political refugee from Edmonton, Alberta. I'm a relative newcomer to British Columbia. I came here to finish my political science degree, and I take courses from Dennis Pilon, who I'm sure has appeared before this committee. I'd like to share a bit of a story with you guys.

In 2002 we had a provincial election. This was during the Klein years, so I'm sure I don't need to say how it all went down. During the election, Edmonton voted almost completely for the Liberals. My MLA was Conservative and he was voted out. The next day he went on a radio show and said that we in Edmonton had voted for the wrong party. He said that we had voted for a party that was not going to be represented because in the legislative assembly the Conservatives were forming the government, and we should have voted Conservative to get our positions known. We were told we were voting wrong.

This is what first past the post does to us, because with regionalization, we don't get our say. We have governments that are completely incapable of working with each other. It fractures communities, and it fractures cities.

I want proportional representation of some kind, and I don't care how it is. We do not need a referendum. And I'd love to see 16-year-olds be able to vote.

Thank you.

• (2040)

The Chair: Thank you.

I didn't see Georgina Kirkman. I assume she's not here.

It's Suzanne Wilkinson and John Amon. Is Suzanne here?

Okay, Mr. Amon.

Mr. John Amon (As an Individual): Any proposal to change Canada's current electoral system must be endorsed by the majority of Canadians before it's implemented. The only democratic way to enable Canadians to express their preference is through a referendum, and that includes the option of maintaining the status quo.

Canadians must be informed about how, under any proposed alternative voting system, electoral districts would be redrawn, ballots would be counted, what the minimum voting percentage threshold would be in order to be elected, how many candidates might run in each riding, and how local representation and accountability would be maintained.

The word "reform" implies making things better. It may very well be that the majority of Canadians are satisfied with the current system and see no need for improvement. That has certainly been the message when at least provinces proposed reforms, which were subsequently rejected by their citizens through a referendum, including in B.C. Although proponents of STV champion STV and point out the first referendum as an indication of full support, the reality is that in the second referendum, when the citizenry was well informed, over 60% of the people voted against it.

My personal preference is to maintain our current electoral system. It has served us well for over 100 years and most often has provided the stability and predictability of majority governments, which is a major strength of our political system.

My second choice would be a system that would be a runoff election or a preferential ballot. Proportional representation would be my last choice.

Proponents of proportional representation perpetuate the myth that any vote that is not for an elected candidate is a wasted vote. That's simply not the case. I have voted in every municipal, provincial, and federal election since achieving the age of majority. I have voted for members of the NDP, the Progressive Conservatives, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Party. Some of these candidates were elected and some were not, and not once did I feel that my vote had been wasted.

The reality is that democracy is about majority rule while respecting the rights of the minorities, and our current system does that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. John Amon: May I just make one brief comment?

The Chair: Yes, but we're pushing it.

Mr. John Amon: It disturbs me in observing the audience that the only people who have been derided through boos or comments are people who have taken the view opposing theirs, and I would expect better from the people of Victoria and the islands.

The Chair: Thank you.

Kathleen Gibson.

● (2045)

Ms. Kathleen Gibson (As an Individual): Thank you so much for being here and thank you for being proportional.

I'm in favour of a proportional representation system that I trust you to come up with for Canada that takes our geography into account, and a referendum after the fact, probably after two election cycles.

I want to make a couple of points.

We've heard very little tonight about the important work that people in government do on the legislative and policy side. There has been a lot of talk about constituency work. What's really interesting is—I know because I'm a policy wonk—a lot of work is done in committee. Well, here you are as a proportional committee. Bless your hearts. I hope it's working well. What a difference it would make in our government if all committee work was done with a proportional blend.

The issues that confront all of us nationally as government and as people are very significant and very large. I would hope that if a PR system delivers a balanced committee approach to legislation and policy, that, for instance, government might be able to push back on things like the trade agreements, where friends of some parties have put the arm on government. I would hope you would have the collective will and power to push back.

I've been to three meetings, and I went to one of the meetings that the minister was hosting. She has a slightly wider scope, I think, than you do. She's talking about possibly ranking those five principles that you're going to use to judge the validity of the system you proposed. I think it's a terrible idea to have five principles as your guidepost, and for anyone to suggest ranking them. Could you maybe have a little chat with her, and ensure that doesn't happen?

We thank you for your work. We're watching. We're going to read your report when it comes out in December. We know the moment of truth will be when it goes to cabinet, and we're going to follow it every step of the way.

The Chair: Thank you.

We hadn't heard about the ranking of principles. We'll certainly look into it.

Madam Natasha Grimard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Natasha Grimard (As an Individual): Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

The Chair: Good evening, Ms. Grimard.

Ms. Natasha Grimard: My name is Natasha Grimard. I am a student at Pearson College. Our group is made up of several students from across Canada. Tonight there are students from Quebec, Alberta, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. There are students at the college from every province in the country. Tonight I am speaking on their behalf.

We do not agree on many things in politics. However, there is one thing that we do agree on, and that's the fact that we don't want a referendum on this issue. We believe a referendum, especially before trying a different voting system, would be a waste of money and would set a bad precedent, frankly. We think people would be less interested in trying a new system, since they would have a poorer understanding of it.

This stems mainly from the fact that very few people, especially very few young people, actually feel included in politics. Ultimately, I don't believe and we don't believe that a referendum would help the cause in that regard.

Some voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: You may continue.

Ms. Natasha Grimard: I will continue my remarks on that.

[*English*]

I'm going to put a question to the audience.

How many of you voted in the last election? Interesting.

How many of you are for a change in the system?

[*Translation*]

You have before you a group of people who take part in Canadian politics.

What are you going to do to include people, especially young people, who don't feel included right now?

Thank you.

The Chair: Give my regards to Désirée McGraw. I know her well.

[*English*]

Mr. Jordan Reichert.

● (2050)

Mr. Jordan Reichert (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm speaking on behalf of the Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada.

I am urging you to move towards a proportional representation system because to me and to many people, the measure of a democracy is in its inclusivity. Right now, animals are sorely excluded from the democratic process. I'm not saying that I want to give animals the vote. I don't trust my cat or dog with that. However, I do want to empower MPs to represent their interests. This is about more than just proportional representation; this is about proportional interest in how people think and feel about animals in our society.

If I ask people here if they thought we should strengthen protections for animals, how many people would put up their hands? Quite a few, probably the majority. But right now, as it stands, with the first-past-the-post system, when a government has a majority, as they do, and with lobby groups having the power that they do, their power can influence people to say, "Well, sure, if I ask most people if they think we should have stronger laws or make it easier to prosecute people who are cruel to animals, they would say that yes, of course, why wouldn't they want that?" Yet there are lobby groups that have the power to influence government beyond the interests of the people, and that's not right. We need to work on changing that.

The Netherlands, Australia, Portugal, and Germany all have animal parties elected to their Parliament. There's no reason we can't do the same here because, with the current issues that face us environmentally, social justice issues, health care issues, and economic issues, if we do not include animals in the way we construct and consider our policy, then we will all bear the consequences collectively.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Wolf.

Mr. Harald Wolf (As an Individual): Good evening.

The disadvantage of coming down the line is that I have to keep my two speeches in my pocket.

You don't want to be praised for being here, although we wanted to do that, so I'm going to turn the table a little bit and maybe challenge you a bit.

I think one of the things that's become evident in the room is that part of the problem—it's not just the electoral system—is we're trying to strengthen democracy, and part of the problem with democracy is the overbearing influence of the parties. If you guys can carry forward this proportional representation and make your decision based on the information you receive, make the decision based on the experts that have come forward and the public that has come forward rather than voting your party line, then I think you will be able to take this forward, take this back to Parliament, and be able to implement it legitimately without going to a referendum.

If we go to a referendum, it will be back into the dirty politics of electioneering, where we bring in fearmongering, who has the most money, and who has the best election machine. We don't need that. We want to put our trust in you and the Parliament that we've already elected.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Etkin, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Jack Etkin (As an Individual): It's always a pleasure to come to events like this where you can hear the public speaking, because that's what democracy is supposed to be all about.

I support proportional representation because I think it'll give us a better country, a better society. We'll have less poverty, less homelessness, and we'll have better health care. We won't have genetically contaminated foods being sold. I think those are the kinds of things that proportional representation will give us.

I just want to mention the idea of a referendum. The weight of supporters of a referendum is the Conservative Party. Given eight years of what Stephen Harper did to this country, including destroying our environment and running the biggest deficit in Canadian history, all of it without a referendum or ever the suggestion of one, it's funny that they should want a referendum on this.

The other big supporters of a referendum are Canada's corporate-owned media. They don't want a referendum, because right now the corporations have so much power with first past the post that the last thing they want is a change. Our media is owned by the Shaw family, the Rogers family, and the Thomson family, Canada's richest family, who owns *The Globe and Mail*, CTV, which is owned by Bell Media, and the CBC, which is controlled by somebody who also doesn't support proportional representation. These are the people who are pushing for a referendum, and we can see where their interest lies.

Thank you all very much.

•(2055)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Coccola.

Mr. James Coccola (As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is James Coccola. I'm a member of the Victoria Labour Council, and I come here today to speak about the position of the Canadian Labour Congress.

We hold the position that it is time to change our voting system, and the system should be proportional representation. First past the post consistently fails to accurately represent the votes cast by Canadians. Our system is outdated and distributes power unfairly. Studies of elections in countries that still use first past the post show that fewer women and candidates from minority backgrounds are elected. We need a system that encourages participation, and that system is proportional representation.

We believe that electoral reform must adhere to three principles: one, no party should be able to get the majority of seats in Parliament without getting the majority of votes; two, any electoral reform must be based on proportional representation; three, any electoral reform must consider the importance of local representation. This position of the Canadian Labour Congress was adopted at a convention by thousands of delegates.

Quickly, I've been told for my entire voting life that my generation, my demographic, doesn't care, that they're not engaged, that they're not representative. I don't agree with that. I know a lot of people my age who are very involved and very engaged.

Consider what we know about voting for a moment. We know that if you go to a poll and cast a ballot, you're more likely to go the next time. Imagine if you go and vote and you realize your vote didn't count. Then maybe you go back again and the same thing happens. Well, you start to get discouraged. As soon as you don't vote in one election, you're less likely to vote in the next election.

While I don't agree that youth are apathetic or they don't care, I can understand why some people don't want to vote. It's because they don't feel that it matters. Change to our voting system would help to alleviate that myth.

I strongly urge this committee to make a very strong recommendation for proportional representation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Merle, go ahead.

Ms. Bronwen Merle (As an Individual): I am Bronwen Merle from Pender Island, and I'm an ardent supporter of PR. I'd like to thank you for your honourable work.

It is no small matter to routinely appropriate the voices of others. There were nine million voices who were silenced in the last federal election alone. First past the post is a rigid and antiquated system, with all of its attendant baggage. Created in a bygone era to serve the narrow interests of the leaders of our parent nation, it frequently yields false majorities.

I do not want my country to continue to complacently shore up falsehoods while simultaneously and perversely deluding ourselves into believing that we are engaging in democracy. We are not.

This weakens us all. A false inflation for the winners, demoralization for the actual majority of voters, it is a form of sanctioned elitism. True democracy values everyone. Let us extend our circle of respect and inclusion, look around at each other and say, "What you think and feel really matters to me. It matters enough that I will willingly transcend party protectionism with the intent to uplift each other into full sovereignty, a sovereignty that can only be honoured by full and honest representation."

I believe this is a moral imperative, a human rights issue, and one that is crucial to the maturation of our nationhood.

There will be a death rattle and birth pains. No system is perfect. However, the moment has arrived. Let us believe in each other enough to jettison our current voting system, a false and cruel one. May we have the courage and compassion to become equal partners in an engaged and liberated citizenry. How lovely, how nutritive, to

cross this new threshold together and reinvigorate our beloved Canada.

Thank you.

• (2100)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Thrift, go ahead.

Mr. Kym Thrift (As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity.

I like to use one analogy to explain my viewpoint. Everybody here has been to school at some point—elementary school, high school, university—so most people are familiar with the grading system that applies there. When I think about the last election, I understand that over 51% of the votes cast did not go toward electing an MP, so over nine million Canadians put their vote in the ballot box, and that vote did not go toward somebody who would represent their political viewpoint. By most grading systems, that's a complete tragedy and a failure, an F grade.

When we look at it in that context and understand that, we might think that if 51% is so bad, maybe that's the only system we have. I don't need to repeat the comments of everybody here, but there are many other alternatives that offer a much better chance at a better electoral system. Personally, I think that proportional representation would result in the votes being translated and represented in a much better way.

I also think that regional representation is another thing that is critical. It is something that people have brought up and that some people who are critical of proportional representation also bring up. I know there are a lot of smart people you're going to hear from, and there are a lot of creative people in this world, so I do not believe that it's beyond this group to come up with a system that is proportional and also has regional representation.

I think it's well within your mandate, and I think it's well within the opportunity and the ability of the group to do that. This is a really important opportunity for you to move forward with an equal, effective, and empowered electoral system.

I think the gentleman who spoke just prior to me at this mike put it really clearly: people want to feel empowered and know that their vote matters. If you remove all the party lines beyond that, I think that's fundamentally what everybody wants when they're thinking about going to the polling station, so please consider that as part of your deliberations.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Brooks, go ahead.

Mr. Catus Brooks (As an Individual): Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here tonight. I just have a short speech to share.

Praiseworthy are we Canadians for upholding those ideal and timeless principles, liberty and equality. With such policies as multiculturalism, we have welcomed the kind stranger and remained unified under one banner. Both nationally and socially, we have found that happy balance between good governance and strong communities.

Proportional representation is but one step in Canada's history of democratic glory. No more should our legislators be divided among adversaries. With Canada's economy going as it is, the last thing we need is parties that make promises for votes, yet once in government, they are impeded by a polarized first-past-the-post system.

With proportional representation, parties take a national rather than a factional stand by working together, whether in coalitions or not. No more cadre catch-all brokerage party politics, where the limited time parties have to complete their policies is compromised to win votes.

The impact of global warming and environmental disasters this summer is alarming, and though voters have expressed their discontent for our current regime and political party system by voting for third and fourth parties, their votes have not translated into enough seats for parties that prioritize environmentalism and effective climate action.

With proportional representation, Canada will become more democratic, engendering a healthy country where more females and minorities participate in democracy, and where a greater percentage of the votes get translated into seats and power in Parliament. Let us channel the frustration that comes from those whose votes don't count. Let us mobilize the masses far and abroad.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would call Ms. Shanjeelin Dwivedi.

Mr. Waldron, go ahead, sir.

• (2105)

Mr. Ken Waldron (As an Individual): Thank you.

Before we consider lowering the age to vote, we might want to look at what we do with it right now. We say it's perfectly all right for 18-year-olds to vote in a federal election, but don't let them vote in the province of B.C. for another year. It's okay to let them join the military, but don't let them have a drink in the province of B.C. for another year or two. If we're going to make a suggestion, we have to be prepared to enforce it and have it have meaningful power.

I've worked for Elections Canada and Elections B.C. since the 1980-some election. It has to be kept simple, and the politicians do not trust the people and the people don't trust the politicians. I say that because in the current system of voting in the federal election, you have to prove beyond any doubt—not beyond reasonable doubt but beyond any doubt—where you live, but you don't have to prove you're 18 years of age; we'll take your word for that. Average Canadians are going to vote once and say who they are. We need a system that believes the voters when they say they're Canadians, when they say they're 18—oh, we already do that—and when they say where they live.

From time to time, it becomes an issue with other things thrown in, but at the end of the day, if 10 people want to go and vote for Elizabeth May instead of voting for the person next door, is it going to change the picture? Well, if we go to proportional representation it will absolutely have no effect on the outcome; therefore, the only reason we're spending so much money making people prove things that we should believe from them would already be in place.

First past the post is a system designed for two parties and to maintain two parties. That's a fact. There have been some statements made tonight that are not facts. Consensus is not watered down. Consensus is a starting point, as opposed to first past the post, which is a finishing point.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Is Robert Waldson here? No.

Daniel Hryhorchuk, the mike is yours for two minutes.

Mr. Daniel Hryhorchuk (As an Individual): I wasn't planning to speak tonight, so I don't have a presentation prepared. I'll just try not to ramble incoherently.

First, the question of whether your vote counts is not one that has anything to do with your feelings on the subject. It's not a question of emotion; it's a mathematical question. If your vote didn't contribute to the members of Parliament or the voting power in Parliament, then it was a wasted vote, and that's all there is to that.

Second, I heard a lot tonight about objections to proportional representation regarding challenges with local representation. From my own standpoint, that's of minimal importance, bordering on trivial for reasons I won't get into. But if we do have to care about that, there is an electoral system available where you don't have to change anything about the current method of electing members of Parliament and you still get proportional representation in the Parliament, and it's called direct—a gentleman was speaking about it earlier—

The Chair: Weighted voting.

Mr. Daniel Hryhorchuk: Yes, direct party and representative voting is the name. You can google it. That's all I have to say about that.

Last, I think “male, pale, and stale” is kind of offensive. That's it.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Jukes.

• (2110)

Ms. Tana Jukes (As an Individual): Thanks for listening to the first 64 people, and thanks, everybody else.

I'm strongly in favour of proportional representation. I'm also here on behalf of five members of my immediate and extended family who won't be able to come to any in-person consultations, so thanks for doing this in a place where I can come.

I would like to see a system that encourages candidate diversity so that we see more women, aboriginal people, and other minorities running and being elected, and not being restricted to expressing views that are strictly party views or that are most likely to please the majority.

I'd like to see a system that encourages long-term co-operation across party lines between candidates and between elected representatives. I would like to see a system that ensures that elected representatives are accountable to their constituents and that all votes count in electing a representative for the voter, and also ensures that the system cannot be hijacked by corporate interests.

We are, at this point, very lucky to be able to draw on the deep consideration that has already been given to this issue by the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, and I think we would be foolish to ignore the conclusions that they came to.

At this point, I do not support alternative vote as it is not proportional. Open list MMP, I believe, could offer some improvements over our current system, but I am concerned about the complexity that would be required to keep representatives strongly accountable to voters. At this point, I believe that a system like BC-STV would do the best job.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Janet Lundman.

Go ahead, Mr. Bergerud.

Mr. Ryder Bergerud (As an Individual): Thanks.

I'm interested in an electoral system that does the following:

I'd like an electoral system that allows for candidates with diverse views to represent the diversity of Canadians that we have, both through electing a variety of political parties, but also being able to elect a diversity of candidates within political parties.

I'd like an electoral system that provides more incentives for co-operation and collaboration between members and parties in the House. Something else to note is that how we elect our politicians and how we elect our MPs really changes the incentives about how they legislate in Parliament.

Also, I would like an electoral system that creates accountability to voters over parties. I'd like to make a note that there is a risk that if we choose a mixed member proportional system, there's a large difference between a mixed member proportional system that is closed list versus open list. That deserves to be mentioned. They're totally not equal. We want to give MPs responsibility to voters, and if you have a closed list system, then MPs will be more accountable to their parties because voters won't be able to choose among different MPs within a party.

With that, I believe STV gives constituents opportunities to have an MP who they feel represents their view, and also, it's local.

Thank you.

The Chair: I guess Janet Lundman is not here, so we'll go to Elie Hofer and Michael Brinsmead.

A voice: Mr. Hofer is not here.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Brinsmead and Dana Cook. Is Dana Cook here?

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Michael Brinsmead (As an Individual): I want us in Canada to have a system that wastes no votes. I want a system that has as its result a Parliament that represents the full diversity of Canadian political opinion. There is only one system that will do that, and that is proportional representation.

Small parties with diffused support across this country are punished under our current system, and they would continue to be punished if we went to either an alternative vote or an STV system. Proportional representation, on the other hand, would allow Canadians' diversity to be represented on a provincial level.

Our current system exaggerates regional political differences. People might think that 100% of Atlantic Canadians voted Liberal in the last federal election. Clearly they did not. And, over many elections, you would think that 95% of Albertans were Conservatives. This isn't good for our country.

Finally, I don't want there to be any minimum threshold. If a party gets 1% of the popular vote, it deserves 1% of the seats in Parliament.

Thank you.

• (2115)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Cook.

Ms. Dana Cook (As an Individual): Thank you. My name is Dana, and I'm speaking to you today in support of proportional representation.

I volunteered with a non-partisan political advocacy group, Leadnow, in their Vote Together campaign prior to the last federal election, to encourage strategic voting. In the riding I was working in, in Vancouver, we had just under 17,000 direct conversations with voters and collected 5,400 pledges. That was with 450 volunteers.

I spent two years of my life working full-time as an environmental consultant and spending all of my free time talking to voters about our broken electoral system, trying to motivate people to work the system to get the system to work for us, because many of the people I talked to are tired of this electoral system and feel it doesn't work for them.

Countless times I repeated the phrase, "Will you agree to vote together for the best candidate that can defeat Stephen Harper, not the best candidate that reflects your values?" We had to cast our ballots on guesswork of how those in our riding would cast theirs, or maybe voters didn't use strategy on principle and accepted that their vote didn't count. Both strategies isolate youth voters and sap them of motivation to participate in this democracy.

I never want to be a part of another strategic voting campaign again. I want my efforts to not be spent working tirelessly against the stream of a broken democracy but instead facing the real challenges of our time, like transitioning to a sustainable energy system to mitigate climate change, which has been proven to be politically easier in a PR system.

It has been said before but it's worth repeating that the 2015 election was a referendum, as the Liberals were voted in on a platform to change our voting system. Their election platform was also based on evidence-based policy, and if you look into the research, PR is the clear next step for our democracy.

I ask for a fair voting system where every vote is counted and represented in Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Dauncey.

Mr. Guy Dauncey (As an Individual): Good evening.

I've come down from Ladysmith, from up island, especially to present to you.

I'm occasionally invited to speak at high schools, where I get the whole school on the floor of the gym. I ask them the question right at the beginning, "When you think about the future, what do you feel, hope or worry?" Out of 400 kids, I'm getting only five hands going up to say they feel hopeful. Then I give them a whole presentation about exciting stuff and how we can tackle climate change and things like that, and that changes their views.

The point is that there's an epidemic of hopelessness happening in our schools. They're not engaged politically, and if they are engaged and they know the history, they'll know that in the last 100 years every government has been either Liberal or Conservative. Also, out of the last 33 elections since the year 1900, in peacetime only three have had a true majority. The two in wartime got just over 50%. Nine elections out of 10 have had a forced majority, which has not been a democratic result, when the majority of Canadians have not been represented by the parties they elected. This is deeply disturbing.

I get involved, like other people, in strategic voting. I see how it splits friends. It puts people who have the same values at each other's throats and creates anger and distress. It's not a pleasant thing to do, to have to vote against someone you don't want to vote against, blah blah blah.

My concern particularly is how to get more young people engaged. I do believe, like other people have said, that we need to extend the votes to 16-year-olds. Currently, if you have not voted before you leave school, you go into that kind of black hole, pretending you're not an adult, and adults vote so you're not going to vote but maybe when you're 30 you'll get around to it. If your first election is while you are at school, you'll get used to it, and you'll get used to the discipline, the rigorous debating, and the challenging of positions. Then you're hooked and you're involved in electioneering.

Another issue around this is that one-third of Canadians don't own property, don't have parents who own property, will never inherit, and will be renting all of their lives, unless we have a changed system. Renters vote far less. The voter turnout among renters is much lower. If we had either mandatory voting, as in Australia, where they have a turnout rate of 94%, that would solve the problem. Alternatively, there could be a \$100 voting tax credit, so when you vote you get \$100, and if you don't vote, you lose it. Also, it's tax revenue neutral, so it doesn't increase government costs at all, but it's an incentive for people who have to take time off work at low wages to come to vote, and it's a way of saying that voting matters to us.

Finally, I think on campaign financial reform we also need to make sure that if any party wants to bring back the ability of powerful interests to finance elections, we lock in a two-thirds majority against that happening, so we stay with good finance control. There are top penalties for attempted voter manipulation, such as robocalls, and we have a new system of mixed member proportional voting.

Thank you very much.

● (2120)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jacob Nicholas Harrigan, but first, Ms. Patricia Lane.

Ms. Patricia Lane (As an Individual): I'm a member of the national advisory council of Fair Vote Canada, and I'm also a co-founding partner at Leadnow. I chose to take on both those responsibilities and those honours because I am so passionate about electoral reform. For me, this has been the most important issue in the last number of years, because I'm a mother and I was frustrated and very sad to be unable to make a convincing case to my son and his friends, and my goddaughter, who I helped to raise, and her friends, about why they should participate in our electoral system.

I happen to really like our MP. He does a great job. But it's a death sentence for encouraging the young to vote because he's going to get re-elected. The young people around me, even though they're politically engaged and they support his values, say they should spend their time doing something else, and I think that's a great pity.

I'm in favour of proportional representation, which will change that. I'm in favour of lowering the voting age to 16. If kids in Scotland who are 16 can vote on the future of their country, then kids in Canada who are 16 can also vote. I really want you to provide some money to the provinces that would be dedicated to civic education in schools.

I'm also a woman. I know, because I've looked at the data, that proportional representation is the only system that will raise the ceiling so that we will end what the United Nations calls our democratic deficit. Let there be no mistake about it. We do not have a functioning democracy as long as we have a glass ceiling that refuses to elect more women than 27%. No system will change that other than PR.

I'm also convinced that the great challenge of our time is to balance the power of the market with the power of the values of people. We're going to be able to do that only if we have an electoral system that does not allow parties to become captive to corporate interests. I think that's what's happening with the decision today regarding Petronas and Site C. It's not that Mr. Trudeau is not well intentioned; I think he's become captured. I think that if he were forced to work in a collaborative system with more Green Party members, with more New Democrats, and with more parties that support those kinds of values, it would be harder for corporations to capture.

Finally, I'm a lawyer and I'm a mediator. I've spent my entire career helping people not to fight. The first-past-the-post system institutionalizes fighting, and we need less of that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Harrigan.

Mr. Jacob Harrigan (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm here today to voice my support for a proportional representation electoral system. Our current first-past-the-post electoral system is ineffective, leaves millions of votes wasted every federal election, and contributes to lower voter turnout, especially among youth, leaving us feeling disenfranchised and like our system does not want our vote.

We are looking for a fair say. We are in dire need of a proportional system in which our votes are effectively changed into seats in the House of Commons and in which power is accurately represented and representative of the governed Canadians.

Canadians living in political strongholds.... I've heard a lot about Albertan refugees. They don't have the choice. They don't have a vote that matters, and this is what we're looking to change.

I want to thank all you guys for coming out here tonight.

I am in favour of a proportional system. I think the mixed member proportionality system is one of the strongest that exists, but I'm also open to STV. Also, I've heard some interesting facts about the urban-rural system. I think that as long as it is a system that takes into account Canada's unique geography and demographics and is proportional, it's better than what we have right now.

Thank you very much for your time.

• (2125)

The Chair: Mr. Pratt, go ahead.

Mr. Martin Pratt (As an Individual): To start off, I am against mandatory voting, and I am against online voting or any sort of voting machine that's electronic.

I did a written proposal to the B.C. commission in 2004, and I believe it could be well adapted to the Canadian context. It's a modified mixed-member proportional system. I support mixed member with open list.

I am not really keen on bumping up the number of MPs by more than a few. With the Constitution stuff, P.E.I. has to send four MPs to Parliament, so we would have to do the top-up seats by province.

Maybe for Ontario and Quebec you could have two sections, one for the more northern part, the more rural, and one for the south.

It would have 4% minimum for parties, and it would be only 40% top-up seats.

The Chair: Thank you. It sounds like you have a very well-thought-out system there.

Go ahead, Mr. Shirvani.

Mr. Tirda Shirvani (As an Individual): Good evening.

Of all the battles we have fought for democracy in this country, this is the most important.

I know first-hand what it's like for your vote not to count. I used to live in Saanich, north of UVic, and no matter how many times I voted, the Reform/Canadian Alliance/Conservative MP Gary Lunn would get elected and re-elected. My vote never counted. I could not persuade my friends to vote, because their vote never counted.

I support proportional representation, because it takes the power away from political parties and gives it back to the electorate.

The minority and coalition governments elected through proportional representation and making decisions by consensus end up making better decisions. Throughout history, the best concessions we have been able to extract out of the government have been out of minority governments: universal health care, minimum wage, old age pension plan. On the other hand, majority governments take us for granted.

No more first past the post; no more one-man dictation by Stephen Harper; no more omnibus bills.

I would say no to a referendum, because masses could very easily be persuaded to vote against their own interests. In British Columbia, the referendum on electoral reform worked for all the wrong reasons.

I would say yes to proportional representation, and no to a referendum.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Merner.

Mr. David Merner (As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is David Merner. I ran for the Liberals in the last federal election in Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, the next riding over. I'm also the national vice-president of Fair Vote Canada, but I'm here speaking as a citizen.

I would, though, like to ask this committee to really consider how you're going to come to a unanimous compromise on the issues that have been raised today. It's not an easy thing. To the Liberals, I say that we campaigned on real change, and that means something. We also campaigned on making every vote count, and that means something as well.

To me it's clear. Alternative vote is not good enough, even though we passed a resolution at our 2014 national convention in favour of alternative vote. We have to do better because we campaigned on something different. We campaigned on making every vote count. We also campaigned on real change. AV is not real change; it's still a first-past-the-post system.

As Liberals we have to look at an alternative. We have an Atlantic caucus that's going to lose seats, right? It's going to be very hard to convince that caucus to vote in favour of proportional representation which does represent real change. What do we do about that?

To the Conservatives, though, who are giggling over there, this is a chance, actually—and not you, Nathan, I know. On the referendum issue, you're making a good point. This is a democracy. We need legitimacy, but let's do it in a fair way. Let's do it after we've tested the current system. Let's ensure that we know that Canadians are having an informed vote.

If you do it before, even Margaret Thatcher said referendums were the perfect forum for demagogues. Listen to Margaret Thatcher. She got it right. Have it after two elections when Canadians really know what they're in for. Then we'll have a real democratic vote because it will be an informed and fair vote.

Last, to the NDP folks who campaigned on MMP, I ask you to put a little water in your wine. There's an excellent compromise that Fair Vote Canada has put forward. It's the Kingsley model. It's a rural-urban proportional representation model, an excellent compromise for this committee.

I challenge you all to come up with a unanimous report. We'd like that from you. Everybody in this room would like that from you.

Thank you.

• (2130)

The Chair: Mr. John Fuller.

Mr. John Fuller (As an Individual): I am John Fuller. I am supporting proportional representation. I came to Canada in 1957 through the famous Pier 21 in Halifax, and obtained my citizenship then. My grandfather came to Canada in 1916 where he homesteaded in Saskatchewan, and became a Canadian citizen. He lived in Regina in 1922 when a referendum was held on the forming of the CCF, and he voted in favour of that. He was also a member of the wheat board.

The reason I'm speaking is that I didn't have a company pension, and the government encouraged us to have our own pension scheme, which I did very successfully, but it was in the trust funds. When Mr. Harper came in, the trust funds were destroyed, and I lost half of my pension. Instead of living comfortably at the age of 86, which I am, I'm on a reduced income. I feel that if we had proportional representation, this wouldn't have happened because I would have been properly represented.

The other thing that comes to mind is that in Victoria, in the capital region, our access to drinking water is being threatened by a private foreign corporation. I feel that every Canadian has the right to water. In that regard, there are many people on a limited income. Often they are widows. I've always supported women. They have to

choose between paying for water and paying for food on a reduced income. That is the other main point that I would like to make.

The Chair: Do you feel proportional representation would have mitigated a lot of policies that have, in some cases, harmed people's interests?

Mr. John Fuller: I do feel that because it would give us...then the whole country would be responsible for these attitudes instead of the private corporations.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. John Fuller: Just on the referendum, I would support a referendum, but I would challenge the media who are under threat at the moment to come up to the plate and give a proper representation as to what proportional representation is. I think they would maybe do it, maybe the independent media.

I got here by accident. Tonight I was down at the CBC show just down the road and I was walking by.

• (2135)

The Chair: It's all serendipity.

Mr. John Fuller: I am a supporter of the CBC.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Cooper Johnston (As an Individual): I came here today not expecting to speak in front of you all, but I'm glad that I am.

I want to say in response to the speaker previously, yes, I agree that there are winners and losers, but that is meant to be kept to sports where the results are meant to change from event to event, and not our political system where an entire country must be represented, and this means for a much longer period of time.

I seldom get involved in political movements, but the issue of electoral reform is important to me. I have lived in many areas over the last 12 years and have watched partisanship come to the forefront of our political system. Unfortunately, in the last election, I had to get involved because I couldn't stand to see where one party could win complete control, but guess what? Again, one party won complete control.

As our world and country have become even more connected thanks to modern methods of telecommunication, citizens should no longer be required to elect one person through an antiquated system that only supports the majority rule.

I believe that elections are better able to represent the people, all the people, and that should be the direction of my Canada of the future.

I want to bring up to you a few of the reasons that I believe electoral reform is important in this day and age.

The first is that everyone talks about the apathy of young people. This is where some sort of change to the system would be most useful. It would get people to care about the political system and in a much greater number.

The second reason that changing our first-past-the-post system would be beneficial is that it would favour the formation of minority governments. While this would be more difficult for a single party to pass their motions in the House, parties would have to work together, and I stress together, and compromise to generate motions that would be able to reflect the beliefs of more Canadians as a whole.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We've heard from about 80 people tonight, and we're up against our time limit, but if the audience here is in agreement, then I would give Mr. Plumptre a couple of minutes. Would you be in agreement?

[Applause]

Okay, I'll tell you what. My offer is that we'll take three more people and then we'll cut it off. I'm sorry, but at some point we have to cut it off. There are other ways to participate. You can send a written submission no longer than 3,000 words to the committee. There's an electronic questionnaire online, so there are all kinds of avenues open. There are many ways.

We'll take three people. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Plumptre.

Mr. Cliff Plumptre (As an Individual): Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I'm going to tell everybody why I have this jacket on, after I quickly dispose of three things: Proportional representation, yes. I'm excited to be a Canadian right now, knowing that this will happen. It has to happen. I say no to a referendum for all the reasons that have been given here tonight. I say no to Internet voting. Ask yourself how we would do a judicial recount: with paper that counts. Also, we know all about secrecy, or lack of it.

I have this jacket on because it is the jacket of my grandchildren's soccer club in Australia. It's West Pennant Hills Cherrybrook. It's a big chunk of northwest Sydney.

I have a grandson who will be 12 on December 1. He has attended at least six elections because they're held on a Saturday. I repeat: They're held on a Saturday. Those of you who will say, "I get time off work, and it's my right", sure. If you're working on Saturday, that makes it a community event. When most of the elections are in schools, you line up to vote, and when you come out from the vote, the associations of parents are flipping hamburgers. They're selling things. It becomes a community event.

My grandson has been selling those hamburgers since he was six, and he sells up: "Would you like a ginger ale, or would you like this...?"

What I am really saying is that this is a form of education. Through osmosis, through example, he has seen people vote.

So on a Saturday, it's municipal elections, state elections, and federal elections.

I'm also 100% for compulsory voting. It is as simple as that.

I'd like to say to you, again, that I'm happy to be a Canadian tonight.

Thank you.

• (2140)

The Chair: I think we all are. Thank you.

Mel McLachlan, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Mel McLachlan (As an Individual): I came from Comox tonight to have a say. The drive is about three hours and a bit more, depending on the other idiots on the road.

We pride ourselves on being an accommodating and co-operative people. We are now taking the mature step of re-examining and attempting to redress the wrongs and injustices in our history.

Decisions made which allowed these errors may have been different if dissenting voices had been heard. The embarrassment of the last decade stands out as an example of how not allowing consensus and vilifying dissent divides our country. Proportional representation could give us government requiring a large degree of consensus. The naysayers and obstructionists in this evolution of our democracy, I would suggest, have a personal and somewhat selfish agenda to hold on to the power that our outdated system gives them.

However, in the spirit of co-operation, to appease the naysayers, perhaps a review after a few elections might be considered, as we heard tonight. I think three is better than two to give it a real chance.

Constituency does not need to be opened, and the alternative vote is not PR.

I campaigned in the last election, and I'm happy to say that most people have a degree of knowledge of PR and think the system needs repair, especially since it was an issue in the campaign.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Last but not least, Zoe Green.

Ms. Zoe Green (As an Individual): Sorry, I'm quite nervous. I wasn't expecting to speak.

I've lived in Israel for the last two years, and I want to talk about my experience living under a proportional representation system. I am in favour of a proportional representation system, but I have seen some of the hardships that come along with it. I want people to know that it doesn't mean the people you don't like don't come to power, unfortunately. In fact, in this last election, that was very much the case. The substantial difference you see is that when the people you don't want come to power, you aren't disappointed in the system. You look around and think that your society isn't getting educated or understanding the perspectives that you understand. The society is speaking out and you disagree with your society. So what does that mean?

Instead of being mad at the system, you want to look at your fellow citizens and ask what is going on and what are other people not understanding. I think that's very important. Part of a democratic society is that it's about more than a vote. It's about a democratic lifestyle, one where you, in your daily interactions, believe in democracy. When you believe that your system represents the ability for all people's voices to matter, then you want to listen to other people instead of just trying to polarize a conversation.

If you're considering different systems, if you have something like a coalition as your end point, know that this can result in a smaller party's ending up with disproportionate power. I probably don't need to explain that to you, but I very much find it to be the case. That actually loses a piece of the democratic power that the proportional representation system has.

That's all I have to say.

Thank you so much.

● (2145)

The Chair: Thank you.

It's been a wonderful experience to share this day and this evening with you. It's a beautiful place, Vancouver Island, populated by lovely people who know how to keep time. Thank you for your co-operation; it's greatly appreciated. Have a safe drive home.

You can go to our website. There are all kinds of alternatives for making your views known. We hope that you'll read the report when it comes out.

Thank you.

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