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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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•(1335)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call to order the first part of the 35th meeting of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

We are delighted to be in Montreal. This is the beginning of our third week of travel. It's becoming slightly confusing. After this, we will head toward the Atlantic provinces.

In this first group of witnesses, we welcome Ms. Carolyn Loutfi, executive director of the Apathy is Boring organization.

Afterwards we will hear from the representatives of the Quebec Community Groups Network, Stephen Thompson, director, Policy, Research and Public Affairs, as well as Kevin Dobie, director.

Are you the son of..

Mr. Kevin Dobie (Director, Quebec Community Groups Network): Yes.

The Chair: I know your father well. I hope he is well.

I will explain our procedure. This is how we function everywhere. The witnesses will all have five minutes to present the broad outline of their brief. Then there will be a five-minute question period; each member will have five minutes to speak with the witnesses. That time includes questions and answers. If you find that after five minutes you have not had the opportunity to answer a question or have not been able to express your thoughts, do not worry, you can still do so when your turn at the mike comes around again.

We will begin with Ms. Loutfi who has five minutes.

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi (Executive Director, Apathy is Boring): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you to the committee for inviting me here today.

[*Translation*]

It is a privilege to be here with you today.

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Loutfi.

For the information of the people who are in the room, there are earphones that allow you to hear the simultaneous translation of the proceedings.

[*English*]

The earpieces have transmitters that connect to the interpretation booth, so you can listen in either official language.

[*Translation*]

I apologize, Ms. Loutfi.

You have the floor once again.

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Thank you.

It is a privilege to be with you today and I thank you for all of the work that you do.

[*English*]

You have already spoken to many friends and allies of Apathy is Boring, including the president of our council, Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, as well as Civix, Samara, and INM. I hope to be able to add to what has already been shared and further represent youth voices throughout this process.

I'll start quickly by giving a bit of context to who we are and what we do. Founded in 2004, Apathy is Boring is a youth-led, non-partisan charitable organization with a mission to educate youth about democracy in creative ways. We work to empower our peers to see themselves as active agents of change and equip them with the tools and resources in order to do so, with voting being one of those tools. Specifically our "get out the vote" program sends volunteer-led street teams to concerts and events, places where youth are, to talk to them about upcoming elections and answer their questions about how to vote. Further, we conduct research to test and evaluate mobilization strategies and to continue to find innovative ways to access the hard-to-reach demographic of youth.

Let me start by saying that Apathy is Boring is not an advocate for one particular electoral system over another. I am not an expert on electoral reform. However, this is precisely why I believe it is important that you are consulting with organizations like Apathy is Boring and youth such as me. We all know that the trend in youth voter turnout has been declining over the years, with this past election being an exception, hopefully one that stays. The trend in low voter turnout, however, is quite problematic and of concern particularly because if youth don't vote in the first two elections in which they are eligible, they become less likely to acquire the habit and won't vote later on in life. As Mr. Kingsley mentioned when he came before this committee, "Legitimacy is tied to participation". As this committee does its work, I urge you to consider the participation rates of youth in our electoral system. Low youth voter turnout is the issue I am bringing to this committee.

We need to do better at reaching and engaging young Canadians. Yes, there are organizations like ours and Civix and others doing good work. Abacus Data released a report after the election indicating that one in three youth who voted was reached by an organization working to get out the youth vote. However, youth voter turnout continues to be a problem. Not only are there abysmal youth voter turnout rates in municipal as well as provincial elections, but federally we are proud that 58% of youth voted. What about the other 42%?

The electoral reform process is a unique opportunity to educate and rebrand democracy for young Canadians. We know what many of the barriers are. We know that many young people don't see how government affects their everyday lives. They don't have a relationship with their local representative. They see the process as bureaucratic and are choosing alternative forums of engagement to have their voices heard, but they are not apathetic with regard to the issues that affect them.

There are global events like Brexit and the U.S. election that are getting a lot of young people talking about whether or not to engage in the democratic process. I think this is an important reminder that giving young Canadians a reason to believe in our system and to engage with their government could change the world. You have an opportunity through the electoral reform process to provide youth with a reason to believe in the system. Apathy is Boring is recommending that first, resources be dedicated to developing non-partisan and accessible information about electoral reform, and second, that this information be brought to the hard-to-reach demographic of youth.

Further, we believe that online voting should begin to be piloted and tested in different electoral environments. We do not believe that online voting on its own will contribute to a significant increase in youth voter turnout. However, if this option is paired with outreach and education initiatives, it could have an important impact.

I'm glad to be with you today; it's quite an honour. While I can share my perspective and the teachings from our work, I unfortunately cannot speak for a non-voter. Using town halls, online platforms, and even social media to generate dialogue about electoral reform will primarily be used by youth who are already engaged.

I understand the time constraints, which have made deeper consultation processes challenging. I do believe if we are hoping to have a meaningful conversation about changing the way we do democracy, we should be actively talking to those who have chosen to stop engaging with it.

Merci.

• (1340)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation.

[*Translation*]

We will now hear Mr. Stephen Thompson.

Mr. Kevin Dobie (Director, Quebec Community Groups Network): It will be me instead, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I'll be speaking for Stephen Thompson.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Kevin Dobie: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, honourable members. Thanks for having us and *Shanah Tova* to any friends who might be celebrating 5777, I think.

My name is Kevin Dobie. I'm a member of the board of directors of the Quebec Community Groups Network, the QCGN. I'm accompanied by Stephen Thompson, the director of policy, research, and public affairs for the organization.

The QCGN is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 50 community sector organizations from across Quebec that serve the needs of Canada's English linguistic minority communities, which we refer to collectively as the English-speaking communities of Quebec. More than one million people, half of all Canadians living in an official language minority community, are English-speaking Quebecers.

We've distributed copies of our brief. We've submitted a copy to the clerk of the committee for translation and inclusion in the committee's work. These opening remarks will be brief and focused and I hope that we can get into a more detailed conversation in the time allotted after this.

The QCGN is concerned that the Government of Canada has not provided Canadians with a specific electoral system on which to be consulted. What we're going through today is a very important conversation and it's a meaningful step in the process, but it is not, in our opinion, a comprehensive consultation process.

This meaningful conversation has been largely conducted by experts and special interests, which is normal and to be expected. However, from our experience in the organization, it's not a matter that is really resonating with members in our community.

The QCGN is opposed to mandatory voting. Voting is a charter right, not an obligation. The idea of the state forcing a citizen to exercise a right runs counter to our democratic heritage.

The QCGN supports electronic voting if, objectively, the integrity of the vote is equal to or exceeds the current system.

Education is the key to youth engagement and we feel it's a fitting, or a nice coincidence anyway, that we're presenting with Apathy is Boring today on this point. We recommend that the Government of Canada, in partnership with the provinces and territories, develop a compulsory civics course for Canadian students at the secondary four or grade 11 level. Upon completion of this course, students would be registered to vote in the first following election after they reach 18 years of age.

The linchpin to effectiveness, legitimacy, citizen engagement, accessibility, inclusiveness, and system integrity is local representation. The QCGN believes it is essential that elected officials be directly accountable to a geographically defined electorate.

Finally, we are very uncomfortable with the notion of legislated or regulatory opportunities for inclusion of under-represented groups in the political process. Our concerns around this point are many. What does under-represented mean? What groups would be helped to the table and in what numbers?

The committee's mandate mentions a number of under-represented groups, but forgets to mention Canadians living in official language minority community situations.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: So, Mr. Thompson, won't be speaking. Mr. Dobie covered his material. Perfect.

We'll start with Ms. Romanado, for five minutes, please.

•(1345)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoynes, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I extend my sincere thanks to all of the witnesses and all of those who are in the room today.

[*English*]

Thank you so much for being here today. Given the fact that you're all speaking about youth engagement and education, it's fitting that we're in Montreal, the home of four universities. I'm delighted to be here back in my home...well, the south shore of Montreal, so it's pretty close.

I'll start with Ms. Loutfi.

You talked a little about youth engagement. As someone having come from the higher education sector prior to my election, I'm very actively engaged with this committee in actually using social media at #ERRE to get questions from Canadians across Canada who are interested in electoral reform. We've been going province to province. We've been using Facebook, our own pages, and so on.

We did see an upswing of youth voters in the last election, which we're delighted with. Do you think that this is a one-off or are we on the cusp of a new era where youth are now going to start coming out in droves?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: I'm not sure. We hope it's not a one-off. I think that what's important between now and the next federal election, and between now and any municipal or provincial elections that are happening for youth in their communities, is that the conversation continue. I think waiting and just running a "get out the vote" campaign once the writ is dropped won't create meaningful and sustainable long-term engagement. That's why having education initiatives, such as bringing the conversation of reform to everyday Canadians, are important.

You mentioned higher education, which I think is important, but I think one of the places we constantly forget to think about is youth who are not pursuing post-secondary education and how to reach them.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Perfect. You did mention a bit about giving them a reason to believe in the system. Do you think that it's the method in which we vote—not method, that's not the right word I

want to use—the voting system that we're currently using. Do you think changing that is going to, alone, give them a reason to believe in the system, or do you think it's a multitude of factors?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: I think it's a multitude of factors. I think they need to be engaged in the conversation if we're changing the system. Right now, I don't think they are being effectively engaged in the conversation.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

My next question is for QCGN. It's a delight to have you here. My hometown of Greenfield Park is a small community on the south shore of Montreal, but it does have bilingual status in the large city of Longueuil. The English language is definitely top of mind in my riding, so talk to us a bit about language minorities and how we should be engaging them in this conversation about electoral reform, if you could. You did mention that it's one of the under-represented groups that is not on our mandate, so if you could elaborate, I'd love to hear a little more.

Mr. Stephen Thompson (Director, Policy, Research and Public Affairs, Quebec Community Groups Network): Just as a way of background, before the committee began its work, we'd been following and preparing for this presentation on electoral reform and trying to engage the community. The challenge we found in trying to engage our community is that there just wasn't a lot of pickup. I don't think people in our community, the folks we work with, understand why we're engaged in this conversation, and what's in it for them. Therefore, they're not engaging in it.

Through our newsletters and our web 2.0 products, we've been trying to engage our community in this, and we just haven't got the pick up. Part of the problem here is that it's so vague. You talk to Canadians about electoral reform and to people in our community, and their first question is, "What do you mean by that?" You say, "They're thinking about changing the way you vote at the federal level." They ask, "What are they proposing?" You say, "There are five or six different systems." By that time you've lost them.

These are busy people. These are people who are out trying to get scarce resources to provide direct services to their communities. These are small not-for-profit organizations. They're not sophisticated organizations that have expertise on electoral reform. What's in it for them? What does this mean for them? People haven't been able to get that message across, so I think that's why our community hasn't engaged thus far.

What we're asking for is to give us a specific model that we can take to our community, and then we can ask them what they think about it.

•(1350)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Dobie: May I add something?

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, but briefly, please.

Mr. Kevin Dobie: In the conversations that we did have with members, partners, and organizations, we did hear regularly—and you're probably familiar with this in Greenfield Park—whether it's Greenfield Park, or the Eastern Townships, or some small communities on the lower north shore, that there's a strong connection to their geographic area. There's a strong connection to their homes.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us here today. I also thank them for sharing the thoughts they have heard on this matter within their respective organizations.

My first question is for you, Mr. Dobie.

In your statement, you mentioned that experts cannot replace the general public. I felt that was a type of warning on the issue, since we have heard a lot of experts. I can tell you that the opinions of these experts can be diametrically opposed.

We spoke with university professors who told us that proportional voting systems do not have a significant effect on voter turnout in the countries where the systems have been put into effect, and we heard experts from other universities who told us that the reverse was true. So it is not always easy for us to sort out everything that is said on this topic.

You say that we cannot replace the general public—and you can probably guess the question I'm about to ask you. When these consultations have led to a model, if the government goes ahead and decides to change the voting system, should we allow the population to express its opinion on the model in question? At that point, as Mr. Thompson said, we would have a model to present, to explain, and we would set out its pros and cons. Ultimately, the population will decide if we should proceed with it.

Mr. Kevin Dobie: I think it is normal and healthy in our society, in the context of our committee discussions, that experts present completely divergent views.

I think it is worthwhile to mention that after these conversations with the experts, it will be necessary to hold a dialogue with the general public. Since this is a very technical and somewhat esoteric conversation, if you will, there is a risk that the general public will distance itself from the dialogue if it does not participate in it right from the outset.

That summarizes our position. We are not against the experts, far from it, but we cannot exclude the general public from the debate. At this stage, the discussions are a bit removed from the electorate, in our opinion.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Does Mr. Thompson want to add something?

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Thompson: I want to put a nuance around that.

You asked a question about the general public. We're not here representing the general public. We're here representing an official language community, and the notion here of the government's duty to consult with official language communities on matters that affect the linguistic rights of Canadians.

We suspect, we don't know yet, but we're waiting for a legal impact study that's being conducted right now by Maître Mark Powers. When that legal impact study comes out, we will have a more complete understanding on what electoral reform might mean on the linguistic rights of Canadians. If that's triggered, then official language communities would expect to be consulted on a specific model.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

Is that right, Ms. Loutfi?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Yes.

Mr. Alain Rayes: You spoke about young people. Several groups came to meet with us, such as Samara and the Institut du Nouveau Monde. What emerged from their presentations was that the voting system is not necessarily a topic that will generate greater interest in politics among young people. We heard many of them say that they felt their vote did not count, but other elements emerged when they were questioned and consulted.

I would like you to confirm or correct what I am saying. When young people were questioned, they expressed a lack of interest in politics. They said they were too busy, that it was difficult to get on the electors' list, and mentioned many other obstacles. Experts told us that when important issues were at stake, young people felt involved, and if we expressed an interest in their opinion, they were motivated to go and vote. We might see a repeat of what happened during the last election.

In your opinion—I believe you said this, but I'd like to be sure—if the only thing we do is change the voting system, will this affect young people's level of interest in voting?

• (1355)

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Would simply changing the voting system accomplish this? No. I don't believe that would be enough, but we have the opportunity at this time to use the current debate to generate interest in young people who don't participate in the current system. In fact, they are the ones who should be involved in that conversation. However, I don't think they are in the room.

Mr. Alain Rayes: If you had one recommendation to make today, in light of the discussions you have had with young people, what would it be?

What you've just said regarding the fact that young people are not in the room, and that we've not gone out to meet with them either, is quite true. It would probably be our responsibility to go to high schools and colleges and have this same discussion.

If you had one recommendation to submit today, aside from changing the voting system, regarding something that could be done to generate interest in politics among young people, what would it be?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: In fact, you have to go and meet with them with some educational resources. You have to go where they are.

[*English*]

We can't wait for them to come to us because they're not coming. We're doing this work, and it's really hard to reach the youth demographic. We need to find them. We need to bring them this information, and we're not doing it effectively as a country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boulerice.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you Mr. Chair.

Good morning, and welcome to Montreal. We are not in my riding, but it is quite close to here.

I thank the people who are in the room for their interest.

Madam Director and Mr. Director, we welcome you as witnesses.

Ms. Loutfi, I do everything I can to engage young people. I tweeted out a message before coming here. I took a photo of the downtown area and put it on Instagram, and said that we would be talking about electoral reform. This didn't mobilize crowds, but... We try to use the tools at our disposal.

The committee was created by the Liberal government in order to see what changes need to be made to the voting system. We were promised that 2015 would be the last federal election to be held using the first-past-the-post system — I prefer the English expression, it's easier to say. We are studying at what is done elsewhere. We know that between 80% and 85% of OECD countries have adopted some type of proportional voting system. This works well in most of the countries where governments are stable, and it promotes good public policy. There are more coalitions than we have here, and it changes the political culture since the parties have to work together and talk.

One of the objectives in the committee's mandate is to lessen the distortions created by the first-past-the-post system. In the last election in 2015 and in the 2011, one political party obtained 39% of the votes and about 55% to 60% of members. With our system, that means 100% of the power. This means that for the next four years, a party can win all of the votes in the House and pass all of its bills.

I know that you're not advocating one voting system in particular. Your organization, Apathy is Boring, has such an interesting name. Do you subscribe to the objective that a voting system should reduce the distortions between the popular will and the number of seats one party can obtain in Parliament, whatever Parliament that might be?

[*English*]

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: As an organization, we don't have a stance on that. It's not an objective that we're specifically pushing for. If you want to know if that's an objective among a diverse population of youth, you need to go and ask them. I don't think we are asking them right now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

I hope that they will go and vote anyway, whatever the voting system.

One of the problems with the current voting system is the fact that a member can be elected with very few votes in a riding. Some people are elected with 30% of the votes where 70% of electors in a riding voted. Their vote is counted, but not taken into account. They will not be represented in Parliament by a member who shares their values and their ideology.

In the previous election, there were 9 million votes that did not elect any members of Parliament. So when people say that they will not be voting because they feel that their vote does not count, they may be right. Under our voting system, every vote that is put into the box will not necessarily translate into representation in Parliament. However, in the case of more proportional voting systems, like those that are used in many countries, if a party obtains 15% of the votes, it obtains around 15% of the seats. The NDP supports that system.

Mr. Thompson and Mr. Dobie, you spoke of the importance of local representation. There are proportional voting systems with dual votes: the local vote and a vote using a list of members, such as in Germany, for example. There are also proportional voting systems such as in Ireland, for instance, where ridings are somewhat bigger and where three to five members can represent the same geographic area. This means that all of the MPs have a local link to their citizens. For instance, there could be two members from a certain party and a third one from another, which allows electors to speak to the member who belongs to their party, the one they feel most comfortable with.

Could the Irish system, with larger ridings and several MPs, satisfy your wish to maintain a link between the local MP and the elector?

• (1400)

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Thompson: Without commenting on a specific system, our position is fairly clear. We're calling for a direct link between the electorate, a geographically defined constituency, and the representative in the House.

We will see what is contained in the legal impact study from Maître Power when it comes out. We suspect that there are going to be concerns raised around systems that don't have that link. We suspect that we are going to have concerns around systems that have a list aspect to them, because in effect, this gives more power to parties.

In the last House there was a private member's bill from Mr. Chong that tried to limit the power of the executive and give more power to individual members of Parliament. It was passed in a revised form.

There have been attempts by the House in the past to limit the power of the executive and bring internal reform from within the House to limit the power of the parties. We suspect that might be where the answer lies, but at the end of the day, when we see the legal impact study, I think we're going to be shying away from systems that give more power to political parties.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ste-Marie now has the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back, dear colleagues. I want to point out that Mr. Rayes and Ms. Sansoucy are back with us, after having been replaced by other members of the committee previously. I also welcome Mr. Rayes and Mr. Richards' colleagues—I don't see the other name. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

I thank the members of the public who have come here to see us and I thank them for listening. I want to commend the fabulous work of the entire support team that accompanies us week after week. It is a real pleasure to work with you on a daily basis.

I thank you for your presentations. They were very interesting. What I particularly retained from them is the need for education. We have to educate the population to participate and be engaged in politics. We have to develop the civic sense once again. If we neglect that too much there could be catastrophes like the ones that are occurring currently in the elections in our neighbour to the south. It could be dangerous.

Mr. Thompson and Mr. Dobie, I have a question concerning electoral reform. A few years ago, the Quebec National Assembly conducted consultations with an eye to electoral reform. At that time, did your organization have a position on either the status quo or any type of reform in particular?

Mr. Kevin Dobie: No.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: So, you did not take a position.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Thompson: We weren't involved in those consultations.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Fine.

Gentlemen, lady, according to your presentations, the status quo suits you well. It would be just as well if the system were not changed, and that would present fewer risks than a reform that would bring in an unknown system.

Are those indeed your thoughts?

Mr. Kevin Dobie: As far as the system is concerned, the status quo is not ideal.

[English]

There are a lot of corrections to be made, specifically to get more people involved and engaged. We're not ready to say that the current

• (1405)

[Translation]

the first-past-the-post system—I have forgotten the French term.

[English]

I've never heard it said before, to be honest. I've only heard first past the post.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: It's the *scrutin majoritaire uninominal à un tour*.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Dobie: We're not ready to say that the status quo, in terms of the system, is a yea or a nay, but we definitely have a bit of a challenge—I think all of us do—with engagement, education, and civic involvement.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Ms. Loutfi, what do you think?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: I would make the same comment. There is a big problem right now because a lot of young people are disaffected. That is part of our mission and it is a problem we have to deal with.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Mr. Dobie, in your presentation you said that the five possible electoral systems presented in our document could create confusion.

According to your group, in order to protect the rights of linguistic minorities, both the anglophone minorities in Quebec and the francophone minorities in the rest of Canada, should we avoid some models, or are there some models that could have an adverse effect on minorities?

Mr. Kevin Dobie: We are not there yet. Certainly, any system that would give more power to political parties would worry us. We feel the same about any system that would reduce the geographical influence, for instance a pure proportional representation system like the Israeli model. That concerns us.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I don't think the committee wants to go that far.

Mr. Kevin Dobie: I don't know if you have reached that point.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Ms. Loutfi, I don't know your group, Apathy is Boring. You are present in Montreal and throughout Quebec. How many members do you have, and in how many institutions?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: We launched our group in 2004. We conduct activities throughout the country. We are more present in anglophone communities, but we are based in Montreal. So we are present there as well.

We have seven full-time members on our team and hundreds of volunteers. We have a board of directors, and quite a vast network. During the last federal election, we were able to reach 3 million people because we worked with several partner organizations.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: In other cities, a lot of representatives from Fair Vote Canada came to meetings. Are you in touch with them?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: No. We are a non-partisan organization. We think this is important; we feel there is not enough really neutral information being provided to young people. In fact, we work quite a bit with Elections Canada because we are non-partisan.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Fine. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. DeCoursey, you have the floor.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank all my colleagues for being back with us this Monday morning so that we can spend another week together.

I thank the witnesses and all of the people here. On behalf of my anglophone, Acadian and Brayon colleagues, and newly arrived New Brunswickers, I thank you very much for your welcome here in Montreal.

[English]

I'll begin with Mr. Dobie and Mr. Thompson.

Clearly, you've indicated to us that you feel there's inadequate consultation going on around this process, both because there's no specific alternative to present yet to Canadians, and the oversight of minority language communities is not mentioned as part of our mandate.

Do you have any advice on how you would recommend our process unfold, should we come to a specific recommendation about an alternative system to present to Canadians?

Mr. Stephen Thompson: In the preparation of our brief, we looked at the only place we could turn to in Canadian law that defines the word "consult". That's in the duty of the federal government to consult with aboriginal communities. We looked at the framework around the consultation. When you consult, you have something specific that you anticipate, that a specific course of action will impact the targeted community. You will provide the community with your assessment of those impacts. The purpose of that discussion or that consultation is to arrive at some sort of mediated solution. That seems reasonable to us.

Following the arrival of an agreement, consensus within the committee on a specific system, we would expect that Canada's official language minority communities, us included, would be approached by government with an analysis of how this system might impact our linguistic rights writ large in the widest possible way. We would then be engaged in a conversation on how to mitigate those risks. That would be the process we would envision.

• (1410)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: In terms of disadvantaged groups, as far as their engagement with the voting system goes, do you feel that minority language communities are currently disadvantaged in the way they can access their right to franchise?

Mr. Stephen Thompson: We would answer from our perspective. I think your specific question is, do we feel disenfranchised from the political system?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Not from the political system, from your ability to vote.

Mr. Stephen Thompson: I don't think so.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: No, okay.

Maybe that's where the difference is in views of who may have historically been disadvantaged in their ability to exercise their right to franchise. I certainly take the point as something that should be considered in our deliberations.

Ms. Loutfi, your point about there being a much larger context involved in engaging young people is well-taken by me, and I assume other members around the table. We've heard plenty of different testimony to suggest there's no direct correlation between an electoral voting system and enhanced voter engagement.

The best evidence that I can recall is that of André Blais, who suggested proportional representation may help increase voter turnout by upwards of 3% to 5%, but that in itself is not a clear correlation.

There are aspects of style and system of governance, political leadership, and political culture all around that. I understand there's a much more complex web for us to take into consideration when trying to build that legitimacy through greater participation.

I want to ask you about a statement on your website. One of the bullets in your youth-friendly workshop overview asked us to consider why outreach is a dirty word. We use the word "outreach" a lot. Why is it a dirty word?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: For us, it's not about going to see young people and talking at them, it's about actually engaging in a conversation with them. When many people think about outreach, they think we're going to push our message onto them. That's not how we operate. It's really about creating a safe space, and inviting them to engage in a conversation with us in places where they feel comfortable, and meeting with us on their territory.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: How many young people is your organization actively engaging with?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: It depends on how you define "actively".

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I mean right now, in this whole conversation on electoral reform. Are you in a position to work with young people and to provide them with some basic knowledge of the different forms of voting systems and the values reflected in those different systems?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Yes, we work on different projects in different campaigns. For example, we've been working with Elections Alberta for four years, which is incredible. Through that, we're reaching hundreds of young people through partnerships with community organizations. They have a mission to bring information to young Albertans, specifically 18- to 25-year-olds who are not in school. We develop projects around those objectives, and then we go get those young people. We do the same during federal elections. We work with Elections Canada, for example, to do that. To run a project or a program around this conversation, for example, we would need resources to do so.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Does your organization have any view on voting age, whether 18 is the proper point of entry or 15-year-olds can—

The Chair: Be brief, if you can.

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Okay. We don't have a formal stance on lowering the voting age, but we do recognize that if we lowered the voting age to an age when youth are still supported by an education system like high school, for example, it would be easier to access them and instil this habit of voting among them. I echo some of what Civix and Samara shared on their panel.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nater, welcome to the committee. It's nice to have you here today. I hope you will find our discussions interesting.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Absolutely. It's great to be here.

I want to start with a line of questioning for Mr. Thompson and Mr. Dobie on official languages. When I'm back in Ottawa I usually sit on the official languages committee and I do think there's an important element here from the official languages standpoint.

I want to go back a little bit, Mr. Dobie, to your response to a question from Ms. Romanado, I believe. You mentioned something about the connection to community. Could you expand a little bit on how important it is to have that connection to community, a connection to a language community, especially as it relates to the electoral system and having a representative serve a specific geographic area?

• (1415)

Mr. Kevin Dobie: It's hard to quantify. It's hard to put into specific terms, but it's a comment we've heard consistently, whether in the west island of Montreal or the lower north shore of Quebec, pockets where you have.... I can only speak first-hand for English official language minorities, but I imagine our colleagues from the FCFA would say the same thing about their communities in Manitoba, New Brunswick, and elsewhere. There's just a really strong connection.

The members of these communities tend to be more or less stationary. We don't see a whole lot of migration in and out. They just feel very strongly about where they are from. Often, these are regional communities.

In Quebec, I think about the Gatineau region or the Eastern Townships where these pockets of English speakers just have generally good connections with their MPs and their MNAs at the provincial level. They want to preserve that.

Mr. John Nater: To build on that, Madam Loutfi, you had mentioned that young people don't have that connection with their local representative. Why is that? Why does your organization think that young people don't have that connection with MPs?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: We work with disengaged youth. That's really our audience. They are perhaps not being reached by their local representatives and they are not seeking that relationship either. That's a lot of what we hear, and again, part of why our work is needed is that we're going to the places where no one else is going.

Mr. John Nater: Now back to Mr. Dobie and Mr. Thompson, you had mentioned in your presentation the idea of compulsory civics education at the grade 11 level. I'm from Ontario and we have a half-credit civics course at the grade 10 level. I don't want to disparage the provincial education system but it seemed very elementary in terms of the information provided. There's a lot of scrapbooking, as I would call it, rather than actual in-depth analysis. What type of information do you think would be important to have in a civics education course for young people?

This question is for you, Madam Loutfi, as well, if you want to provide input about the high school level.

Mr. Stephen Thompson: We were careful to couch our recommendation as a partnership between the federal and the

provincial and territorial governments. I don't think the federal government is alone in its concern over voter engagement and voter turnout in elections. I think you would have a ready partner there in working with the provinces and territories.

What would be in it? Eugene Forsey's pamphlet, "How Canadians Govern Themselves" could be the foundation. It would be something small and compact that lays out how the federal government works and how the federal system works. You can foresee companion pieces to that for the provincial governments, the municipal governments, and, in our case, certainly in our community and in the francophone minority community, how the linguistic minority school boards work.

You really need to create a culture and inspire a generation to get civically engaged and civically minded, so that they're intimately involved and engaged with the democratic institutions that are available to them.

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: I would add that I think it's really important that we help young people build that bridge between government and their everyday lives. A lot of young people don't actually see how government affects them. We need to get better at doing this by talking about issues they care about and actually mapping it out for them and saying, "These are all the ways that you've interacted with your government today."

Mr. John Nater: Again, you mentioned in your opening statement that if you're likely to vote in the first two elections, you're more likely to just carry on. Having that proximity to that first opportunity to vote would be important, I would surmise.

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: I'm sorry. I didn't follow what the question was.

Mr. John Nater: Having the opportunity to vote in that first election makes you more likely to vote continuously after that, so having the education and the opportunity at the beginning, when you're most likely to first start voting, would be important.

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Exactly.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): My first question is going to the QCGN.

You mentioned that you were against mandatory voting. If there were an option to opt out on the ballot such that you would have a protest vote or none of the above, or something like that, would you still be opposed to mandatory voting in that regard?

• (1420)

Mr. Stephen Thompson: The foundation of our opposition to mandatory voting is that it's the government imposing on the electorate or on its citizens an obligation to do something. If there's a box on a form where you click and say that you're not voting, you're obliged to be there to fill in that box. What right does government have to tell me that I have to go to a place to check a box that says I'm not voting? A right is inherent to a citizen. It belongs to me.

The state can't come in and tell me how I'm going to use that right, how to exercise that right, or even if I should be exercising that right. Where does that stop? We have a number of rights in the charter. Where does it stop? Does it stop with the right to mobility or the right to vote? Where are we going to go next?

Also, in terms of whatever penalty is imposed for my not showing up and checking the little box, who's that really going to affect? Is it going to be a \$50 fine? At some point, I heard somebody who was in front of the committee say that maybe it would be a fine of \$75, that it wouldn't be very much. Well, \$75 isn't a lot to me, but \$75 is a lot of money to my daughter, who is 27 years old and living on a very tight budget. Also, it's a lot of money to the homeless people who are living right outside the Delta hotel here.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Some people have been suggesting that we do an incentive-based program, whereby someone gets a tax credit. How would you feel about that?

Mr. Stephen Thompson: Again, the idea of the incentive program would be good, but in terms of a tax rebate, now you're going to involve people who pay taxes. Not everybody pays taxes, so who are you incentivizing to vote? The people who pay taxes.

In order to create a political culture where Canadians understand that their section 3 rights are connected to an obligation as a citizen to engage themselves, you have to—or we collectively have to, I would argue—instill this values-based understanding of the obligation to vote.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's very interesting, and I'm happy for that input.

As a committee, I think a lot of us have been discussing and worrying as well about the outreach that we've been doing and how to engage those who don't vote because what we have been seeing is that most people who come in here are dissatisfied by their history of voting, so they've all been very engaged in the voting process, and we're not reaching out to a lot of people who don't vote.

Ms. Loutfi, you've mentioned that your organization is experienced at doing this, so what advice can you give us as to how we can reach out? I'd hate to put this on the record, but some of us have been discussing a reality TV show. I don't know if any networks would take us up, but it's been hard for us to even get media out to discuss this portion of the committee work. They're very interested in what our outcome is going to be and what the make-up of the committee was going to be, but no one seems to be interested in the whole aspect of the actual consultations and the process of it. How do we get out to those people?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: There are organizations doing this work like us and some others. I think supporting us to actually be able to do this work is one way to do it. There are a few things I would mention about that. We are a youth-led organization and we mean that through and through. I'm 26 and I'm the executive director. So working with organizations that actually represent the communities that you're trying to reach I think is really important, and we also do that with our partners. If we're working in a specific community with a target audience in mind, we partner with an organization of that community. Whether we go to employment centres, whether we go to artisans or music events, wherever it is that we're going, we're

actively seeking out environments where we're going to get a diverse and broad group of young people.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Here's another quick thing. Would you also suggest our going into universities on our own? I mean, we're on such a time crunch, and that has been a little bit of our problem. Do you think people would come out, or is it better done through organizations like yourself?

• (1425)

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: I think we need all of it. I think if you guys walk into a university, the people who are going to start engaging with you are likely going to be more engaged young people—or not young people, but I do think it's important to go onto university campuses. There are a bunch of organizations that already have home bases there as well, but I would also just highlight, like I mentioned earlier, that I think we're really missing out on young adults who are not pursuing post-secondary.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sansoucy, you have the floor.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I would first like to acknowledge the people who travelled here this afternoon to come and take part in the work of our committee. I also thank the witnesses who are here with us, and finally, I want to greet my colleagues. I want you to know that it is a pleasure to be briefly among you again, and to express my respect for those of you who will be doing the entire tour, that is to say the full three weeks. I very much admire the fact that you will be visiting so many cities, from one end of the country to the other. The same goes for the members of the team.

My first question is for Ms. Loutfi.

You said, quite rightly, that the level of participation by young people was influenced by many factors. Their participation in the last election was exceptional. You said that that was the exception that proved the rule, which is true in my opinion. The fact that 42% of the electorate did not vote, however, is deplorable.

I respect the fact that your organization has not chosen to speak in support of one type of voting system or another. The purpose of my intervention is not to ask you to do so. However, I would like to take advantage of your presence here and of the fact that your organization's work has made you aware of the various barriers that discourage young people from voting.

We know that the current voting system creates distortions. For instance, a party that garners a minority of the votes can still win a majority of the seats. This type of voting system, as we have seen in the last elections, leads people to vote strategically. You mentioned that to encourage young people to vote, we have to take their aspirations into account. With the current voting system, too many people vote against something rather than for something.

Based on your knowledge of the situation and on the dialogue you have with young people, would you say that those elements of the voting system may constitute barriers?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Do you mean the fact that people vote against something rather than for something?

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Yes, exactly.

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: I think there are several factors. After every election, Elections Canada prepares a report on the obstacles that young people felt were most important. Education is one. A lot of young electors feel they do not have enough information to exercise their right to vote. Yes, there are obstacles involving

[English]

logistics, I would say. There are things like actually being free the day of the election, and things like that. I think the reports that Elections Canada has which outline those issues would be the ones to look at in terms of the existing barriers.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

In voting analyses, especially of the vote in Quebec, we hear about francophone ridings, anglophone ridings, and distortions in terms of representation. As we know, the West Island usually has its mind firmly made up, and often before voting day. Do you think the anglophone community feels it is well represented with the current system?

Mr. Kevin Dobie: I think you are right to say that the electoral map is not perfect. I don't know whether the solution is to redraw the electoral map or to make the election of the prime minister a little more difficult, for instance.

• (1430)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Could a system—my colleague Alexandre Boulerice referred to it earlier—of proportional representation that, without taking linguistic pockets into account, would allow for ridings with several members, an anglophone among them, be a possible solution? I want to hear your point of view because you stated that it is the responsibility of elected representatives to present a precise voting model.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Thompson: I think that English-speaking voters federally are equitably represented under the current system and, as Mr. Dobie said, have a very strong connection to their local member of Parliament. That is what we're trying to maintain.

I think the fear of all minorities, ours included, is either lost in a bigger riding or a bigger district with multiple members, or worse, compartmentalized: oh, that's the minorities' MP; that's the minorities' representative. As soon as that happens, it's fairly simple to identify who the minorities' MPs are and say, "We'll just put them over here."

The system that encourages a minority to work with the majority helps the minority. I'll give you an example. The Sherbrooke and Lennoxville communities in the Eastern Townships have very close relationships with both their provincial members of the National Assembly and their federal MPs. They are a minority community—and there's no question about it—but they feel very connected to their MNA and to their MPs, and very supported by them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards, it's good to see you again.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions. I'll start with you, Ms. Loutfi.

You made a comment in your opening remarks, and I think this is a direct quote or very close, "Legitimacy is a product of participation." I certainly would agree that it's important to ensuring legitimacy that we give as many people as possible the opportunity to participate and that as many people as possible actually do participate in that.

What do you think about consultation around any changes on electoral reform, and about us trying to be as broad and inclusive as possible in those consultations? Is that important in terms of legitimizing any proposed change coming out of this?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Are you asking for consultations prior to the committee's recommendation?

Mr. Blake Richards: I meant prior to any changes being made. Actually, we should have consultations both prior to and following a recommendation. The bottom line for me would be prior to a recommendation being implemented. Is it important to have broad consultation to make it legitimate?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Yes. The quote was Jean-Pierre's, actually, that participation is tied to legitimacy. That's what I've been kind of harping about the whole time I've been here. I think we do need to consult, and we need to go out to hard-to-reach groups of young people that we haven't spoken to.

Mr. Blake Richards: As for trying to make sure that the opportunity to participate is as broad as possible, you made a comment about using this opportunity to better educate and to rebrand government for young people. In my mind, if you were to conduct a campaign following a recommendation, where there was a lot of opportunity for public education and participation, I would see a referendum as being one of the options that would give a great opportunity to educate and include young people in the process. If it was done properly, it would also give the broadest possible ability to participate.

What would your thoughts be on that? Would that be something you would see as enabling broad participation?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: Yes, the question for us isn't whether there should or shouldn't be a referendum on this. Our concern is, if there is a referendum, will a lot of young people show up and vote? Right now, people aren't even showing up for elections. If we're going to go down that route, for instance, the idea of actually getting very high rates of participation should be the priority, and for us that will only happen if we create non-partisan and accessible resources, and if we actually go out and bring it to these diverse populations of youth.

• (1435)

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, great. That was the follow-up I was going to ask and you've answered it, so thank you.

Mr. Dobie or Mr. Thompson, either one of you is welcome to respond to this. You made the comment in response to the last set of questions that you feel English-speaking, so in this case minority language voters are adequately represented under the current system. You made several other comments about moving away from a geographically represented electorate, the idea of multi-member larger districts. One of the concerns you raised was the idea of shying away from systems that would give more power to political parties.

I think I can assume from that that you would be reluctant to make any change to the current system. It doesn't sound as though you're opposed to the idea of something that would be better than the current system. It sounds like based on some of those comments that you'd certainly be reluctant to change, because you think that currently the system is fairly adequately representing minority language rights. You have concerns about the geographics and political parties gaining more power. Would that be a fair assessment of your position, or am I mischaracterizing it?

Mr. Stephen Thompson: I don't think you're mischaracterizing it. I think you might be colouring it a little bit. We don't have a position on any system. In response to a question, we said that our community is generally equitably represented. Our concerns are that we could lose the link between a geographically defined constituency and a member of Parliament. We are concerned about a system that would give more power to a political party, because minorities tend not to be...linguistic minorities anyway tend not to be well represented, or equitably represented, within political party systems. Those are our concerns in the current conversation we're having.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Do I have time?

The Chair: No, you're out of time.

Mr. Blake Richards: I was wondering why the microphone was off. I guess that's why.

The Chair: No, I have no control over that.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, I just wasn't sure what that was signifying.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): It's great to be back in ever-beautiful Montreal. We're at meeting 35, and I was just reflecting that this panel has given us new material, so that's a great way to start another week.

I want to go to Mr. Dobie and Mr. Thompson for what I hope will be a brief comment. My colleague, Ms. Sahota, was talking about mandatory voting. Do you have a position on mandatory registration? I don't think you touched on that.

Something else that's come up is the idea of having people register but being able to indicate that they won't be voting for whatever reasons. Would that be any more palatable, or is anything mandatory not a go?

Mr. Kevin Dobie: I like the way you summed it up at the end, "anything mandatory is not a go".

It's the same principle of impositions on citizens. To us, it's contrary to the spirit of our democracy and our charter.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Ms. Loutfi, I've really liked everything you've talked about, when you said that those in post-secondary tend to be more engaged and easier to access. When you were talking about doing some of the things like concerts and events, I think that gets into some of the strategies you've used to get to that audience that is maybe less engaged.

I'd love to know what else you've used as strategies to reach out to people. I haven't heard you talk about a lot of specifics. Can you share anything about where else you go to find both the post-secondary groups but particularly this elusive non-engaged group of youth who simply aren't at the universities and are maybe not at the concerts? What did you do in 2015? What's your strategy moving forward to identify and engage these young people?

● (1440)

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: We consider ourselves an innovation organization, because we haven't found the silver bullet to find all of these disengaged youth as yet. But we're constantly testing and trying and figuring out new ways to do our work.

Right now we are working through other community organizations that offer front-line services and different resources. Whether we're talking youth shelters, employment centres, or food banks, there are different organizations out there that are providing services to young people who are more marginalized or harder to reach through the traditional current systems we have.

For us, it's partnerships with organizations like that. We've found that talking to them about the issues they're working on and how that's related to government and thus related to policies that affect them and the populations they serve, has been a really good way of building that relationship and trust with those organizations and the communities they serve.

Then, as a youth organization, we always try to find fun ways to bring these resources to them, whether it's video content, whether that's infographics or partnerships with artists, and finding interesting ways so that when we're actually with this population they're engaged in the conversation.

Mr. John Aldag: You were talking about the marginalized, and I think that's one obviously unique and challenging group to get to. I don't know if you would see it the same way, but there is the not necessarily marginalized but disengaged group of youth. Do you try to reach that group as well? Are there different strategies you would use with them? We hear about the working poor, the youth who are finally beyond post-secondary education, or they've gone from high school into the workforce and in many cases they're in part of those working poor, minimum-wage kind of jobs, and trying to pay off student loan debt and save for rent for the next month.

They may not be out at the clubs and things, so how do you reach that disengaged group as opposed to the marginalized youth?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: We think about it often as a ladder of engagement. There are always different rungs on that ladder, so as much as possible you have different strategies for the level of engagement or disengagement that you're working with.

Going through a lot of creative centres, often we find artists and young people involved with different creative organizations, or agencies that are passionate about certain things, or use art to voice different concerns or ideas they have, but maybe they're not using the system—and by the system I mean our democratic process—to be heard as well.

They tend to be not necessarily marginalized but disengaged within the system. I think that's actually something we talk about quite a lot, because our name, Apathy is Boring, can be confusing. We're not saying that youth are apathetic, they're simply not choosing the current system to have their voices heard. They're using alternative forums. Going to those alternative places where they're voicing their concerns is how we reach them.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes our round of questioning.

I have a couple of very short questions.

Ms. Loutfi, does your organization go into the schools? Have you been into any schools in my riding, which is on the western tip of the island? Have you been to those schools, and what do you do? Do you go into the classroom, or do you go to the auditorium and have a motivational speaker come in? How does it work exactly?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: We focus on 18- to 25-year-olds, or 18- to 30-year-olds, so we don't actually occupy the high school space. We let Civix do that. We partner with organizations like CASA, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, which works through different university groups, but our focus isn't actually being on campus; it's being in the spaces where we can reach youth who are not pursuing post-secondary education, through community organizations, creative events, and things like that.

The Chair: Oh, so you don't go into post-secondary per se?

Ms. Carolyn Loutfi: We do. We don't discriminate against post-secondary, but they're not our priority.

The Chair: Right, it's not the major focus. Interesting.

Mr. Dobie and Mr. Thompson, to follow up on the line of questioning that Ms. Sansoucy had, obviously your priority is that the voice of English-speaking Quebecers be heard and that the community have influence over government policy.

Is there one system that you feel would give more influence to the English-speaking community per se? I can't imagine what it would be.

Right now you have members of the National Assembly of Quebec, and members of Parliament. Whether they be francophone, anglophone, or have other origins, they represent and represent well. I'm not speaking for myself here; I'm just speaking for the colleagues I have in the west island. They speak for the community. I think you alluded to the fact that even in areas where the MLA, the MNA, or the MP may not be from the anglophone community, they have good relationships with the community.

Do you feel that the influence of the community would be stronger under another system? How could it be? I can't see it myself. How would a proportional system change anything, really? How would a proportional system with local representation change

the influence of the English-speaking community in Quebec? It would probably have the same representatives.

• (1445)

Mr. Stephen Thompson: Again, Mr. Scarpaleggia, we have no position on any specific—

The Chair: Okay, so just sort of guessing at it or thinking out loud.... Okay, that's fair enough.

Thank you so much. That was very interesting, and it was a new angle. We've been all over the country and we've had many meetings and seen many witnesses, but it's a fresh angle and we appreciate your coming here to speak to us.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We'll suspend for about five minutes, please.

• (1445)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1500)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will begin the second part of our meeting and welcome the second panel of witnesses.

First we have Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille, coordinator in sociopolitical affairs and research with the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec. Then, from the Forum jeunesse de l'Île de Montréal, we welcome Mr. Santiago Rizzo, president.

Welcome, gentlemen.

Finally, as an individual, we welcome Mr. Rémy Trudel, guest professor, École nationale d'administration publique. Good afternoon and welcome, Mr. Trudel.

I don't know if you were here during the first part of the meeting, but I will repeat what I explained. Each witness has three to five minutes for their presentation, and this is followed by a question period for the members. Each one of them has five minutes to question the witnesses. The five minutes include both the questions and the answers.

Without further ado, we will begin the second part with Mr. Pilon-Robitaille.

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille (Coordinator in Sociopolitical Affairs and Research, Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec): Good morning.

I will begin by briefly describing the organization I represent today. The FECQ represents the students of 22 CEGEPS in the province of Quebec. These have more than 65,000 students throughout the province, from Abitibi to the North Shore, Gaspésie, Joliette, etc. From its inception, the FECQ was built on democratic principles, that is to say that we try to give a voice to everyone and ensure that all opinions are heard and can be expressed to build a consensus. That is the vision that guided our reflection on democracy and the representation of the opinion of all citizens.

We consider that the current voting system does not meet our expectations concerning the representation of everyone's wishes. We are aware of the fact that the first-past-the-post system distorts representation considerably, and that there can be a discrepancy between the votes and the members who are elected to the House. We advocate the adoption of a proportional voting system with compensatory mechanisms.

Also, we would like to see half of the elected representatives elected in ridings, and the other half chosen on the basis of closed lists, which would be tabled before the beginning of the elections by the various political parties.

Moreover, the FECQ is opposed to any affirmative action, whether be to further the representation of women, ethnocultural communities or young people in politics. We are instead in favour of various measures such as popular education, which could change the population's attitude, rather than imposing quotas. We believe that the solution should not come from artificial measures but rather through changing attitudes. We are also open to the idea of lowering the voting age to 16, as has been done in Austria, which saw a quite significant increase in electoral participation among young people.

We think that this would be a good way to improve the participation of young people particularly. We know that it is quite complicated to encourage electoral participation among young people. Although things were different during the last federal election, which made the statistics lie, we believe that there would be avenues to encourage that participation.

• (1505)

The Chair: Have you finished?

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: Yes.

The Chair: Perfect, thank you.

That was succinct and clear, thank you.

Mr. Risso, you have the floor.

Mr. Santiago Risso (President, Forum jeunesse de l'Île de Montréal): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, esteemed members of the committee.

On behalf of the Forum jeunesse de l'Île de Montréal and of Citoyenneté jeunesse, of which I am the vice-president—Citoyenneté jeunesse is the issue table for the Forums jeunesse régionaux du Québec—I would like to thank you. We are very pleased to be taking part today in this exercise that is crucial for our democracy. We also appreciate enormously that the committee reached out to youth, which is entirely normal.

I am not going to go on at length about the proposals we submitted, because you have them in our brief. I will give you a broad outline of our proposal.

To begin, as a young person and as the representative of an umbrella organization that brings together over 250 organizational members and 300 individual members, I can say that we are unanimous. We have already taken part in several consultations regarding changes to the voting system, particularly in Quebec, where the last consultation took place in 2005. The briefs submitted to you were inspired by that consultation. We consulted many young

people in the process of drafting these briefs. It seems entirely relevant that after 10 years, the same proposals can be applied to the federal level.

In our opinion, it is urgent that the voting system be changed, and this feeling is prevalent among young people.

We know that young people are very active politically, but in a less classic way, so to speak. Young people are committed in other ways, but the figures are eloquent: they distrust the current system. We thus think that changing the voting system could greatly encourage participation by young people.

We feel it is urgent to take action and change the current voting system which causes an unfortunate break between civil society and political representatives. The current voting system does not reflect the popular support given to the parties, and often creates false majority governments.

For all of these reasons, we propose a greater proportionality between the popular vote and the number of elected representatives from each party. We recommend the adoption of a mixed compensatory voting system where some members would be elected on a territorial basis and others on a basis proportional to the mixed vote.

We think it is essential to maintain the territorial representation of the population through a member of Parliament. However, we also believe that we need provincial lists to achieve the proportional aspect. These changes could lead to the achievement of gender parity. In this regard, we suggest the use of a proportional vote with lists drawn up, as I was saying, with an eye to achieving this parity. It is very rare that we do not agree with the FECQ, but we feel it is essential to seize this opportunity to create a new culture. Eventually, we would like this gender parity to be achieved naturally via popular education.

In conclusion, it seems very important to aim to gradually increase the representation of ethnocultural minorities and young people in the electorate.

We don't want to go into specific details. We don't think it is important at this stage to examine in detail all of the elements of a new voting system. The important thing is to come up with a consensus in the House of Commons so that a change takes place. The current government has given itself that mandate. It was one of its electoral commitments. It cannot back down.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1510)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Trudel, you have the floor.

Mr. Rémy Trudel (Guest Professor, École nationale d'administration publique, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and ladies and gentlemen members of the committee.

Since I spent 14 years at the Quebec National Assembly, I was there during half of the time since the electoral reform. Nothing has moved yet. That gives you some idea of its complexity.

In examining the mandate that was given to you by the House of Commons, I see that one of the fundamental questions involves the representativity of elected representatives, and the opinions that are prevalent in Canadian society.

Regarding the representativity of elected individuals, rather than changing the system, I would be in favour of two-round elections. First, in a two-round system, we all have the opportunity of expressing our choice. We then have the opportunity of expressing a second choice on the opinions that may emerge during an electoral campaign, or speeches to citizens.

That said, I am not very much in favour of proportional systems, because there are a lot of other ways to encourage the participation of citizens and the expression of diverse opinions in democracies. I can point to an extreme example, that of Iceland. The members of the senate, which is a chamber set up pursuant to the power of the state, are chosen at random. Senators chosen at random? Can you imagine?

And yet, in criminal trials, 12 individuals are chosen, as intelligent as all of us gathered here, who will make decisions about someone's life. And so we trust 12 individuals to make decisions about someone's life. What is the underlying premise to that selection? Everyone is intelligent or brilliant enough, sufficiently representative of currents in a society to be able to express them, and there are multiple ways of doing so.

For my part, I hope and dare believe that the committee will make recommendations not only on the voting system, but also on the ways in which citizens participate in Canadian democracy. I created a course at the École nationale d'administration publique entitled "Participatory Management and the Defence of Rights". I look at what is happening at this time, and I tell my students that I feel I am teaching an archeology course, because citizens are no longer represented in the current voting system. And yet it is a representative system, since it is based on universal suffrage.

As for the representativity of individuals, I would like to see a two-round election. My position on that is very clear. In France for instance, there is a system that functions very well and that allows citizens to express different opinions.

Moreover, all of the methods of consultation and modes of citizen participation have to be reviewed. We must have more than consultations that can be lost in the maze of power, but obligatory consultations as to the advice to be given to the House of Commons, for instance. If it were mandatory for the House of Commons to receive the advice of a group, to take it into account and have it be tabled in the House, the various currents of opinion in Canadian society would be expressed. We have to be very creative.

Some day you are also going to have to—and I understand all of the constitutional difficulties involved—broach the issue of the second Chamber, the Senate. You could make some very strict recommendations regarding the way in which appointments are made, if not the election of senators. The different currents in society have to be expressed in some way, including the one we just heard, the opinion of young people. They have to be represented in this second House, as do many other groups as well. To do all of that, we don't need to change the voting system, unless we opt for the two-

round system in the House of Commons. I think that we could in that way bring about considerable changes, and more stakeholders could join Canadian democracy in order to revive it. As for the obligatory vote, it did not work in the Soviet Union. I am not very favourable to it.

● (1515)

Moreover, if we are indeed considering online voting, it is essential that, in 2016, we examine mechanisms that could increase public participation. We all have a bank card to withdraw money or do a banking transaction. If we wake up at 2 a.m. because we have forgotten to make reservations for a university conference in Munich, within half an hour, we can book a flight, a hotel room and a car rental with a credit card. Then we can go back to bed.

It is essential that you consider this and make recommendations about online voting. We live in a modern society and this would get us out of our antiquated ways.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

We will begin the question period with Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here on this lovely, sunny day in October. Many thanks also those in attendance. I would like to point out that we have devices available for anyone who needs simultaneous interpretation.

[*English*]

We have translation services, if you need to have instant translation. I know there are some new people in the room.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank Mr. Pilon-Robitaille and Mr. Risso for their testimony.

I have spent nearly my entire working life in the higher education sector, at the CEGEP and university level, and I do not think young people are apolitical. I think they like politics.

Voting is another matter, though, as is running for office. During the last election, there was a Green Party candidate who turned 18 on voting day. She was the youngest candidate in the history of federal elections. Her name is Casandra Poitras and she was a candidate in Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, the riding next to mine. I asked her why she had decided to run. It is true that young people, as a rule, do not seem to be interested in running in municipal, provincial or federal elections.

What must we do to appeal to and get the next generation of young people interested in politics? Do you have any suggestions?

Mr. Santiago Risso: We have several suggestions.

The core mission of the Forum jeunesse de l'île de Montréal is to increase civic participation and engagement. That is what drives us. Civic education is lacking, especially in Quebec, glaringly so, in fact.

Thirteen years ago, the Forum jeunesse de l'île de Montréal was funded by the Secrétariat à la jeunesse, which was the case until April 2015. We had developed a great program to encourage young people to vote. Essentially, the program provided information about the current voting method. The program was called "Voters in training". We used it every time there was an election, whether at the school board, municipal, provincial or federal level. We approached high schools, youth centres and teachers who implemented several steps, because there were five different steps in the program.

We showed young people how to look for information, how to recognize the various media, how to find reliable information, how to develop arguments for debate and how to debate.

The fifth step was an election simulation. For provincial elections, we worked with Quebec's Chief Electoral Officer. All the information came from his office. Young people voted on the same day as the actual election, with real material, electoral lists and candidates, depending on the riding.

The last simulation was conducted in April 2014. About 70,000 young people participated across the province. Unfortunately, the program was transferred to Quebec's Chief Electoral Officer. I say unfortunately because, although it was a good decision to transfer it, we lost funding for the program when the provincial government eliminated funding for youth forums. That is one example.

Familiarity with the current voting system is crucial. Civic education is lacking. How can we expect young people to vote or be interested in politics if nothing has been explained to them? Ask a young person what the difference is between a municipal councillor and a borough councillor. That is a tough one even for me, and I work in the field. That is where education is lacking.

Moreover, there are a number of other steps. There could be other proposals. Young people have to be able to identify with political parties. At the Forum jeunesse, we provide a lot of training in this regard. We give presentations at conferences and ask young elected officials to meet other young people to talk about their experience. That is why the Forum jeunesse de l'île de Montréal and Citoyenneté jeunesse have proposed a provincial compensatory list that would include more young people. If young people can recognize the candidates running, it might encourage them to become politically involved in a party.

● (1520)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rayes, please go ahead.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the three witnesses for taking the time to come and meet us. I have a question for each of the groups, I mean for the young people and the elders.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alain Rayes: Let me start with experience. There is a lot of experience here! I have to find the right term so as not to ruffle any feathers. You know what I mean.

My first question is for you, Mr. Trudel. You have many years of experience in politics. During the election campaign, I never heard

any mention of this proposal by the Liberal government. I challenge anyone to find a national debate that clearly referred to changing the voting method. I think it was not really an issue and that people did not vote on that basis.

That said, the government has already announced that it wants to change the current voting method. Surveys show that just 3% of the population is interested in this right now. I get the sense that the goal is to get people to believe that changing the voting method would solve the civic participation issues, and that worries me. When we hear that we will have proportional representation, that there will be proportional governments and so on, it is implied that this is a simple matter. In my view, however, the problem runs much deeper.

My first question is very simple. In your view, Mr. Trudel, if the committee reaches a consensus and the government decides to proceed, should all Canadians be consulted before the voting method is changed?

Mr. Rémy Trudel: Yes, in my opinion, Canadians have to be consulted because any change would be significant. It would mean turning the page on a system that has been in place for over 200 years. Our democratic institutions will be affected by the change. The population must be consulted, but I really think that a referendum is an outstanding tool for public education.

As was just pointed out by the young people here, this is an excellent opportunity to provide public education and information. Even if the outcome is not what the party in power or the government wants, it would not be a waste of time as regards education and training. People would be better prepared to exercise their civic responsibility. There are so many avenues for civic participation that this would be an opportunity to discuss it with the public. Whether or not a change to the constitution is needed, I will let the specialists give you their opinion on that.

We should leap at the opportunity to engage with the public in order to have more representative institutions. If the public is consulted on the voting method or changing the voting method, regardless, the discussion will turn to the Senate. It is part of the government, of our governance, and people will ask questions. Groups, such as young people and those with various leanings, will raise questions about their ability to express themselves and will want us to consider their opinions.

To answer your question, quite definitely, the public must be consulted. We must take advantage of this opportunity for public education and training.

● (1525)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

If you compare proportional representation, whether preferential or some other method, with our current system, there is quite a significant difference in local representation. Everyone who has come to talk to us about proportional representation reminded us of the importance of local representation. There are two possible scenarios.

The first would be to reduce the number of constituency MPs to make room for list MPs. This would necessarily increase the size of ridings and distance MPs from their role as local representative. I often give my own riding as an example. I have 40 municipalities. Tomorrow morning, if half of all riding MPs were eliminated and placed on a list, or if their number were reduced by 30% or 40%, this would necessarily increase riding size. This would weaken my close ties with my constituents.

The second scenario is to increase the number of MPs. This would maintain the status quo as to the number of MPs and would establish a proportional system. In that case, nearly everyone agrees that Canadians are not ready to increase the number of MPs by 150, 200 or 300. That is politically unthinkable.

My next question is for the three of you. If we had the choice between the two scenarios, would you still be in favour of a proportional system? As representatives of the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec and the Forum jeunesse de l'Île de Montréal, you say that is your proposal. I would also like to hear Mr. Trudel's opinion on that. We have a dilemma regarding the two scenarios. Between the two, I am inclined toward local representation, because I think that is the first thing people ask of me. They would like to vote for their MP and at most for the party or the government.

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: That is a very interesting question. The conclusion you just provided helps me structure my answer.

A proportional system with two types of votes, one for a local MP and one for a list MP, would in a way address that very issue, that is, people could vote for their riding MP and then for a party.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, but let us be clear about something. If you do that, you have to eliminate MPs to free up a hundred or so places on the list, otherwise you have to increase the number of MPs. It is not possible to maintain the current 338 ridings we have in Canada. All the experts have come and clearly presented those scenarios.

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: Of course, we are not in favour of adding new seats. We agree with you that it would be unrealistic in the current context. It would even be unrealistic to add a hundred or so seats all of a sudden.

We are definitely in favour of redrawing the electoral map. We believe that a new electoral map could be drawn that would provide very satisfactory regional representation, while still having proportional representation and a more accurate way of representing the popular vote.

• (1530)

The Chair: Thank you.

The six minutes are nearly up.

Mr. Trudel, you may make a brief comment.

Mr. Rémy Trudel: I am more in favour of geographical representation, that is, attaching voters to their MP in a familiar space, a community space. You say you have 40 municipalities in your riding. I represented a riding with 43 municipalities, with a radius of at least 285 km. People identify with their MP.

Moreover, do we have to sacrifice the expression of diverse views in society because we insist on geographical representation? The

answer is no, but we have to make the effort to find other formula that are used around the world. We have to look at Scandinavia. Stéphane Paquin, one of my colleagues, is doing that.

The Chair: We have really gone over the time limit.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

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

I would like to thank everyone here.

I think people would like to talk soon, after our experts.

Hello Mr. Trudel, Mr. Risso and Mr. Pilon-Robitaille.

Many things are said during an election campaign and we know it is hard to determine exactly why voters voted for one party or another. Mr. Rayes, I was not able to rise to your challenge of finding something in the debates, but I found a Radio-Canada article from June 30, 2015, in which Justin Trudeau called for electoral reform. It was part of the public debates and discussions. This also came up at times during canvassing.

Mr. Risso, thank you very much for your presentation. Your comments about the urgent need to change the voting method and about young people's mistrust in the current political system were quite clear.

You made a rather harsh statement that struck me. You said that, right now, there is a rift between civil society and the political parties. As to the mixed member proportional system you propose, I would like to know how it could improve matters or reduce that gap.

Mr. Santiago Risso: Thank you for your question, Mr. Boulerice.

I think I will answer the question from Mr. Rayes at the same time.

It is unfortunate that we are focusing on just two solutions when there might be many more.

How could our proposal improve matters? A minor change will of course have to be made to the ridings and territories, based on population. How can we restore that trust? I think we must keep territorial representation.

We can enlarge ridings and the compensatory list will fill the gaps. If an MP has a larger constituency with a larger population, the MP elected from the provincial compensatory list will also be assigned to that riding.

We are talking numbers, but as I said in my presentation, this might not be the right time for that. We have to talk about the details, but first of all we have to reach a consensus on changing the voting method. We propose that 60% of MPs be elected based on their territory—as is the case right now—and 40% by the compensatory method. It would not be necessary to add MPs. The issue would be how to distribute the MPs and how to better represent the larger regions.

I will quickly answer Mr. Rayes' question as to whether we are in favour of or opposed to a referendum. Since the current government promised to change the voting method, we think it must do so. There must be a referendum to validate these changes, but we would like to see two or three elections with the new voting method before it is validated by the public.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Risso.

We don't buy a car without first taking it for a test drive, which is what most people do at a dealership. Otherwise we are making a choice based on uncertainties, which represents a leap of faith. That of course is problematic.

All three of you have spoken about the need for education, for a better understanding of our electoral system and our political system. You are right. You have probably already observed that many voters believe we have a presidential system and that they vote for the prime minister, when in fact they vote for a local MP, and the party with the most seats forms a majority in Parliament or in the House.

Mr. Pilon-Robitaille, you propose a mixed-member proportional system with 50% of MPs being elected by lists and 50% elected locally. We could discuss the 10% difference between your two proposals.

Yet, you are proposing closed lists, which is essentially the system that Germany has had for several decades. That creates stable, predictable, coalition governments with good public policy in general. You are opposed to positive discrimination measures, although the list system—as far as gender equality is concerned—can in fact be a way of breaking through the glass ceiling as to women's participation in our electoral systems.

In your opinion, would it be possible to use closed lists as a tool to increase the representation of women in Parliament?

• (1535)

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: The reason we are opposed to positive discrimination measures is that we see them as an artificial solution to a problem that ultimately runs much deeper. We have to do more than simply put MPs in the House for the sake of it.

That is why we strongly support public education, in particular, in order to encourage civic participation among young people. Closed lists could of course be a solution. We have observed, however, that they are more of a short-term solution that does not truly resolve the underlying problem.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

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

Hello, gentlemen. Thank you for being here and for the three very interesting and informative presentations you gave.

In discussing ways to improve representation, a type of proportional system is often suggested. It could be a two-round system, a mixed compensatory system or another type. We could also use the upper house as a way to maintain regional legitimacy or regional representation.

You touched on this earlier, Mr. Trudel. To your knowledge, would it take a constitutional amendment to have an elected Senate?

Mr. Rémy Trudel: Clearly, it would take a constitutional amendment.

Let us first explore the idea of using the upper house, which has a fully-fledged role in state decision-making, to represent the diverse trends in Canadian society, including men and women, minority groups, ideological leanings, and so forth.

I think I can say without insulting anyone, I hope, that the current appointments to the Senate are based more on being well-known than on representing trends in society. We are fortunate to have the Senate. In principle, we should use it to encourage civic participation.

Let us consider as well the extreme example of Iceland, where the 25 members of the senate are randomly chosen, because citizens are considered to be equally intelligent and able to represent others. They are then changed at regular intervals.

I hope your committee will dare to make recommendations that go far beyond the methods currently being suggested. I am not saying it is not a good idea, but we are caught in a discussion whose sole purpose is to determine whether or not we want a proportional system. There are many other aspects of civic participation. We must ensure not only that the public knows that the institutions are listening to them; they must also clearly sense that their opinion is well heard. If it is just a lot of talking, people will be discouraged, as they are now. The institutions must be required to consult MPs who, in my view, represent ridings geographically. Citizens must still feel close to their MP so the MP can in turn represent them. There are many other approaches, and you have to be daring in a sense.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Mr. Risso and Mr. Pilon-Robitaille, I would like to hear your views on the possibility of reforming the Senate so senators are elected in order to better represent the population.

Mr. Santiago Risso: As I said earlier, our brief is based on reforming the provincial voting method. We have been talking about this in Quebec for a long time but nothing has changed. We believe that our brief also applies to the federal system.

I will answer your question, not on behalf of the Forum jeunesse de l'île de Montréal, but from my own point of view. I am very much in favour of Mr. Trudel's proposal. If we can choose members of a jury at random, by chance, why can we not do the same for members of the Senate? That would be a clear message to the public that democracy and its institutions belong to them and that everyone must be part of it.

• (1540)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

What are your thoughts, Mr. Pilon-Robitaille?

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: I share Mr. Risso's position. Similarly, the FECQ's argument is really based on the provincial context of Quebec, so the Senate does not come into play of course.

I will also answer from my own point of view. The idea of making the Senate more democratic is indeed a good thing. It would be a way to better represent trends among the population.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

I have a final question for the three of you.

With regard to representing political opinions, do you think the federal government should examine the financing of political parties in order to give everyone an equal opportunity? We know the previous government made cuts in this regard. Should we consider returning to more public financing in order to better represent ideas?

Mr. Rémy Trudel: That is what Quebec did by eliminating the financing of political parties by individuals and instead establishing public funding, based on vote share, support, and other indicators.

Democracy does not exist in a vacuum. As a rule, the less fortunate groups are also the ones that have fewest resources to share their opinions, to convey them, especially considering a few elements that cannot be controlled. It was mentioned earlier that people think they are voting in a presidential system and for a president. That is what most people believe. Election campaigns focus almost entirely on party leaders and little on local issues, except when there is a contradiction between a candidate and the leader shown on national television.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rémy Trudel: We must revise party financing in order to support different political views in our society.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Answer very quickly, gentlemen.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Ste-Marie, but we have run over the time limit.

The witnesses can make further comments later on. That is possible.

Mr. DeCoursey, you have the floor.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I will not go over five minutes, for sure.

I would like to thank the three witnesses for their presentations.

Mr. Risso, in your presentation you mentioned the growing public distrust in our political elite. Many people told the committee that they feel their vote doesn't count. I think what these people really

feel is that nothing will change, that the political elite does not really know the issues they face and that their vote does not carry much weight.

Do you think adopting proportional representation will help address the public distrust of the political system and of politicians?

Mr. Santiago Risso: Yes, but it will not be enough.

[*English*]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Why?

Mr. Santiago Risso: It is one solution among many. We have to start with the basics. How can we claim to be a democracy in 2016 when the government appoints senators, for example? That is a fundamental issue. That is why I stress civics education. Civics education is the foundation.

Even though it is not under federal jurisdiction, I do not understand why civics education is not part of school curricula. I come from Uruguay, which has a population of 3.5 million, and civics are taught in the third year of high school. I had a book that explained Uruguay's constitution. There were only two students out of 30 who were interested in the subject, but at least the whole class was familiar with our electoral system. That is the foundation.

If the government, all the parties, and the House of Commons want to promote democracy, the first step is to implement a voting system in which each person's vote counts.

• (1545)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Trudel, you said you have a prejudice against proportional representation. Can you explain why?

Mr. Rémy Trudel: I would like to add something. As we just discussed, proportional representation is not the only way to correct the situation. I think we need a process that could lead to proportional representation.

First we need to create institutions that give people the opportunity to express their opinions and to be considered, which is referred to as mandatory opinions. For example, the House of Commons could not begin discussion of a bill without the mandatory tabling of the opinion of a group representing the public or various public opinions.

We must work toward that kind of change rather than simply changing the current format. There are 338 MPs and it would not inherently be a bad thing to eliminate a hundred or so of you and then to use representatives of groups that represent various opinions. Yet this would not solve the problem of civic participation. We have to be innovative. We have to use online voting or online consultation. Online methods can be used to gather the views of our fellow Canadians from the various regions of the country. We have to use these new communication tools that are multiplying very quickly. We have to go much further than the current institutions that are caught in a rut, maintaining that proportional representation will solve matters. Let us make the expression of opinions through various channels mandatory to ensure that they are considered in the decision-making process. That is why I say that proportional representation cannot instantly resolve all the basic issues.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you very much.

Mr. Pilon-Robitaille, you can use the remaining time to comment if you wish.

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: Of course we do not think that proportional representation is the answer to everything. Believing the opposite, however, would be willful blindness. It is one way to increase voter confidence in their elected officials. That said, proportional representation could increase the importance of more parties, which could motivate the various parties to improve in order to win voter confidence. It would be positive in that sense, but it is far from the only solution.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. DeCoursey.

Please go ahead, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will start with questions for Mr. Pilon-Robitaille and Mr. Risso.

If I understood correctly, you are in favour of a closed list, Mr. Pilon-Robitaille.

Do you think that a closed list would be problematic, considering that less than 3% of the population belongs to a political party?

In your opinion, would it be problematic to give political parties that power considering that a small minority of the population belongs to a political party?

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: That is a question worth considering. As you just said about the current system, less than 3% of the population belongs to a political party. Closed lists are not a perfect solution, but they are a way of increasing stability. Moreover, if a candidate withdraws during their mandate, it is easier to call upon new elected officials.

I do not have the figures to back up this statement, but I think a proportional system—or a system with more proportional aspects—would increase the importance of more political parties, which in turn would increase public trust. Over time, one might expect confidence in public parties to increase, which would encourage more people to join political parties.

[English]

Mr. John Nater: Thank you.

Mr. Risso, I want to follow up on something you said in response to a previous question about large geographic seats under a mixed member proportional system. I think you recommended a sixty-forty split, and Mr. Robitaille recommended a fifty-fifty. The exact percentage doesn't really concern us greatly.

You mentioned something about adding a list member to a geographic area. Do you recognize any challenges with that, of adding a list MP to a geographic area to have multiple representatives for a single geographic area, one being an elected member, in the traditional sense that we know and the other being added as a list MP, a list MLA or a list MNA to a geographic seat? Do you see a challenge with having two different types of MPs for a single geographic district?

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. Santiago Risso: I don't think it would be a challenge if the electoral boundaries were drawn fairly for everyone. It has been proven. Our brief provides the figures. I should say that our findings are based on the 2003 provincial election in Quebec. You can nevertheless see what the effect of similar lists might be. For our part, we do not see it as a challenge but rather as a necessity. I don't know ...

[English]

if I answered your question.

[Translation]

Mr. John Nater: Yes.

Mr. Trudel, would you like to add anything?

Mr. Rémy Trudel: It bears repeating that the geographic area and the community area are extremely important to voters. We are in an environment in which the electoral boundaries were drawn on the basis of as many factors as possible and we belong to the same community. If we reduced the number of seats representing a geographic area, for example, that would of course produce some surprising results. If there was one MP for Rouyn-Noranda, Témiscamingue, Ungava, and so forth, they would represent an area about the size of France. Just because there is a problem does not mean we should not consider it. We can find solutions to such situations.

In view of the responsibility conferred on MPs who represent constituents in specific geographic areas, we have to add places for civic participation. We have to do that not just once a year, or once every three or four years. There have to be permanent mechanisms.

People want to participate if it is interesting or if the issues that are important to them are being discussed. Young people, such as those from the group with us here today, are interested in participating if the issues that concern them are being discussed. The same is true for the rest of the population. Would that bring us closer to a solution on proportional representation? It might help us, but I do not believe in that. I believe instead in developing mechanisms that would allow us to consult the wisdom of the people on an ongoing basis.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: My first question is for Mr. Risso.

You and your colleague mentioned that your preference would be toward MMP with closed lists and no quotas. Am I correct about that?

Mr. Santiago Risso: No closed lists for us.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No closed lists. Okay, sorry.

Mr. Pilon-Robitaille, I guess my question is for you. You had mentioned you wanted closed lists and no quotas, right?

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: With closed lists and not having quotas, do you think we would end up essentially with a more representative Parliament? Perhaps even moving away from that, we had a previous panel talk about increasing party power. Do you see that as something that would allow parties to have even more of a say as to who gets on the list, in what order they get on the list, and of what background or gender? You may think that the parties will make the right choice, but perhaps one day in the future they may not. It's left to their discretion. How do you feel about that?

[Translation]

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: If we started imposing quotas, where would we draw the line? That is the main issue. What is an acceptable quota? Having closed lists without quotas would definitely give political parties more power.

It is not a process that could be changed overnight, but if steps were taken to educate the public and increase their interest in politics, we believe that, over time, the lists would become more proportional and more representative of what the public really wants. For example, it is tricky for us to say that there has to be equal representation of men and women, that there have to be young people, and people from ethnocultural communities.

• (1555)

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What makes you think that would happen over time?

Yes, of course, in an ideal world we do feel that parties will tend to go toward what society looks like, if they want to get people out and voting. But there are many people who are saying they are disenfranchised, that they're not being reached out to. There's a large population that doesn't vote.

Do you think a system like that could turn people away perhaps? Then we would have that whole problem all over again of people saying they're not reflected on that list, they don't see themselves on it, so what's the point of going out and voting.

[Translation]

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: We must not simply change the electoral system and then ignore all the issues surrounding electoral participation. That is why we take a broader view encompassing a range of measure that would promote civic education and engagement. Over time, that would produce results that are more representative. Of course, if we simply adopt a voting method with closed lists, allowing the political parties to choose the names on the

lists, that would not solve the problem for you. Rather there needs to be a range of solutions that can lead to change and to a more representative voting method.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: To be clear, would you say that without doing all of the other things that require work, education, and many other things, changing the system alone would not increase turnout and engagement among different populations?

[Translation]

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: I'm not prepared to say that it wouldn't make a difference, but changing the voting system alone wouldn't be sufficient.

That's why we always recommend adopting other measures, but a proportional system is still a solution that could improve things.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Trudel, my next question is for you. You mentioned a second-round voting system. Is that something that you would propose doing in Canada?

Mr. Rémy Trudel: Yes.

[Translation]

The reason I proposed it is that, when representativeness is at issue, people will consider whether a member represents the majority of people in his or her riding.

The simplest and most effective way to correct that is the two-round voting system, as can be seen in a number of countries where it's in place. That means that only the two top candidates from the first round go through to the second round and that the eventual winner represents at least 50% plus one of the population. That's the type of representative system I would suggest.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Essentially, would people be going back to the poll a second time around in this system?

Mr. Rémy Trudel: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you think we'd have a greater turnout if people had to not only vote once but twice? Is there another method by which we could get the majority results without having to ask people to vote twice?

[Translation]

Mr. Rémy Trudel: The experience of many countries—France being the most commonly cited—shows that's not a problem. Quite the contrary, voters turn out at the same rate, if not higher, for the second round because the choices are so clear at that point. For that reason, it's the system I prefer.

On the issue of representativeness, what matters is not the representativeness of the opinions expressed but, rather, the representativeness of the person chosen as the member.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sansoucy, you may go ahead.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the members of the public joining us to participate in this consultation.

I'd also like to thank the three witnesses before us today.

My first question is for Mr. Risso.

One of our committee's objectives is to reach out to as many Canadians as possible in search of as many opinions as possible. You pointed out the democratic process underlying the positions that your organization adopts. When someone representing 500 youth groups tells us that they favour a compensatory mixed member proportional system, that view carries a lot of weight because it represents a great many people who considered the issue. I believe the committee has a duty to look towards the future and to take young people into account, especially since we are talking about 500 youth groups.

You underscored the urgency of the decision we, as elected representatives, have to make. Other witnesses have told us that opportunities for electoral reform are rather rare in our democratic system.

You spoke of the importance of seizing this opportunity to achieve parity, discussing gender parity. Your brief also mentions equality for cultural communities. As you said, our voting system is one way to achieve that equality.

You talked about incentives as well. You should be in favour of the bill our colleague Kennedy Stewart just introduced. The bill seeks to introduce incentives widely agreed upon by women's groups. They gave the issue particular consideration, specifically Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie, here in Quebec, which supports the measure.

This is an excellent opportunity to promote gender parity, given that women make up just 26% of MPs in the House of Commons. That puts us in 64th place globally, far from an enviable position. Do you see this as an opportunity for cultural communities as well?

• (1600)

Mr. Santiago Risso: It's actually similar to what we are proposing in terms of gender parity. Some type of requirement would be necessary in order to achieve that parity. That could involve the introduction of alternating male-female candidates on the compensatory list. Clearly, a requirement based on a similar alternating principle could be established to improve the ethnocultural balance as well.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Pilon-Robitaille, what you're proposing is based on a democratic process. Anyone who's gone to a Quebec CEGEP indeed knows that very long general assemblies can take place leading up to a result like this. You represent the opinion of 65,000 students from 22 associations across the province of Quebec. When you tell us, then, that you support a compensatory mixed member proportional system, we should consider that the opinion of 65,000 students.

Earlier today, we discussed low turnout among youth at election time. One witness told us that the last federal election was the exception that proved the rule. The fact remains that 42% of young

people didn't vote. The Institut du Nouveau Monde even referred to generational suicide in describing voter turnout among 18- to 34-year-olds.

A number of factors are to blame for the fact that voter turnout is lower among young people than average Canadians. Regardless, do you think reforming the voting system could encourage more youth to vote?

Mr. Raphaël Pilon-Robitaille: We believe reforming the voting system will encourage elected officials to take all segments of the population into account, including young people. As it stands, political parties don't have to reach out to youth in order to get elected. To some extent, then, young people are disregarded. As we see it, this is really a way to engage young people in politics.

I'd like to take a moment, if I may, to discuss incentives that could encourage more young people to vote. Polling stations could be set up on CEGEP and university campuses. In fact, some were during the last federal election, and the measure met with some success. We believe such measures can really go a long way towards encouraging youth to vote because they make it easier to do so.

Electronic voting is something else we talked about. It's another worthwhile measure, in our view. The development of these measures would require proper consideration, and they would have to fit into a broader reform. In short, however, I do believe that reforming the voting system could improve voter turnout among youth.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards, over to you.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: I appreciate all of you being here to share your perspective with us.

One thing that has been pretty clear... Throughout the hearings we've had, whether it be from members of the public, whom we'll have a chance to hear from shortly, or experts and academics such as you, we've heard support for a variety of different systems. We've heard a number of arguments for and against different systems. The one thing that is almost unanimous, if not unanimous, is that there is no perfect system. All systems have their trade-offs. There are arguments for and against, and there are negatives and positives to each of the systems.

I know two of you are advocating for some form of PR. With regard to PR, we've heard about some of the issues, such as unstable governments, fragmented electorates, increases in riding size, and losses of local representation. Mr. Trudel, you talked about that one in particular, that loss of direct accountability. Sometimes the ballots can be more complex, and there are some issues around the transparency of how the votes are counted and therefore how the representative is determined. Those are some of the negatives we hear.

Mr. Risso and Mr. Robitaille, you both laid out well some of the arguments for PR as well.

Mr. Trudel, you talked a fair bit about the concern with the geographic changes that would come with a PR system, because that's one of the choices that have to be made in going to a system where you have some list MPs. You either have to increase the number of seats or you have to increase the size of the ridings.

Although that may not necessarily be an issue here in Montreal, it certainly is an issue when you get to some of your northern ridings. I can speak from my perspective. I represent a central Alberta riding, not even a northern riding, right in the middle of the province, with some suburban area and some rural area. Although it shrank because of population growth in a couple of the larger communities, prior to the last election it was about 28,000 square kilometres in size. That's not even a northern riding. Some of the northern ridings are upwards of 100,000 square kilometres.

It becomes a real issue when you start to shrink the number of seats, because you start to have some very large ridings that can be very difficult to represent. I won't get into that in any more detail.

Mr. Trudel, I would like to talk about two other aspects. One of them is one of the arguments against the PR system, and I would like your thoughts on it. The other one is one of the arguments often made for it, and I would like to get your thoughts on that. One is the idea of the party list. Does that take some of the accountability away from the voter and put it more into the hands of the political party? The other is the idea that it can reduce strategic voting. I would argue that strategic voting would occur under any kind of system. There are just different types of strategic voting.

What would be your thoughts on those two questions?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémy Trudel: That's certainly something to consider.

When you reduce the number of seats and elected members per riding, or the number of ridings, the accountability of an individual chosen from a party list really comes into play. Saying that it's totally one side or the other doesn't address the issue. Leaning a particular way or representing a particular group shouldn't exempt a person from having to answer or be accountable to that group.

But the point I'd like to make is that the first responsibility of a member elected by the population, someone who has to deal with multiple opinions, should, in my view, always be to convey that representativeness in informing the decisions made by the House of Commons and the government. We aren't factoring the Senate component into that straightaway. We'll let those in the House handle that aspect.

What matters is making sure the representativeness of members in the local geographic area in which they are elected is preserved as much as possible. It's also essential to identify and develop other elements of the system that will allow for the expression of diverse viewpoints in forums other than the House of Commons, which is made up of 338 members. That's something that exists elsewhere when you look at other countries. That would exist if members and the government had an obligation to listen to the diverse viewpoints expressed.

I'm not saying you should completely reject the proportional voting system. However, the potential complexity of such a system

could make it challenging to achieve representativeness and ensure the link with the various segments of the population in a given riding or geographic area, provincially speaking. That would present some major challenges.

A solid foundation exists, and that is universal voting by all Canadians who are able to voice their opinions. Some groups, however, do not see their voice reflected in the positions taken by those elected to the House of Commons. So mechanisms should be developed to ensure those voices are expressed and necessarily taken into account by the House of Commons.

That's really the crux of where I stand on this issue.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag, over to you.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Mr. Trudel, I'm intrigued with the idea of the two-vote system that you spoke of. My first question is simply whether you think Canadians would be ready for that kind of change.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémy Trudel: I think so, as long as the purpose was made clear. I don't want to generalize, but, in many cases, House of Commons members are elected with 30% or 35% of the votes. The same is true of the National Assembly in Quebec. If the public was told that the reason for the system was to ensure that the votes received by members elected to the House of Commons reflected a representation of 50% plus one of the population, I can't see why they wouldn't be willing to accept that dimension. That is even truer given that, in the second round, parties would end up in a race involving two people who would otherwise be automatically eliminated because the plurality of votes wouldn't give them the freedom of expression required to have elected members or represent a body of opinion.

Frankly, I think Canadians are prepared to accept that. As for everything else, the people should be consulted by way of a referendum. It's a mighty and powerful instrument because the time frame can be as long as it needs to be to reach out to all segments of the population, provided there is a will and a belief in the changes being sought.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: On the idea of the system you're talking about, what do you think the benefits would be of going to the polling station twice to get to the majority system versus having a ranked ballot? That's the other option to get to what you're saying. It maintains the "majority wins" kind of system. What would be the advantages of going to the polling station twice to eliminate the low-hanging ones and to get that majority vote versus simply going once and doing a ranked ballot? Have you any thoughts on that option?

[Translation]

Mr. Rémy Trudel: To some degree, you've answered the question. When there is a second round, the outcome necessarily represents 50% plus one of the voting population. Conversely, in a system based on the plurality of votes, it's possible for members representing 25% or 30% of the population to be elected. Someone could slip in between the two majority party candidates, for instance, which would be much more representative of the views expressed by the vote. Someone would still have a week-long period to more strongly and thoroughly assert their positions, since it's possible they would have to represent the majority of the population going forward. As I see it, that member's voice would be even more powerful because it would represent 50% plus one of the voting population.

[English]

Mr. John Aldag: Is there any time left?

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay, I'm going to share my time with Ms. Romanado, who wanted to follow up with her first round of questions.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you, Mr. Aldag.

We discussed youth engagement. We use all the social media. One of my constituents, Danny Tonner, asked me a question on Facebook about changing the voting age to 16.

Mr. Pilon-Robitaille, you said you were in favour of such a change. Mr. Risso and Mr. Trudel, I'd like to hear your thoughts on such a change.

Mr. Rémy Trudel: In Quebec, when the government amended the legislation respecting health and social services, it decided that an individual could consent to or refuse any form of treatment at the age of 14. I can't see why the same wouldn't apply when it comes to setting the voting age at 16. I would be in favour of that.

Mr. Santiago Risso: To be honest, we've never examined the issue. If the government decided to change the voting age to 16, some civic education would have to accompany the measure.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Trudel, you're a professor. If I understood correctly, you said that, rather than holding a referendum, the money could be used to introduce an education program. Such a program is needed, but, of course, it falls under provincial jurisdiction.

How can we work with the provinces to develop high-school civic education programs?

• (1615)

Mr. Rémy Trudel: I'm not sure that it should necessarily be for high-school students. Rather, I think it should be aimed at groups interested in civic education. Many such groups can't afford to educate their members or provide training. Not everyone has a master's degree from the École nationale d'administration publique, like Ms. Sansoucy.

I think the program should actually target groups. Quite a few community groups would like to provide civic education and would be in a position to do so were it not for a lack of funding. Whenever

society faces a literacy problem, be it financial or otherwise, the proposed solution seems to focus solely on school-based training via the curriculum. Educators will wind up having to cram even more into their already busy weeks.

That said, it's not a problem that can be ignored. If you want some hopeful food for thought, I encourage you to see the film *Demain*, playing at the Beaubien theatre. You'll all be quite impressed. The theatre is in the Rosemont community.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

I'd like to thank all the participants in our panel. We've very much appreciated the views you've shared with us this afternoon. We are now going to move on to the citizen engagement portion. You're welcome to stay if you like or leave if you have other commitments. Once again, I'd like to thank you for your contribution today.

I would now invite Bryan Lee and Marie Claude Bertrand to proceed to a microphone.

Mr. Lee, the floor is yours.

• (1620)

Bryan Lee (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'd like to start by saying that Canada's democratic system is one of the most stable and respected in the world today.

[English]

Why fix something that isn't broken? This is why I favour the current first-past-the-post system, which is simple and effective.

Let me be very clear that it is a pure display of arrogance for a single political party which has gains in changing the political system to think they know what's best for Canadians. Well, Canadians know what's best for Canadians. These consultations are great for contributing to listening to what some Canadians have to say on our established electoral system, but any changes made by elites that come as a result of this should only be sealed off with a nationwide referendum. Contrary to what the government in power thinks, Canadians are smart enough to say yes or no to changing the way we vote for our representatives.

[Translation]

The Minister of Democratic Institutions believes it's necessary to choose between consultations and a referendum. The reality is both are possible. The majority of Canadians are in favour of a referendum on electoral reform. The electoral system affects all Canadians. It goes without saying, then, that such a major change should not be decided by a single political party, which does not have a mandate to make the change.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I would invite Mr. Robert McDonald to go to mike one.

[Translation]

Ms. Bertrand, you may go ahead.

Ms. Marie Claude Bertrand (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon everyone.

As a Canadian citizen, my heart skipped a beat when I heard Mr. Trudeau say, during the last election campaign, that he would change the voting system. That was the most important election issue to me. I hope the committee will arrive at a solution that makes all Quebecers and Canadians feel that their voice has been heard.

To regain the confidence of Canadians, politicians should begin by demonstrating some consistency when it comes to the institutions that reflect our inherent values. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that everyone is entitled to the same protections and benefits under the law, without any discrimination. I want my vote to carry some weight and to matter. That is why I am in favour of a proportional representation system.

Under such a system, the strongest isn't the winner. To my mind, what's important is to ensure that a multitude of diverse values can be expressed within society. That combined set of values guides how we approach legislation, policies, and emerging issues. As I see it, it's fundamental.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bertrand.

Ms. Marie Claude Bertrand: My two minutes are already up?

The Chair: Yes, and you even went over time. Regardless, you expressed yourself succinctly and clearly.

Thank you.

I now invite Jacinthe Villeneuve to proceed to the microphone.

Mr. McDonald, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert McDonald (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For me, the keys are that all our country's diversity, both from one region to another and within those regions, be reflected in our political institutions and that, in our public debates, all points of view be accepted proportionally to the number of people who subscribe to them.

I have always been active in politics but I do not know if I will have sufficient energy and courage to continue to be active if we do not adopt a proportional voting system. I am not the only one to be discouraged. We are fed up with wasting our votes and working as hard as we do during the election campaigns, all in vain. Most of the time, our votes elect no one. That is unacceptable. Without proportionality, there will be no reform.

My heart wavers between the single transferable vote system and the mixed-member proportional system. At the moment, I am leaning towards the mixed-member proportional system, but with certain conditions. First, I would like us to be able to vote for a local member of Parliament using a preferential system. Second, I would like us to vote for the party of our choice, which would allow for the election of regional members to the compensatory seats. It would not be done by province, except in the case of small ones, but by regions inside the provinces. In that way, the representation would be equally regional and national, and it would reflect the proportion of the votes won.

Thank you.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Selim Totah, please come to the microphone.

Ms. Villeneuve, the floor is yours.

Ms. Jacinthe Villeneuve (As an Individual): Good afternoon.

I myself support a reform in the voting system.

Canada has a population of over 36 million. Some people live in cities and others in regions in rural or urban communities. Everyone has different concerns. Farmers do not think in the same way as financial bigwigs. I feel that it is important that everyone's voice be heard.

I support a reform in the voting system so that each vote should count and should affect the result. At the moment, as I see it, too many votes go into the garbage. For example, if I decide to vote for the Green Party, I know full well that, basically, my vote will be worth nothing.

We also have to put an end to false majorities. At the moment, some governments have a majority while winning only a minority of the votes cast. That allows the government to shut things down. For example, the current Liberal government received 39.5% of the vote, but it is able to shut things down. I am not sure if you are aware of this, but 39.5% is only a minority of those who voted.

I also favour reform because it would allow us to have women represented in a greater proportion. At the moment, the rate is 26%. In my opinion, that just does not do because the population is made up of 50% women, after all.

It would also allow certain minorities to be represented. I am not sure whether you know this, but 20.6% of Canadians were born elsewhere. It is important for them to be represented as well.

Finally, we have to be able to vote according to our convictions and not to get rid of a party. In the last elections, in my opinion, a lot of people voted to kick the Conservatives out and did not vote according to their convictions. It is important to vote for what one really believes, and not in order to get rid of a party.

In addition, some incentives would probably succeed in increasing the turnout rate. In 2015, it was 68.5%, but it has previously been as low as 58.8%. It is important for all Canadians to take part in an election.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Totah, you have the floor.

I invite Mr. Douglas Jack to go to microphone 2, please.

Go ahead, Mr. Totah.

Mr. Selim Totah (As an Individual): Thank you for allowing us to speak, Mr. Chair.

I would like to bring up something that has not been said. What is the goal of all these changes? If you do not tell us the exact goal of the changes, except to repeat that there will be proportionality, it is not enough. The main goal is to allow the government to make decisions for the good of the community.

First of all, there has been no mention at all of the elderly, despite the fact that statistics show that the number of elderly people will be greatly increasing in the coming years.

In addition, the disparity in salary from one person to another has not been mentioned. The goal of all these decisions is to make changes by establishing a proportional voting system or by some other method that you are aware of.

Far be it for me to take away from your responsibilities, as has already been said. But you have an elephant in front of you, and people are in the process of deciding what the elephant is for and what it means. The blind, or those in the dark, are going to give you different answers. What you most want to do is to reach a goal. Today, despite all the changes that are being suggested, I have not heard what goal you want to reach.

Thank you.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

I invite Mr. Gerard Talbot to move to microphone 2.

Mr. Jack, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Douglas Jack (As an Individual): Hello there.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, everyone.

[English]

Here we are about 400 years into the colonization of Canada and we've never looked back and our history books say nothing about the first nation democracy that was here. It was a form of combined economic democracy, and it was a form that I would say was fractal. The reason that people here called this "*kanata*", Canada, was that it's the word for "village" in Mohawk. Within the *kanata* were the multi-homes, *des maisons longues*, the pueblo, the village itself. All our indigenous ancestors from all around the world, Astérix *et* Obélix, lived in longhouse villages.

If we were to try to create participation for everyone, we would look at it not as centrally administered from Canada down, but from the bottom up, how it expresses itself. Seventy per cent of Canadians, actually 70% of the people of the world, live in multi-home dwellings. With the amount of damage that we have, unfortunately, in condominiums, in co-operatives, we don't have good investment into our multi-homes, so we have a degrading infrastructure. We're not using the imagination, the collective intelligence of people. In our workshops, in our workplaces, we don't have the participation of workers. We don't have the participation of people in our institutions.

The indigenous history here, the first nation history—

The Chair: I think what you're saying, correct me if I'm wrong, is that a more participatory kind of democracy that would hearken back maybe to the decision-making process of first nations would be healthy. Am I expressing the view properly?

Mr. Douglas Jack: Yes, pretty good. But colonialism came with violence—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Douglas Jack: —the genocide of 100 million people in the Americas, as well as 100 million people in Africa, 100 million people in the Far East, 100 million people in the Middle East, and about 100 million in the last century.

The Chair: But I was correct in what—

Mr. Douglas Jack: The violence has removed us. We're in a climate of fear. We're in a climate of hierarchy and fear and oligarchical control. Who owns our media—

The Chair: But basically you're saying—

Mr. Douglas Jack: Hold on. Let me finish just one point.

Who owns our media? Who owns our finance? We have very centralized oligarchical control. We do not have a democracy.

The Chair: But you believe a different electoral system would perhaps provide people with more influence over these institutions.

Mr. Douglas Jack: Yes.

The Chair: We must go now to Mr. Talbot, because we don't want to take away his right to speak.

Mr. Douglas Jack: The last word I would just say is, before we go ahead, we should be turning to first nations and asking, what is sovereignty here? What is democracy here?

Thank you.

The Chair: Other people in our hearings have said pretty much the same thing, and we've been up to Whitehorse, Yukon. We heard actually from Chief Erasmus last week.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Gerard Talbot (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, thank you very much for holding this exercise in democracy.

I have two observations for you.

First, in my opinion, democracy begins by recognizing all votes. Recognizing all votes is recognizing the will of the people. I feel that, with the current voting system, the only votes that count are those that elect members of Parliament. The other votes have no weight. For example, when I go to vote and I vote for a candidate that does not win the election, it is as if I am putting my ballot in a garbage can rather than in the ballot box. I am not the only one to experience that. It has been said that millions of people waste their vote in that way under the current system.

My second observation is that, recognizing the will of the people also means that Parliament must be a mirror that accurately reflects Canadian society. That is why, if a party gets 20% of the votes, it should have 20% of the seats. The current voting system is a mirror that really distorts the reality. You do not need me to give you figures to show you how that happened in the last election.

What I see as the most serious aspect of the system, is that, at the moment, with our first past the post voting system, the outcome of the election is determined by mechanics and not by the will of those voting, the will of Canadians. I feel that it would be a fine project for our society to set as our objective the reduction of the democratic deficit by, for example, establishing a proportional system, instead of constantly talking about reducing the deficit and getting the deficit to zero at any cost. I don't think that is a major concern.

We were talking earlier about citizen participation. However, if we had a societal project specifically designed to reduce the democratic deficit, it would increase citizen participation.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Yes, okay. We understand, Mr. Talbot. Thank you for your comments.

I invite Mr. Samuel Leclerc to go to microphone 2.

We now move to Mr. Guy Demers.

Mr. Guy Demers (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Basically, what we all want to achieve is a fairer and more sustainable society. Politics is one way of doing that. In politics, all points of view must be recognized and expressed. With that as a consideration, surely mixed proportionality is the essential way to achieve it.

There is also the matter of considering each and every one, particularly the weakest and those whose voice is not represented. Education is not the only solution, because we are going to have to be able to listen to those people. I extend an invitation to you to take the time to consider all the studies and everything that has been done on human rights that show how the poorest can be heard in politics. We know that there is legislation on the rights of the child. Even though children do not have the right to vote, that does not mean that they do not have the right to be heard and respected.

I would like to add a variation to Mr. Trudel's comments. Our outlook also has to be modern, meaning that we recognize that people do not just identify themselves as being from their own small community, but also as citizens of the world. Proportional representation is also a way to connect with others who may be far away, but with whom we share values and common objectives. In my opinion, that is also what mixed proportionality would allow us to do, that is to become citizens of the world. We no longer just have the old way of seeing things.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Demers.

I invite Ms. Gabrielle Tanguay to go to microphone 1.

Mr. Leclerc, the floor is yours.

Mr. Samuel Leclerc (As an Individual): Good afternoon, I would like to talk to you about my experience as a voter. I have had the right to vote for 10 years. I have taken part in every election I could, provincially as well as federally. In 10 years, my vote has elected not one single candidate.

Basically, my vote had no more effect than if I had stayed home and not participated in the elections. I was not able to have a

representative in the government. The party for which I voted has never formed the government, partly because I have always refused to vote strategically. I feel that it is important to vote for a party that truly represents us and not to try to block another party.

So I am dissatisfied with the current voting system. I would like to have a proportional system that would let me feel that my vote is not being wasted and that the government really does reflect the opinion of all Canadians.

To reform the voting system, a preferential vote would absolutely not satisfy me. It would give me the feeling, not that my vote counted, but that I was being forced to transfer my vote to a party in which I had no interest. It would also not prevent others from voting strategically, whereas in a proportional voting system, I would not need to vote for a party other than the one I really want.

Finally, I do not think that a referendum is at all necessary. I think that the work this committee is doing is wonderful. You are listening to people. If you are able to come up with a non-partisan recommendation to the government and it is accepted, it would have all the legitimacy it needed to proceed to a change.

Thank you.

● (1640)

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

I invite Mr. Olivier Germain to go to microphone 2.

We are now going to hear from Ms. Tanguay.

Ms. Gabrielle Tanguay (As an Individual): Good afternoon and thank you.

I am a Canadian citizen. I would like to let you know about my feelings and my opinion about the reform that is currently under way.

Unfortunately, I have never had the impression that the government was representing me because of the simple fact that the parties for which I voted have never been elected and I have never succeeded in electing a candidate in my constituency.

The current reform fills me with great joy but also with great fear, because it could as easily end up with something very good as with something very bad.

I want to thank the government and the members of Parliament for holding public consultations of this kind. I thank the committee for consulting experts and many who are qualified to represent the people. Personally, I do not feel the need for a referendum, because I consider that the government and the committee have done what they needed to do to get public support and to seek the opinion of the electorate.

I am asking the government to adopt a proportional voting system. It is clear to me that the status quo or a preferential system would not allow for more democracy. A proportional system would allow for more democracy.

I would also like better representation of men, women and minorities. That is why I am in favour of a pure proportional voting system with a closed list. This would allow certain rules to be set when the list is established. The rules would ensure that minorities, language groups, men and women would be represented, as well as the various regions and provinces of Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Benoît Bouchard, you can now move to microphone 1.

Go ahead, Mr. Germain.

Mr. Olivier Germain (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon.

Forgive me in advance if I talk too fast. It is because I am nervous about making this statement.

I will start by saying that I agree with Samuel Leclerc about proportionality. I will stick to my notes and that will help me.

At the moment, we are seeing a lack of interest and trust in elections. That has previously been highlighted very well. I wanted to arrange my thoughts around three key words: integrity, legitimacy and representation.

As I see it, one of the defects that mars our perception of the integrity of our elected politicians is that they can make a career out of it. In terms of their legitimacy, they are lacking in support, and in terms of representation, it is the extent of their power. To protect integrity, we must not permit elected officials to make it their career. To protect legitimacy, we cannot make it into a system, as the preferential method does.

So legitimacy is not born of a preferential system. That is a false positive. In my opinion, to make representation acceptable, the extent of federal power must be reduced.

That is all I had to say.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I invite Ms. Veronika Jolicoeur to move to microphone 2.

Mr. Bouchard, the floor is yours.

Mr. Benoît Bouchard (As an Individual): Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, thank you for this consultation. It has been a long time since we have seen anything like it in Canada.

My name is Benoit Bouchard and I am the regional vice-president of CUPE-Québec. The organization represents 639,000 members in Canada and 110,000 members in Quebec.

We have held consultations on this process, and, at the moment, there is a broad consensus that the current democratic political system is no longer doing its job. We have a problem and it is plain for all to see. Disillusionment is taking hold in almost all political and democratic institutions in our society. The proof is that wonderful consultations like this can be held, and the rooms are

practically empty. That is a great pity. However, it is the price that we have to pay for all those years in a political system in which people no longer feel represented. The Canadian Union of Public Employees therefore supports this reform.

We support a mixed-member proportional system. It is a system that makes room for all opinions all across the country. As a country, we are diverse. We have great cities and we have more sparsely populated regions. We therefore want to be sure that opinions across the entire country are represented in proportion.

The system could be very simple. Sometimes, we make life complicated. We just need one ballot and two votes. We vote for one member of Parliament and we vote for one party. Consultations with Canadians would help to make this change less complicated. It is a change that can become very problematic for people who have had no interest in our country's democratic system for years.

A little earlier, there was discussion about the lack of democratic education. I feel that the idea of presenting notions of democracy would help to simplify the debate and to enrich the country's democratic system.

With that, we urge you to continue the consultation and to move towards mixed proportionality.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bouchard.

I am having a little difficulty reading this writing. I think it says Ms. Cymry Gomery, correct? You will be speaking after Ms. Jolicoeur.

Go ahead, Ms. Jolicoeur.

Ms. Veronika Jolicoeur (As an Individual): Good afternoon and thank you.

I do not understand those who want to keep the current system, given the huge injustices it has caused. Indeed, if we change to a system in which each vote counts, minorities or other groups will no longer be discriminated against because it will be fair for everyone.

As for young people, I feel that we could count on a training effect. If their elders are happy and if they regain trust in their government, young people will follow, because, at the moment, disillusionment is the greatest obstacle to participation, in my opinion.

If we were to choose the mixed-member proportional system with a list, I would propose an open list in order to reflect the will of the people as much as possible. I also propose that we not use the complementary list chosen by parties, but, for example, to move downwards, taking the person with the second highest number of votes and so on. That would give less power to the political parties, which have always tended to do their utmost to wield power.

Finally, the importance of local representation has been mentioned. In that context, I strongly urge parties to drop the party line. Local representatives can no longer represent their voters because they are forced to follow the party line. Voters elected them because of their qualities and their character. When they see that the representatives can no longer represent them, it subverts the system completely.

Thank you.

• (1650)

The Chair: I invite Mr. Steven Scott to move to microphone 2.

Ms. Gomery, the floor is yours now.

[*English*]

Ms. Cymry Gomery (As an Individual): We live in a pseudo-democracy in Canada right now, and we have all my life. I've been working with Fair Vote Canada and Le Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle. I've worked for more than a decade with Fair Vote, and we had a big campaign leading up to the 2015 election. Our slogan for proportional representation was "make every vote count".

To our delight, the Liberals, after an unprecedented turnout on the part of youth, indigenous people, and everybody who was desperate because of the crazy system we had that managed to elect somebody like Stephen Harper and the Stephen Harper Conservatives twice in a row.... We had sunk to an all-time low as a nation, with no legitimate democracy, to effectively a dictatorship, and the Liberals were elected after having borrowed our own slogan.

They were elected and they promised to make the 2015 election the last under first past the post and to make every vote count, which was our slogan for proportional representation in Fair Vote. I take that to mean they promised us a proportional representation system and that you people here, me, and everybody here today is here to figure out how we're going to do that.

I'm hearing a lot of people say that we don't need a proportional system. Mr. Rémy Trudel was proposing another majority. That's what he was proposing, and that's not what we want. We've been there. We've done that. We want a proportional system. We want one of the many proportional systems. For me, I don't really give a hoot which one, just make it a proportional system.

I might point out that MMP allows for local representation. Under MMP there is a local representative. You vote twice. You vote for your local representative and you vote for your party representative, so you're going to have local representation no matter what under STV or MMP, which are both—

The Chair: No, mixed member proportional is—

Ms. Cymry Gomery: It's mixed member proportional, yes, thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Scott, and I'll call Mr. Green to mike number one.

Go ahead, Mr. Scott.

Mr. Steven Scott (As an Individual): The current government loves to talk about values, and most people have expressed the value here as being that Parliament should be as inclusive and representative of the diversity of political views in Canada as possible. It's very clear. I think a lot of people take this as a core value, and it's clear that only the PR system does accomplish this.

We've also heard that many Canadians do like to have local community geographic representation. I would also add I don't think most Canadians have been asked, "Which would you prefer, local representation whose opinions you totally dislike, or distant

representation where the values accord directly with yours?" People may be surprised at what such a poll would come out with.

The current system is good at local representation; however, PR can accomplish this. You can define by law how many people by gender, ethnic community, indigenous people, even age.... It's just a matter of details. One can accomplish this. There's no problem with that.

The best system is perhaps a mixed system. Just because of the size and geographics, you can even have the bottom 25% of seats, the largest area seats, basically stay the same, and perhaps in the political sense they can be double. Geographically they would probably be still immensely smaller than those distant ones. The mathematics of that can be worked out on how they share, perhaps, offices for ombudsmen-type divisions. Again, that's a matter of detail.

There are many problems with the current system. Other people have listed them. I don't really want to go into that, but it's just crazy when you can have a majority of the population vote one way and get a majority for the second party possible. This has happened in Canada.

The current system has the advantage that it votes in centrist parties. That is why I am against also doing a sort of listed or majority thing, because it's going to advantage the centrist thing, and also for a referendum as well. Most people are going to say the systems are broken. Well, they're centrist, and the majority will defeat minority views, and we'll just be left with the same system.

Thank you.

• (1655)

The Chair: Mr. Johan Boyden, please come to mike number two.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Green, you have the floor.

Mr. Daniel Green (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The reason why you are here today and why you are doing a cross-Canada tour this fall is that some people, such as Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party, together with other parties like the NDP and the Green Party, have felt that our electoral system is broken. As you do your work, I feel that it is important that you always keep in mind how broken it is.

I have looked at the election results from a year ago and I am fascinated by the false representation in various constituencies. In Quebec, for example, in the constituency of Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, a Bloc Québécois member was elected with the lowest majority in Canada, just 28.8% of the votes. With 28.4% of the votes, the Liberal candidate lost. The NDP candidate won 24% of the votes. That means that the votes of a lot of constituents went into the garbage.

If we want to get our democracy moving again, if we want to renew it and convince Canadian voters that change is possible, we have to change our voting system. We must put a proportional system in place, with compensatory members, for whom each vote counts. That is your mandate. As members of this committee, your mandate, your mantra, from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night, should be to think about what you, as elected members of Parliament, can do to make it so. You have been given a solemn mandate to make each vote count and to prevent MPs in this democracy from ever again being elected with 28% of the votes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Would Daniela Chivu please go to mike one.

Mr. Boyden, go ahead.

Mr. Johan Boyden (As an Individual): Thank you.

Like others, I believe that we should start the discussion by insisting that every vote should count and by calling for the scrapping of the unfair elections act of Stephen Harper.

My name is Johan Boyden. I'm an organizer with the Communist Party of Canada, a socialist party with a 95-year history of fighting for peace and social progress. Our party fought to be on the ballot in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, with the Padlock Law in the 1950s, and most recently with the landmark Figueroa case. Having fought in elections and won and being the only small party that has historically won municipally, provincially, and federally in Canada, we were the first party to call for mixed member proportional. We believe this is a system that is fundamentally more democratic and one which creates the conditions for coalitions, which are easier for the public to pressure. We believe that no threshold should be imposed.

I think it is important to comment on some other questions that your committee is discussing, including the issue of why more people aren't voting today. I would suggest to you that people have to vote for something. If you believe strongly in peace but all the parties you see on your ballot are in support of NATO and are against the liberation of Palestine, you have little choice or motivation. Our party says no to mandatory voting, to online voting, which would threaten the sanctity and the secrecy of the ballot. We support lowering the voting age to 16. We think it should be easier to vote with fewer ID requirements, and we think there should be the right of recall of MPs.

Last, I'd like to say that the whole issue of electoral reform raises the question of the Constitution. The reality in Canada is that we are a multinational country not just of anglophones, not just of English

speakers, but also of the Québécois, also of the Acadians and the aboriginal peoples. Our party has proposed for a long time to abolish the Senate and to replace it with a house of nations, and we're not alone in these ideas. They came forward in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Other countries around the world, such as Bolivia, are implementing this too.

I want to conclude by saying that this would guarantee two fundamental democratic principles. One is the equality of all nations no matter what their size, and the other is the fundamental question of majority rule. This is why we support mixed member proportional representation.

Thank you for your time.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boyden.

Could Ian Henderson come to the mike, please.

Madam Chivu.

Ms. Daniela Chivu (As an Individual): Hello everybody.

Thank you very much for listening to us, although I shouldn't say thank you. I see everybody feels honoured to feel listened to, although it is our democratic right to be heard, which was actually violated in a way by the Minister of Democratic Institutions when she decided to have a survey online, which in accordance with our Constitution, freedom of expression, either online or not, Canadians do have it.

I am in favour of the current voting system. It's not broken. The current voting system is broken by false promises. It's broken by people who got elected based on personal agendas. I will not go any further than that.

I come from a post-communist country, and coming from a post-communist country, my democratic right to a vote through a referendum is very important. Whether I agree with proportional representation or not, I want to have the right to have a referendum. I want Canadians to have the freedom of expression through a vote. This is how making every vote count begins. It would be extremely appreciated if public consultations could be held on the weekends, when we would be able to actually have a full room and where senior citizens would be acknowledged, more than just a few times. They make up 16.5% of the total population as of July. They need to be taken into account.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Would Jimmy Yu come to mike number one, please.

[Translation]

The floor is yours, Mr. Henderson.

[English]

Mr. Ian Henderson (As an Individual): I do want to thank the members of the committee for listening to us. Your presence here is something hopeful for Canada, but be careful of giving people hope.

I've lived in several countries around the world, including Germany, where I've seen a proportional system functioning well, in my opinion, allowing voices to come to the table that in Canada are kept rather firmly marginalized. I would therefore welcome a system in Canada much more like the system in Germany.

Let me bring your attention to one more consideration. In most of the conversation today, I've been hearing what I would call generalized considerations in favour of electoral reform, the desire to include more people. That's admirable and I support it, but I think there's a particular consideration for people like myself who are living through a process of, could I say, radicalization.

I'm a professor of religious studies. I study religious political radicalization. In myself I've experienced a growing sense of environmental radicalization. I've lived in Quebec for 30 years. In that time, no one I've ever voted for has ever been elected to public office. You don't want my vote in the present system, but we are now entering times which will increasingly not be normal times. I think everyone here understands that we're facing deepening climate change that will be stressing our whole system.

In that context, people like myself will take action. We need to have the possibility of taking action within the parliamentary system in proportion to the voices that we represent. For those of us who are experiencing that push toward radicalization, it's vitally important that it be possible for the federal Parliament to accommodate those of us who need to speak hard things, urgently.

Thank you.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Yu, please, you have two minutes.

Mr. Jimmy Yu (As an Individual): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon, everyone. Congratulations for the excellent work of the committee and for the public participation in that work.

My name is Jimmy Yu. I was a Conservative Party candidate in 2011 and 2015. So I have been part of the democratic process. I am not here to argue in favour of one voting system or another and to say which is the better. I am simply here to raise this question: why not hold a referendum?

As for the committee and its hearings here and in all the cities in Canada to which the committee has travelled, one might ask, as a previous witness did—and rightly so—why are there not a lot of people in this room at the moment?

In my opinion, you are basing yourselves on positions that do not represent everyone. So my wish, at the end of the consultation sessions, is for the committee to recommend that a referendum be held. Mr. Trudel said something very important. In Canada, we have a very powerful mechanism called a referendum. All Canadians can express their opinion on how to form a government.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yu.

Our thanks to everyone who attended and took part in this afternoon's meeting. We are going to suspend our work for about an hour.

Before I bring this part of the day to a close, I would just like to make an announcement. The Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship is organizing a public forum on the Canadian electoral system. This forum will take place on Thursday, October 20, from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. in New Residence Hall at McGill University. The address is 3625 Avenue du Parc.

Thank you very much and good evening.

I am informing committee members that the meeting will resume around 6:00 p.m.

• (1705)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1810)

The Chair: Let us resume the session.

Welcome once more to the committee members. Welcome to the witnesses who are appearing before us this evening.

This is the third part of our day of hearings in Montreal. We welcome Ms. Mireille Tremblay, as an individual, and Ms. Ruth Dassonville, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Université de Montréal.

I am going to take this opportunity to give an overview of the way in which we operate at this committee. The witnesses will each make a presentation for about 10 minutes, followed by a period of questions from committee members. Each member will have five minutes to interact with the witnesses. That includes the questions and the answers. If, at the end of five minutes, we have to stop in order to move to the next speaker, it does not mean that you cannot make your comments later when you have the floor. We are quite flexible about that. After the question and answer session, there will be what we call an open mic session or, more officially, a time for comments from the people in the audience.

So, without further ado, Ms. Tremblay, I ask you to take the floor and to provide us with your ideas about our topic.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening to the committee members.

Good evening to all participants.

My name is Mireille Tremblay. I am a professor in the department of social and public communication at the Université du Québec à Montréal. I have been retired for six months. I worked in the health care and social services system for a number of years, in the area of public participation. My doctorate is on conditions for democratic participation in our health care and social services system. For a time, I worked with Jean-Pierre Charbonneau at the Quebec National Assembly. I have been a professor for eight years; my field of research is public and democratic participation and democratic governance.

In my brief, I answer the questions you asked. I did so reflecting the committee's mandate. In the first part of my presentation, if time permits, I will provide you with the results of my research into democratic citizenship education and the ethics of citizenship.

As for the reform of the voting system, I suggest a provincially-based first-past-the-post proportional system, nominating one member in each of Canada's 338 existing constituencies.

Having taken part in all the debates on reform in Quebec for a number of years now, I know that one of the reasons for hesitancy on the part of members of the public is that they may lose their constituency MNA in Quebec or their constituency MP in Canada.

I suggest finding a formula—as I have done—which would allow members to be designated as the result of campaigns in each of the existing constituencies in Canada. In each province, the proportional result would be obtained and everything would be distributed—a number of mathematical formulae could be used—according to the performance of each of the parties and the members. That would give a performance list of the candidates in each constituency for a given party and a candidate would be allocated to each constituency according to their performance there.

A number of other mathematical formulae would do the same job. The reason I propose this one is that I am opposed to lists being drawn up by parties, which would mean that the members would be beholden to their respective parties for their appointment. Members belonging to the local electorate and having a base in a constituency seem to me to be conditions for democratic participation.

A little while ago, in *Le Devoir*, I saw a proposal made during consultations on the reform in Prince Edward Island. It was for proportional representation in two-member constituencies. Under that system, two constituencies would be merged, but there would be two people in those constituencies. They would be distributed proportionately. The goal is to have absolute proportionality at the end of the process.

If that is the case, I cannot leave one aspect unchallenged. Belonging to a territory is extremely important. First, parties came onto the scene after the designated territory of those elected. In Ancient Greece, there were demes, districts, to which people belonged. Belonging is therefore one of the conditions. The other that you will get is a multi-party system. A number of researchers are working on the multi-party system, because it provides less effective governance and takes a long time to reach and to work at.

Personally, I find that a two-party system is outdated as a formula, based as it is on the idea of one winner and one loser. Alain Touraine says that we accept the pattern of winners and losers, and we submit to the power of the winner when one party wins an election, because the principle of alternance means that the losing party assumes that it will be in power after the next election, or at some point in the future. As a principle, that seems a little outdated to me. In my view, a multi-party system is based on dialogue, consensus and compromise. Clearly, it supposes that the complex issues have to be dealt with. Nevertheless, for me, that constitutes social progress.

• (1815)

As for representing diversity, no model guarantees that. Which-ever reform you may suggest, proportional or not, I recommend that

each party be required to ensure equal representation of men and women running for office under its banner. Each party must also provide a fair representation of Canadian cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as people with disabilities and people of different age groups. In addition, why not make the voting age 16?

Consideration must also be given to the impact of any type of electoral reform on the transformation of governance. I spoke about that previously.

I do not find compulsory voting to be appropriate. I am working on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and on promoting and exercising human rights for those with disabilities, for the poor and for members of cultural communities. Compulsory voting violates the right to freedom of expression. We have a responsibility and a duty to take part in a vote, but that should not come with penalties. I do not believe that putting penalties in place would increase electoral participation.

As for e-democracy, or cyberdemocracy, the era of Web 2.0 or even Web 3.0 provides a phenomenal capacity for interactivity. Some of you are very effective users of digital media like the Web, Facebook, Twitter and other media that allow us to open public dialogues. The Internet also allows everyone to put their proposals into a public forum. The relationships in the kinds of communications that the Web can give us are being overturned. However, we have to be very careful, considering the risks that electronic voting could pose in terms of security and confidentiality.

In order to minimize the risks associated with electronic voting and to reduce the number of obstacles faced by those with difficulty moving around, I suggest, as other colleagues have done before me, that an electronic voting procedure be developed, tested and validated in the next federal election. A number of colleagues who have come to meet the committee previously have suggested the same thing. I have read all the testimony presented to you up to last week. I take this opportunity to thank the witnesses who have gone before us.

This procedure would be available to a list of people requesting it and eligible to do so in a designated pilot area. Based on the results of the trial, a revised model could be applied in the future in other regions.

I will now talk about the process for adopting a new voting system.

Ethically, the voting system seems to me to be a democratic issue of such importance that any major changes should be ratified by all Canadians in a referendum. However good the quality of the consultations may be, it is not the same as a referendum. The public can be consulted and everyone interested can come and testify freely, but that does not guarantee the support of the public as a whole.

You are doing wonderful work, but you must be careful. A variety of methods of participation have been put in place by political parties and by members of Parliament. The procedure is extremely vast and generous, but it does not guarantee public support. You cannot run the risk of doing nothing. You have to move forward very quickly. When you hold consultations that come to nothing, you are helping to increase public cynicism.

That is why I am recommending that the reform proposal be the subject of a referendum in the next election. The election and a referendum can be held at the same time. If the public supports the proposed reform, the elected government would be required to make the amendments.

I will jump over the last proposals I make in the document in order to talk to you about the essentially deliberative nature of democracy.

I would like to talk to you about the final recommendation. It seems to me to be the most important: the need to establish a context. I would like voting system reform to be included in public and ongoing debate on improving Canada's democratic institutions. I also suggest that we explore implementing other processes promoting civic and democratic participation in order to ensure a true code of civic engagement.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

• (1820)

The Chair: About 30 to 40 seconds.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: Okay.

Democracy is deliberative by nature. Democracy is an ongoing process of transformation. My research focuses more specifically on vulnerable people. I led a summit last May on harmonizing intercultural relations, research I've been doing in the past four years. A series of recommendations were made by citizens to improve participation. I have worked with youths from the Laurentians youth forum and with disabled people. There were several hundred people, perhaps close to a thousand. One recommendation that came back is to support participation through many platforms and to support education for democratic citizenship, so beyond the school's role.

We're talking about all platforms that would enable citizens to take part in developing their civic skills. Participation doesn't mean just voting. Being able to run as a candidate is also important. There is an entire process of political socialization that ensures that citizens become active in various duties.

• (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tremblay.

We'll now move on to Ms. Dassonville, who also has 10 minutes.

Ms. Ruth Dassonville (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I'd like to thank all of you for the invitation and the opportunity to present my point of view. The topic I'm going to be talking about today is compulsory voting, or more precisely, the obligation for voters to turn out, not actually the obligation to cast a vote as the

vote is secret, but the obligation to turn out to vote because voting is a civic duty. Let me start by being more precise about what exactly is compulsory voting.

There are currently over 20 countries worldwide that have some form of compulsory voting. Citizens are obliged to turn out to vote. How exactly these countries implement compulsory voting varies quite a lot. There are some countries where it's just the law that stipulates that voting is a duty and they should turn out to vote. There are other countries where there are sanctions as well, and then there is a limited number of countries where those sanctions are actually enforced.

There are countries that hold that not all non-voters are punished or going to have to pay a fine if they're not turning out to vote. There are a considerable number of citizens who, even though they have the right to vote in those countries, they haven't got the obligation to do so. For example, elderly people in some countries and citizens abroad do not have the actual obligation to turn out to vote although they have the right. Furthermore, there are lots of citizens who can have good reasons for not turning out to vote, and if they provide such reasons, they're not punished either. They could be ill. They could have work obligations. They could be away from home on election day. Those are all good and valid reasons for not being punished at all in any of those systems.

For sure whenever voting is compulsory, is mandatory in a country, voting should be made easy as well. I think the Canadian context is a great case of a country where voting is relatively easy. Already though, more measures could be taken to make it even easier.

What are the effects of making voting compulsory or the participation compulsory? Obviously, it has an impact on turnout. We know from comparative research that turnout levels are considerably higher in countries where voting is compulsory, in particular, if the law is actually enforced, if there's some form of punishment and that punishment is enforced. For example, in the Australian case, non-voters pay a \$20 fine for not voting.

For example, in elections worldwide since 2010 in voluntary voting countries, turnout was at 63%, while in compulsory voting countries where the law was enforced, it was at 85%, so there's a huge impact. Is this an issue in the Canadian context? I think it might be. The 2015 election obviously saw a surge in turnout, but the overall trend is still declining. You might be worried about that, because high turnout as such is an important goal, I think, and it is for two reasons.

First of all, it is an important goal because it increases democratic legitimacy. A government that's been elected based on high levels of turnout could more legitimately claim that it's representing the citizens.

Second, and this is really the crucial point, high turnout levels should reduce inequalities in who turns out to vote and who does not. The political science literature is quite clear that the less well off are less likely to turn out to vote. So lower-educated people, lower-income people, lower social class citizens are less likely to turn out to vote. Compelling them, mandating them, to turn out to vote will effectively reduce those inequalities. I think reducing those inequalities is important because it changes the dynamics. It would make sure that parties would actually care about those less well off citizens. If parties know that the less well off, the low-income groups, low social class citizens are not turning out to vote or are hard to mobilize, then they have no reason whatsoever to care about the interests of those citizens. Compulsory voting would change that dynamic.

Obviously, there are counter-arguments as well and that's probably the reason there are not that many countries where voting is compulsory. I'll talk about four counter-arguments, and then I'll sum up by saying that I think that the benefits are more important than the potential negative consequences of compulsory voting.

The first argument that is often used against compulsory voting is that it violates the principle of freedom of speech.

• (1830)

Once again, I'm not talking about mandating that people actually cast a ballot but about mandating that they turn out to vote. In the polling booth, people can still cast a blank vote or an invalid vote. We could even think of a system where there's an option that stipulates "none of the above", which would actually be a more accurate measure of the extent to which people are dissatisfied with parties or alienated from parties.

A second argument often used against compulsory voting is that it would increase political dissatisfaction. If it does, that would be worrisome, although the empirical research on the topic is not conclusive that this would be the effect. There's some research showing there might be a negative effect on satisfaction with democracy, but there are other studies showing that people are actually more satisfied in compulsory voting countries.

A third argument often used to argue against compulsory voting is that it might have partisan effects, that some parties would benefit from compulsory voting. Yet again, research is not conclusive on this topic. Some research would show a benefit for leftist parties, other research for rightist parties, and other research for small parties. Really there's no conclusive evidence. To a large extent, that is because non-voters are not a homogeneous group. They would vote for different parties, and in the end it wouldn't have a strong impact on electoral results.

The fourth argument against compulsory voting is probably the most forceful; namely, that while it increases the quantity of the votes and you would have more votes being cast, it might be harmful in terms of the quality of those votes being cast. Research shows that there might be a cost indeed. There might be a cost in terms of voting for the ideologically most proximate party. However, research also shows that there are no differences whatsoever in terms of, for example, accountability mechanisms. People in compulsory voting countries hold incumbents to account to the same extent as is the case in voluntary voting countries, meaning that there might be a

cost, but only if you consider voting for the ideologically most proximate party. We might argue about whether that should be the only good reason to cast a vote and the only element that informs people to pick a party. There are many reasons that could inform a vote choice. There's partisanship and there are accountability mechanisms. Ideology is just one of the many different factors that inform the vote. There is a cost, though a small one.

From my reading of the literature, the advantages of compulsory voting outweigh the costs. Compulsory voting increases the legitimacy of the system. Most importantly, it reduces those inequalities in who turns out to vote and who does not. This could be regarded as a matter of principle. If you're going to take policy measures, then you want to be able to be informed on what are the preferences of the citizens, not just the preferences of a small group of people. In much the same way the census is required, you want to have the best possible information. Why not require that citizens actually say what they're thinking and what their opinions are? It's an important information-gathering argument, really.

Other ways of influencing politics are not nearly as important or as effective. If we're thinking about non-electoral forms of participation, inequalities are even more pronounced for non-electoral forms of participation. That will not be the solution. You might think that opinion polls would inform us on what the preferences are of the citizens. Well, opinion polls suffer even more strongly from low response rates.

Really, making sure that as many people as possible turn out to vote on election day would give you the best possible information that you might have to represent those citizens in a good manner. That's why I think compulsory participation might be an effective means to strengthen Canadian democracy. We could think of a system with limited punishment, much like the Australian system, which would effectively increase turnout and reduce inequalities. Providing a "none of the above" option would also make sure that it doesn't violate any principle of freedom of speech.

I'd like to thank you for your attention. I look forward to any questions you might have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Dassonville.

We'll start the round with Sherry Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

[Translation]

I'd like to thank all witnesses very much. I'd also like to thank the citizens in the room for attending this meeting.

[English]

Thank you so much for being here this evening.

[Translation]

It's always a pleasure to be at home in the Montreal region. I'm from Montreal's south shore, and so I crossed the bridge.

I would like to thank you both for your testimonies.

Professor Tremblay, you spoke about another way of calculating votes. I tried to make calculations for Quebec. I don't know if you have an example about how your system would work for the province of Quebec.

• (1835)

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: I didn't do any simulations in that respect.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Right, but your model mentions 78 seats in Quebec. I don't know what the percentage of votes the Liberal Party received in Quebec, but if it's 40%, that means that 40 candidates who obtained the most votes in their ridings would be appointed. Is that right?

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: That's right.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: A candidate who won the election but was not included in the list of the first 40 candidates would therefore have lost.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: Yes. It's different.

In a majority system, someone who has the majority of the votes wins the seat. But here, we're not talking about a majority but proportional representation. Suppose there are 100 seats and the party wins 40% of the votes, that's 40 seats. The results obtained by the candidates in the ridings will be measured and ranked in order of importance. The results 45, 44, 43, 42 or 25, 22, 29 will be indicated by order of importance, and the candidates who obtained them will get a seat.

I consulted some people, but to develop this I mainly used members of my family. I didn't have time to go into this in more detail. The fault in this model is that a candidate from a smaller party could get 29% of the votes, for example, for a better performance. Ultimately, a party could end up with 2% of the votes or something like that. A threshold needs to be established to prevent this.

That's why I propose that, in the formula, we start with the smallest party for granting seats and then move to the party that came second in terms of the number of seats or results obtained. The purpose is to obtain a better match. What has been given to one party couldn't be given to another. There are several formulas to consider with this.

The other formula involves alternating, meaning giving one seat to one party, then one seat to another, and so on. It's based on performance. The ridings remain the same, but the list is created using the public's expression based on the number of votes. Of course, the more votes a candidate gets in a riding, the more chance that candidate has of winning it.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I understand that, but how can we explain to Canadians that the candidate they voted for in a riding won, but lost because there were too few votes compared to other ridings?

Basically, the voices of those Canadians would not be heard.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: On the other hand, how can we explain that a party came to power with 29% of the votes?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Fair enough.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: We know that there's a problem and that choices need to be made. So we need to determine which values to

consider. I think that the governance of a country is more important than the governance of a riding, even if it is important in its own right.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm going to stop you there, not because I don't want to hear what you have to say, but because I also want to ask Ms. Dassonville a question.

[English]

Madam Dassonville, you spoke a bit about mandatory voting; actually, you spoke extensively about it. How would this impact on the way political parties work?

I'm throwing this out there as most of the people who've worked on political campaigns know that the majority of time political parties are trying to classify voters into the *pointage*, and then get the vote out. If you already have mandatory voting, you don't have to get the vote out.

How would this change the culture of politics in terms of political parties?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: Parties do not have to focus energy on mobilizing anymore. They could focus more on convincing people to vote for them based on arguments, based on the contents, and based on policy. That's the way in which it changes the dynamics.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Do I have some more time?

The Chair: No, actually, but it's a great conversation. It was so good that I was discussing all of this with the analysts. It was a fruitful conversation, but it's over.

Mr. Rayes.

• (1840)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

For starters, if your system was applied today, I wouldn't be here talking to you because I would surely be among the ones who would have been cast aside. I received 33% of the votes in the last two elections, but if someone showed up in my riding today and did a poll on the street, I don't think anyone would find it fair that the candidate who received the highest percentage of votes and a majority of over 4,000 votes would not become the representative of their riding.

So you'll understand that I have many reservations about the model you are proposing. You mentioned that choices need to be made. I think that no matter what voting system is chosen, whether it favours proportional, preferential or any other system, my colleagues from every party will tell you that the vast majority of experts and Canadians who have expressed their perspectives before the committee clearly care about having local representation.

I'm not saying it's unanimous, but I think that even people who are in favour of a proportional voting system face a dilemma because of the list. Did you think about that before proposing your system? I acknowledge that our system isn't perfect, but it's not to the point where we need to go against the popular will that still seems fairly clear, going by what has been said before the committee.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: That's not quite the position I had in 2004 when I participated in consultations in Quebec on a reform initiative, or rather a bill. I hadn't thought of the solution I'm proposing today. I heard from the public, municipal associations and people from the UPA who were against losing the local power. People are—

Mr. Alain Rayes: They are attached to their local representative.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: —very attached to their member's office, even if the studies show that they don't consult their MP all that often. Except that the citizens know that their member is in the region, that he's attending spaghetti dinners, that he's studying and defending various projects. They know that he's very active. Candidates form a direct link with the population during their election campaigns. I think it's this link that people are attached to.

So, as for representing the people, the party is in a paradoxical position. Basically, the party aggregates interests, meaning that it assembles the interests, creates a platform, seeks votes from people during elections. I'm sorry, but no matter which party is in power, the member who is elected no longer represents only the people who voted for his party. He must represent the interests of the entire population of his riding, not just the part of the population who voted for him.

Mr. Alain Rayes: However, if we polled the people currently in the room, I think some of them would tell you that they voted for their MP, others would say that they voted for a political party, and still others for the party leader, namely, Justin Trudeau, Stephen Harper or Thomas Mulcair. There is no perfect model. No matter who you ask, the answers may be very different.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: That's right.

Mr. Alain Rayes: With the model you're proposing, I understand that you are making the concession that it isn't necessarily individuals who win the most votes in their ridings who automatically become the representative for the constituents.

What's your perspective on the legitimacy of the process we are currently using? Do you think our three weeks of consultations in Ottawa are sufficient to legitimize the process of changing the voting system in the House of Commons?

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: No, not really.

I don't want to criticize the quality of the process, but we can't guarantee the position or constitution of the entire population and all Canadians.

People took part in the process because they followed the debate as citizens. They did it because the issue interests them, because they represent a party or an organization that wants to express its position, but this isn't the case of the population overall. In Quebec, the more informed the population is, the more it is in favour of the proportional system. We know that.

It's important to inform the public. I know how tiring it is to have the same discussions every four years. We start all over again and we put it off until the next election. That's why we mustn't waste any more time. We've been talking about electoral reform in Quebec for 20 years. René Lévesque also spoke about it in another era.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I will move on to my last question since the chair is going to interrupt me soon, as is his duty.

If you had the power to take action as prime minister and you had the flexibility to do it, what would you do to improve our system without changing the voting system?

• (1845)

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: This is more complex in terms of solutions. However, since I work more with vulnerable people, I would make changes to the process to ensure that Canadians are informed, that the information is universal, that everyone has access to voting, whether they are disabled or—

Mr. Alain Rayes: The chair is going to tell me my time is up soon, so if we used one word to summarize this, it would be “education”, wouldn't it?

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: Education is necessary, but we also need to support the diversity of the platforms that allow Canadians to deliberate, decide and educate themselves.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Perfect.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Boulerville, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'd also like to thank the people in the room who came to attend the deliberations and discussions.

Welcome back, Ms. May. We missed you yesterday.

Ms. Dassonville, you mentioned the fact that mandatory voting had an impact on reducing social inequalities. Could you send the committee some studies or documents on that? I find it very interesting. This is the first time I've heard about it. It may seem logical. When we went door to door, we actually noticed that people who had lower incomes and were less educated were less likely to vote. If we have to consider these people, maybe we will have social policies that will speak more to them. If there are documents available, could you please send them to the analysts?

Mrs. Tremblay, your proposal is very interesting. I have the impression that you have tried to find a solution that reconciles two things that are difficult to reconcile: the local affiliation of the MP and the direct link between voters and their MPs, which everyone wants to maintain; and a proportionality that is reached on a wider scale, be it provincial or territorial.

You are seeing the reactions of my colleagues; I think this is how most people would react. If we keep a local vote by riding and then, because of the proportionality model, the candidate who comes first is not elected MP, I don't think the public will accept that.

Did you consider the single transferable vote, which includes multi-member ridings? The model exists in Ireland. They are combining three to five current ridings, so that one riding is represented by three MPs, for example, and the proportionality is done inside that small territory. The three elected members have truly been elected by the locals. It improves the proportionality, as we see with the Irish experience. It also allows for stable and sometimes even majority governments. In Ireland, the Fianna Fáil party has formed six majority governments since the republic was established.

Would this kind of model, with larger ridings that include more MPs, be better accepted by the public?

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: It depends on how much we want to change the system. If three ridings are combined, it doesn't correct much. I'm suggesting not combining them, but allocating the three seats while keeping the same ridings.

Henry Milner proposed 10 ridings for the Toronto region. Why combine the ridings? Let's keep the 10 ridings and one proportional. This comes back to what I was suggesting, which is to allocate MPs in a riding proportionally. However, your MPs won't have the majority in his or her riding.

There are mathematical ways to solve the problem. There are several solutions, in fact. The idea is to know what responds best to what we're trying to do that will be accepted by the public.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Our committee's mandate is to find a new voting system. We have a lot of suggestions from people who are bringing us new ideas. I've been interested in the matter for a long time, and I've learned an enormous amount through this parliamentary committee. However, we are torn between different values. We want to keep the connection with the local member and the proportionality to represent the diversity of voices so that a true public opinion is heard in Parliament. We also want to avoid false majorities and distortions. In addition, we need to keep a system that is simple and understandable.

One simple and understandable system is the mixed member proportional system, where people vote first for the local member and then for the political party through MPs from lists.

Based on Germany's experience, we don't see that there are two different categories of MPs. The MP who is elected from the list also has an office in Hamburg, or in another city, and also provides services to citizens. Those members are physically located somewhere and can help their communities and people from organizations.

Why have you rejected this option?

•(1850)

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: We rejected it because the list is established by the parties. In a case like that, it is likely that MPs would be more accountable to the party than to voters. I think that's a risk.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: As for open lists, like they have in the Netherlands, I think—

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: This already improves the situation because they are chosen in principle by citizens, but they are still made by the parties. I think it still creates a subgroup of elected people and belong to the party.

Parties currently recruit candidates, invite them to run and support them, but there is a separation between the party's work and what happens when members are elected. They become the rulers.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Do I have any more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Your time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

For anyone who would like to listen to the simultaneous interpretation, there are earpieces to listen to the interpreters, who are seated in the booth to my right.

I would also like to make note of the presence of our colleague, Mark Holland, who is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions.

Welcome to our work, Mr. Holland, and welcome to Montreal.

We'll now go to Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening, ladies.

Thank you for your presentations. Usually, many more men than women testify before us. I think you are the third group of entirely female witnesses. It is greatly appreciated because the standard is always a little higher.

I wish to acknowledge Mr. Holland's presence.

We are delighted to have you here. It's greatly appreciated. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Tremblay, I see that you work in communications. Your document and your presentation are very interesting. You express an opinion on many aspects, including the need to have as many female candidates as male candidates and to have minorities represented. Your position on the referendum is clear.

However, you issued a warning. It's the first time I've heard it, and it's very important to mention it. You said that if the committee's work leads to nothing, it will fuel the disillusionment of the public, when one of the goals of creating this committee was to fight disillusionment while improving the electoral system. We are taking note of that. Still, I will come back to the criticisms made by my colleagues Mr. Rayes and Mr. Boulerice.

A few witnesses have presented a similar model to yours. I will tell you about the criticisms we are hearing by giving an example. If we go by the proportionality by province, Alberta would have an MP from the Green Party but, under your system, that MP would probably hold the third rank in the riding, and the first rank would be held by a Conservative. So constituents of the riding would have voted by a majority for the Conservative, but would be represented by an MP from the Green Party. There would almost be a risk of civil war!

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Participants have told us that there is the constituency, but that there is also proportionality in general, and it needs to operate in a certain way.

Could you quickly defend that perspective?

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: If a candidate did not have the majority but was elected—

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Let's suppose he is third and is elected.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: Yes, that certainly could happen. Many conventions could be adopted. Thresholds could be created. For example, if someone doesn't receive a minimum of 25% of the votes, that person wouldn't be elected. With math and statistics, we can do all kinds of things. We could anticipate that with simulations of this type of situation.

However, I think the work MPs do in their constituencies is important, but it isn't the most important place of governance. The place of governance is the House of Commons and the Government of Canada. That's where I think the issue lies.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you very much.

Ms. Dassonville, so far, people have been telling us that they don't want voting to be mandatory. In the consultations I've attended, no one has ever told us that it might be worthwhile to make voting mandatory. The worst thing is that your arguments are convincing.

As my colleague Alexandre Boulerice said, mandatory voting has an impact because it encourages reducing social inequalities. Could you speak to that?

You also said that when these people go and vote or when voting is mandatory, it doesn't necessarily help the parties to the left or to the right, and that the effect is mitigated. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

• (1855)

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: Thank you for the question.

Indeed, inequalities are reduced depending on who participates and who doesn't participate. That's it in a nutshell.

Studies show that the economic inequalities in societies in general are somewhat less pronounced in countries where this system is in place. The mechanism is that the parties and candidates speak to voters who, in other contexts, are very difficult to mobilize. The parties and candidates have an interest in reaching out to voters and talking to them.

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

I have one last question for you. This is my economist side talking.

For mandatory voting, if we impose a fine of \$20 on people who don't vote, will the administration costs of the system be covered? Is it a cost-neutral system or does it cost money?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: We would have to do the calculations. I don't think this is a concern in Australia, for example. No one is saying that the system is too costly. That's not the biggest issue.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you very much, ladies.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. May.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all my colleagues.

I'm sorry I missed all the other testimonies today. This is one of the times I greatly regret being the only MP for the Green Party. I had to take part in the debate in the House on the Paris agreement.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here this evening. This is very interesting.

I'll start with Ms. Dassonville.

[*English*]

While you were talking I was remembering a proposal that used to be put forward in every Parliament by a mutual friend of the chairman and mine, Charles Caccia, the Liberal member of Parliament for Davenport from 1968 to 2004. In every Parliament where he had a chance, he put forward a private member's bill to make voting mandatory, but to have the ballot have an option for "none of the above". When you said "none of the above", I started thinking that I've heard this before somewhere. It would not surprise you to hear this never passed our Parliament despite being put forward repeatedly by Charles Caccia.

In looking at mandatory voting, I think that certainly would be something a lot of voters would find empowering, to know that they didn't have to spoil a ballot. They could make their views clearer.

Have you turned your mind at all to the idea that if we did have mandatory voting, whether we should have it on a Saturday, a weekend day? We heard not from a witness who was actually invited to the committee, but from one of the open-mike participants who talked about it in Australia and said that the mandatory voting election day became a great family event. People congregated. Communities were involved. I don't know if you've looked at the social cohesion aspects of how one organizes a mandatory voting day.

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: There's definitely this socializing aspect to it. I'm not sure it absolutely has to be on a weekend. Research tends to show that turnout rates are a bit higher on weekends than they are during the week. But if you have a system where you have several days to have the opportunity to cast your vote, the time really isn't the most important issue.

You might consider changing it in general that if you decide that voting should be mandatory, then it should be made as easy as possible, and the weekend might be a bit easier, yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: There is another proposal that was put forward by one of the people at an open-mike session. Have you considered that rather than a penalty for people who do not vote there be a very small tax benefit for people who do vote, so that there's some monetary reward for turning out to vote? Did you consider that in preparing for today?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: It is one of the ways in which you could implement it. I think most countries have penalties rather than incentives. The incentives don't work the same way for everyone and it's not really as effective as a punishment, even a small punishment.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mrs. Tremblay, this is the committee's 35th meeting, and the electoral reform approach you are presenting is entirely unique. We have heard all kinds of ideas, but yours is completely different from the ones presented previously by other witnesses. I agree with my colleagues that voters have a problem when a candidate is third or fourth but wins the election.

I have another question about the idea of holding a referendum. With that approach, you proposed holding a referendum at the same time as the next election. You also proposed that the reform be used for the election that would be held no later than 2020 and the ones that might be held in 2024.

You also said that there was a risk of increased public cynicism if Mr. Trudeau did not keep his promise. He mentioned that the 2015 election would be the last to use the first-past-the-post voting system and wants to replace it with another approach in the near future. Would there be a risk of more cynicism from the public if this didn't happen?

• (1900)

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: If a referendum were held at the same time as the next election to ensure that the changes suggested would be in effect during future elections, it would be clear to the public that progress was being made. We are used to having discussions that keep coming back and seeing referendums cancelling things in British Columbia or Quebec. The public has rejected some proposals.

However, if something changes because the public supports it in the next election, if there is an action plan and an assessment is done for the following elections, I think it would be appropriate. And it all depends on the extent of the reform. I read the first review of the Chief Electoral Officer and of the constitutionalists regarding the complexity of introducing electoral reform and the legitimacy and responsibilities of the various players to make these changes. Specifically, the Chief Electoral Officer mentioned the need to change the electoral districts.

Basically, it depends on the extent of the reform and the proposal that will be put forward and that you will pass on. You could use various ways to confirm whether it is clear and easy to understand. The other option that I think remains democratic would be to put it in place for the next election and still have methods of evaluation that would be ratified by the public. Sooner or later, it's going to need to be ratified by the public. So if it isn't through a referendum during the next election, it should be ratified in future elections. So it involves evaluating, ratifying and continuing to use it or making changes to it.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. May, but your time is up.

Mr. DeCoursey, you have the floor.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the witnesses who are with us this evening. Please excuse me for being late.

My first question is for Ms. Dassonville.

[*English*]

We've heard the idea of a voting holiday. I've heard echoes elsewhere, not as testimony here in front of the committee, that that's a bad idea, that there might be research to suggest that is a bad idea. Have you done any research, or do you have any advice on the idea of a civic holiday for people to go and vote?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: I wouldn't know what research has to say on that. If it's a weekend when people don't have to work, then turnout tends to be higher. I'm not sure that you want to create a holiday during the week by having a day off, since there are weekends already.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: We've also heard the geography of Canada makes it difficult to properly time the closing of polls across the country so that people from one end of the country to the other have the same information when they go to vote. As an Atlantic Canadian, I'm culpable of causing some predetermined thought, perhaps, for those who go to the polls out west. Have you done any research, or do you have any advice to share on how polls should administer themselves during election day so that voters across the country have equal knowledge of what's going on from one end of the country to the other?

• (1905)

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: Equal knowledge would mean no knowledge about the results before the polling stations are closed, and that seems like something that's feasible. I'm not quite sure what the effects would be of doing that. The effects on the electoral results of being informed about the results are minimal. That's what research is showing, but I'm not sure it would change that or if it's that important an issue.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Professor Tremblay, I think we heard a proposal similar to yours from other witnesses, but it wasn't exactly the same thing. For the first time, I think that a system like this might boost strategic voting.

If I were a Liberal candidate in New Brunswick, where Liberals won 51% of the votes, and I thought I would come fifth or sixth out of the 10 Liberal colleagues, I could ask voters who wanted to vote for the NDP or the Green Party to vote for me so that the Conservative candidate wouldn't come first or second on the list in the overall votes.

Would it end up increasing strategic voting? The witnesses who support the proportional system tell us that it would reduce it.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: I don't think it would increase strategic voting.

However, the voters' problem is that they have to boil their decision down to a single x, which has to represent the party, the MP and the prime minister. So there is a decrease that means that, obviously, voters wonder what is motivating them to put an x in one box rather than another. It's either because they like the look of the MP for their ridings or because they like the look of the various party candidates nationally.

I find the whole issue of the debate on strategic voting strange because it can't be ruled out from an electoral approach until we have a greater variety of options, meaning a referendum or a 150-question survey.

The electoral process itself is a reduction process, and we can't rule out all strategy. I find the whole debate on strategic voting intriguing because I'm not sure we can rule out strategic voting completely. It seems to me that it's one of the rights of citizens.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you very much.

I have one last question. Even if we proposed another system, an alternative to the current system, would your proposal on the referendum stand?

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Okay.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. DeCoursey.

[English]

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: I want to begin my questions with Dr. Dassonville. You'd mentioned that the differences in voter turnout between obligatory voting and volunteer voting is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 85% and 63%, respectively. Even in compulsory voting, there's still about 15% who don't vote. Do we have any indication on demographics of that 15%? Are they people with disabilities? Are they people with lower incomes? What's the significance of that 15%?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: They would have fairly similar characteristics to those who are not turning out now, but you'd just have a smaller number of them demographically.

Mr. John Nater: Is there a risk that we're double penalizing someone? Not only are they feeling disenfranchised with the system, but now we're disenfranchising them financially by levying a fine, even if it is only \$20. It's symbolic in nature and it seems like we're doubly punishing someone who not only feels disenfranchised with the system, but who feels doubly disenfranchised now with the monetary fine.

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: If that would be the case, then we would clearly see that dissatisfaction with democracy, and dissatisfaction with politics would be more pronounced in compulsory voting countries, which is not the case.

Mr. John Nater: I know you do have some connection with Belgium. Do you have any comments on how the Belgian system deals with regional issues and the language issues in Belgium, and the impact the electoral system in Belgium has on regional issues and linguistic issues, as well?

•(1910)

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: I'm not sure the electoral system... We have a proportional electoral system, but all ridings are provincial. As a consequence, it's mostly in unilingual districts where you're voting people in. It makes sure that representation is proportional in Parliament, and then there are additional rules that are part of the constitution and help make sure that all linguistic groups are well represented. There are veto powers at different stages in law-making to make sure that a linguistic minority still can have an important impact, even though they're a minority.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you.

Dr. Tremblay, you made an interesting comment in your opening remarks about the concerns with a party list, the concerns with giving that power to political parties. Would you mind elaborating on that? What's your major concern with having political parties draw up a list in different types of systems? Where does your concern rest with that?

[Translation]

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: It risks creating a system of apparatchiks, power and collusion that ends up favouring friends or the group. The MP becomes accountable to the party. If the MP was designated because he is a list member, his allegiance or accountability will tend to be toward the party.

The parties do extremely important work to develop platforms based on certain values that fracture society between the left and the right. They mobilize people, develop and support dialogue. They train citizens and engage in political socialization. It's their job for civil society. Afterwards, however, they have to separate themselves from the government. They developed the platform, but they must not control the government. That seems dangerous to me.

[English]

Mr. John Nater: I know your research background is in citizen democratic engagement. Going forward, this committee will be making a recommendation at some point. On December 1 the report will be tabled. When a proposal is made, what type of engagement with the population do you think will be necessary to go beyond that?

[Translation]

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: Today we may regret that the social fabric and civil society in both Quebec and Canada have crumbled because Quebec community organizations and many institutions of civil society have lost their ability to support the public participation.

I am trying to determine why people take part in the democratic process. We must help people in the multicultural communities, persons with disabilities, and those living in poverty to get involved in the participatory process. I will not cite the factors that influence involvement in that process, but I will say that men participate in it more than women. Their cohorts, age groups, economic status and level of education are other factors that have an impact. Educated people participate more in the political process in all its forms.

There is another important factor for the communities, and that is political effectiveness. If I feel politically effective, I will participate more. Between elections, we should care about the dialogue in the community and about the strength of civil society to support that dialogue. That is what your committee is doing. Many associations in civil society are taking part in the debate. I think that is important. We have to help people develop their political effectiveness.

There are two types of political effectiveness for a person with disabilities. First of all, there is the way people view their own citizenship skills. They may think they are not effective because they do not have the necessary skills. Persons with disabilities may also doubt that people like them will be heard. Similarly, the voices of people on welfare, people in situations of poverty, and persons with disabilities do not make themselves heard. Consequently, those people will not get up and go vote or take part in the political process.

We must have a policy to support participation by the population, including the most vulnerable, and that includes people from the ethnic communities.

When people come here as immigrants or refugees, the first thing that is important for them is to protect their person from mistreatment and violence. The second thing is to find a job. That is what immigrants say. If I ask them what their rights are, they will tell me that their political rights are not the first thing they think of. As for women, they have other obligations.

We must support the process of developing citizenship skills. That requires a citizen participation and education support policy. The Chief Electoral Officer has previously made some proposals. We have to look at the real problem and understand why people participate or not. If no one hears them, they do not understand why they would get up and go vote.

• (1915)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sahota, go ahead, please.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: My question is along those lines, Professor Tremblay. We want to encourage voter participation. We want to encourage immigrant populations and women to engage in politics and to perhaps run for politics. I'm not quite sure how this proposed system does that.

We did have a similar system presented before, and at first glance I was almost sold. I thought it was great, but there's something about the list system that I'm not fully convinced about yet. It seems as if the parties have too much power in that system. Perhaps it could be tweaked. We've seen a lot of proposals around that too.

With this one, the more I'm thinking about it, I like the fact that all the candidates have run in a riding and have run in an election. I like that aspect of it, but at the end of the day, when you have somebody who on the face of it has won, as my colleagues have mentioned, but who then doesn't end up winning, what does this do to the structure as a whole? Are we going to have good government as a result of this?

Being on this committee has been quite humbling. Most experts have told us that it's not about us, that it's not about the MPs, that it's all about the party. It doesn't really matter how good an MP you are or how good the people think you are, because that's not what people are voting for.

It may not be about me, but I can definitely say that I can look at my colleagues and say that not all MPs are alike. Not all MPs are created the same. I think we have a lot of brilliant minds among our government. At the end of the day, a government needs to select ministers, and some of those ministers had really close elections. Does that say they weren't a really great candidate? Also, some MPs ran in really safe ridings but perhaps aren't, let's say, at the level of some of the other MPs. I don't know how to put this—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Put it carefully.

An hon. member: Who are you talking about?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It may be me. I'm just saying that we have to recognize that some people have—

The Chair: On this committee, we're all on the same level.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Some MPs are made for this job and maybe can contribute great things to a government. For others, maybe this job isn't made for them, and they realize that after some years.

Through this system, it seems so random. You may end up losing some of those who have really good potential and end up having all the people who were in safe seats winning—those who won by a greater margin—but there could be others who won and who are equally deserving. Explain that to me, because at the end of the day, I think citizens do want to see good potential in their government, as well as proportionality.

[Translation]

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: I think that pure proportional representation, with various ways of calculating and preserving the connection with a district, if possible, will change the entire dynamic of public participation. The reason is that we will have multipartite governance and all voters will be able to work more closely with elected members or with the people of their party, within the party.

How do we ensure we have competent MPs? Someone talked about political careers this afternoon. This is in effect a political career. It must be a political career, and that is part of the political socialization process.

I have skills as a voter. My party is ultimately what reflects the opinion I have on a particular issue or series of issues. However, my opinion may change as we begin to deliberate. For example, I do not hold the same position on the reform we are discussing here as on the Quebec reform in 2004.

The proportional system encourages us to develop our judgment and skills as citizens. The more candidates there are, the better. It is like in the Olympics. Canada won a considerable number of medals. Why? Because there is an infrastructure that enables people to develop skills. Not everyone is required to be an MP, and not everyone is required to be prime minister, but everyone should engage in politics.

We do not have that culture of politics and political engagement. That is what determines our skills as citizens, first of all. Then we can have a career in politics, join a party, become MPs, or support a campaign. There is a whole chain of citizenship skills that makes the system operate efficiently, and the proportional system contributes to that.

• (1920)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We've had this criticism that women oftentimes run in ridings that are not winnable. How does this system address that? I feel that even less women would run. Things are up in the air.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Please answer briefly.

What was the question about?

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: About the representation of women.

The Chair: All right.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: The problem is that, even if some women run, they will not necessarily be elected.

However, they do not constitute half of the candidates from all parties. If that were the case, that would be progress.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sansoucy, you have the floor.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to recognize the citizens who are among us. Your involvement in this consultation is really important. Thank you for being here. I see that some have been here since early afternoon.

Thanks as well to both witnesses.

Ms. Dassonville, you have an entirely original point of view. Witnesses have told us from the start that they are opposed to mandatory voting. That is also an issue that you addressed, Professor Tremblay. We are told this is a matter of right, that people have a right not to vote. However, you have really given us food for thought. I have been wondering for a while why you have come and shaken up my opinions, but that discounts the fact that your arguments are very sound.

The fact is we all regret the low voter turnout rates at elections. I was previously a municipal councillor, and the situation was even worse then. You can imagine what it would have been if I had been a school commissioner.

If voting were mandatory, it would have to take place over several days for everyone to be able to vote.

Since I was a bit confused, I do not know whether you brought up the subject, but I would like to know whether this would go as far as to include electronic voting.

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: Not necessarily. There are countries where voting is mandatory, but where there is no electronic voting, and it works all the same.

In Belgium, the turnout rate is quite high, 90%, even though voting takes place over a single day. There is no early voting or electronic voting, but, as a result of their social conscience, people feel they have a duty to go and vote, even though no fines have been imposed on people who have failed to vote in Belgium since 2003. The fact remains that the voter turnout rate is still 90%.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: When we meet with citizens, we see, for example, that older people feel they have a duty to vote. Mandatory voting might ultimately result in that kind of change in culture. I understand this more clearly. Thank you.

Professor Tremblay, I agree with you that we have an obligation of result. That is very clear. However, you also said the system would have to be accepted by the population. I must say you are the second person before whom I have made that same observation. In Manitoba, one individual presented a concept that was mathematically valid but that I did not understand. I told my colleagues I was not good at math.

During an election campaign, part of our work as candidates to educate people. However, I find it hard to see how I could explain to a citizen that voting outcomes will be the result of mathematical calculations I could not explain to that person. That is where I have reservations.

However, as I find your work on democracy very interesting, I would nevertheless like to take advantage of the fact you are here.

You say your formula permits better representation of women and various cultures. Whether I agree with you or not, I would like you to tell me, based on the work you have done on democracy, why that is important.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: The formula I am proposing does not support that.

What I am recommending is that, regardless of the formula proposed, arrangements be made so that women are also represented. I also include in that regard all persons with disabilities because they feel excluded and represent a significant segment of the population. As for ethnic diversity, as is often said, people say those people often feel excluded. They are among the groups that must be represented.

Perhaps we should also look at age groups. We have already raised the issue of giving the vote to people at the age of 16; that has been done elsewhere. However, are age groups represented? We see this in the parties. There is a youth section in all political parties. However, are the various age groups represented, whether they be seniors or people between 45 and 60 years of age? The question arises because we have to ensure there is that diversity.

As for men and women, we can say there are approximately the same numbers of men and women in every district. That can be done.

With respect to ethnic diversity, however, people in the communities tell us they feel excluded. How will we deal with those aspects? That is not easy. Will it be in the Montreal region or in the least urban regions? When we talk about ethnic diversity, does that mean that people come from Haiti, that they are anglophone and francophone, or that they have different ethnic or religious characteristics? This is important, but I do not know exactly how to answer that question.

•(1925)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: You associate it with the fact that it will encourage citizen participation. Will that be the case?

The Chair: Ms. Tremblay, please answer briefly.

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: Measures have to be taken to achieve that. Which ones? I do not know. However, we must encourage citizen participation and diversity.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Speaking of citizen participation, I see we're past the time when we're supposed to have begun that portion of the evening. I'll be quite brief, so that we can get to that, because that's the most important part of what we're doing here today.

I have one quick question for each of our witnesses. Then I'll give away any time I have remaining, so we can get to the people.

Professor Tremblay, one of the recommendations that you make in your brief that we have here in front of us is that each party be required to ensure equal representation of men and women who run for office. Certainly that's a wonderful goal. It's certainly one that all parties should be doing more to encourage women to run for nominations within their party.

Of course, one of the challenges with saying that each party is required to ensure equal representation from each gender is the fact that all parties... I know my party and I believe all parties obviously have nomination processes where it's open for anyone that wants to run. Often these nomination processes can be some of the most contentious parts of our democracy, and the most subject to complaints about fairness and these kinds of things.

How does that get put into practice? If there are 338 seats, that would mean we would require each party to have 169 men and 169 women on the ballot in an election. Let's say we've now elected the candidates for 318 of them and there's already 169 women that have been chosen to be candidates for one of the parties. Then you're telling the last 20 ridings to nominate someone and they all must be men.

I would assume there might be a woman somewhere in one of those ridings who was really intent on running and who's going to be a bit upset that she doesn't have that opportunity now. How would

you suggest that be put into practice so the parties could do that fairly?

I'm honestly trying to see how it would work in practice. It's a great goal and one we should do everything we can to encourage, but I'm at a loss to see how that would work in practice when it comes to a party nomination.

Do you have any thoughts on that?

[Translation]

Mrs. Mireille Tremblay: I understand it may be difficult to establish an equal list for each of the parties. We could set ratios, a minimum, for example, that might be between 45% and 55%. When you have three candidates on a list, it is hard to get half of them. So we could establish a margin that would be between 45% and 55%. However, that does not guarantee that 50% of those candidates will be elected.

Furthermore, the other dimension that should be considered is that the government also has some flexibility in this regard. It generally tries to meet that percentage or to approach it by appointing equal, or roughly equal, numbers of men and women to ministerial positions. I am talking about the executive level here. Some parties and governments make sure they meet that condition.

However, to solve the problem of nominating candidates, it is important first of all to develop women's desire to engage in politics and to guarantee them good working conditions that will help ensure enough female candidates run for political office.

We spoke about school boards and municipal councils. We see that, historically, women in politics very often start out by getting involved in municipalities and community organizations. Then people tell them they are capable of going further, and then they move up to another level.

So there is a history of skills development in women. We must take that fact into account and support the development of their skills and political careers. If I remember correctly, there are support organizations, in Quebec City, for example, to ensure that parties nominate enough female candidates.

We must also ensure that governments have women in ministerial positions and that men and women are equitably represented.

Ultimately, there is a range of measures that should be considered. However, the parties have an important role to play in recruitment.

•(1930)

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Professor Dassonville, in regard to compulsory voting which is obviously the main body of your research, you mentioned earlier that you felt it probably wouldn't significantly change the results in an election because, for the most part, the make-up of those who are not voting now, in terms of demographics and also in terms of the parties they support, probably would be quite similar to the electorate that is voting.

I was curious to know if you'd ever done or seen any research on the effect it's had on where someone's placed on the ballot. In other words, with mandatory voting I've heard often that sometimes people will go in and randomly make a selection on the ballot because they're forced to go and vote. I've heard it referred to as donkey voting, as in pin the tail on the donkey. I'm wondering if you've ever seen or done any studies on....They often talk about the person whose name is first or last on the ballot having an advantage. Has there ever been any studies on that? In other words, with mandatory voting, do we see more often a higher percentage of the first or last candidate on the ballots being chosen? I know there are ways that that can be remedied, obviously, but I'm curious as to whether—

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: For the Australian case, there are indications of a number of people, indeed, casting votes simply by ordering them from the top down on the list. There are always going to be a number of those votes in any kind of system. The easier your system is, the less of those kinds of votes you're going to get. If you think of a proportional system just causing a list vote, then there's not going to be such an effect of that.

Furthermore, if you have a “none of the above” option, those who really don't care have that option, and would either cast an invalid or a blank ballot or just make something up.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: I've really enjoyed the day in Montreal today and look forward to the audience questions and comments that are coming next. You have given us lots of new information.

I'll start with Professor Dassonville, because some of the mandatory voting knowledge that you bring is not an area we've heard a lot about. My first question for you is, have you also looked at mandatory registration versus mandatory voting and have you any thoughts on that?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: If you decide that voting is mandatory, it should be made as easy as possible. That is why automatic registration would be the easiest way to go for that.

Mr. John Aldag: Would you be able to say registration is mandatory, but then the voting part is voluntary, or do they always go hand in hand?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: They mostly go hand in hand, but not all the time. Chile is an interesting case where voting used to be mandatory, but registration not, and they just flipped it around recently. It's a more sensible thing to first make registration compulsory before moving on to the vote, obviously.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

The second one on mandatory voting, do they include the name, the party, or both on the ballots? Is there a consistency and how is that done?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: I don't think there's consistency. Mandatory voting has been used in all sorts of electoral systems and all those ballots differ quite a lot, so I don't think there's consistency.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

On Saturday, two nights ago, I did a town hall on electoral reform and there was a healthy level of political skepticism present. We actually talked about mandatory voting. One of the questions was if we're concerned about declining participation rates, then why not make it mandatory, and that got the group talking.

I like this idea of the mandatory going hand in hand with “none of the above”. At my town hall on Saturday, the question came up and I couldn't answer it. Has “none of the above” ever won? That's one piece of it. The other is, can you change your name to “none of the above”?

What kind of games get played with this and what result can you expect?

• (1935)

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: The reason is that probably there are no majoritarian systems that actually have compulsory voting right now, so you wouldn't have such a case.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay. It was a fun one to play with as we talked about it.

You also talked a bit about quantity versus quality. That came up at the town hall as well, and it's about what we are trying to achieve here. I don't want to put you on the spot, but my thought has always been that it would be great if we had 100% voter participation, even if people maybe are misinformed or ill-informed. Again, at the town hall we had a bit of a discussion about people who may be disenfranchised, who are simply not plugged into the process. Are they going to come and either do the donkey vote or vote for “none of the above”?

Does that help our democratic system? Is that a sign of a strong democracy? What's the benefit of having this kind of mandatory voting when people really are not all that interested?

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: It changes the dynamics and it makes for more equality in who turns out to vote. In terms of the quality of the vote, it's really an arbitrary judgment to judge what is a good vote and what is not a good vote, what is an ill-informed vote. There are lots of reasons that could motivate people to pick a particular candidate or to pick a particular party, and there's no way we could decide what is a correct vote and what isn't.

There might be a bit more noise added to the system if you're requiring everyone to turn out to vote, but then again, it doesn't change the electoral results. In that case, the equality argument's really the more important one.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Thank you.

The Chair: When you say it doesn't change the electoral results, could you elaborate on that? I just want to make sure I have a proper understanding of what that means.

Ms. Ruth Dassonville: As a matter of fact, the votes of those who are not turning out to vote are.... They would vote for different parties, and if you add up.... There might be a bit of a skew towards some parties, but it's never going to be big enough to really change....

The Chair: Right, that's what I thought you mentioned earlier.

Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for this very interesting testimony. It is different from what we have heard so far, and it makes matters more interesting for the members of this committee. As you know, we are now at the 35th meeting of this committee, and you have managed to surprise us with stimulating testimony. Thank you very much.

Now we will move on to the period of audience remarks.

I will take this opportunity to explain the procedure to those who were not here earlier today. Remarks must run no longer than two minutes. That is feasible. It is what we have done in all the other cities we have visited. That is the way it was this afternoon.

I would also remind people in the room that we are operating in accordance with Parliament Hill rules. Even though we are not in the Centre Block in Ottawa, we must abide by committee rules. It is prohibited to take photographs while the committee is sitting, for various reasons. The rule unfortunately applies here as it does in Ottawa.

I would ask Brenda Linn to step up to microphone No. 1.

It seems Ms. Linn is not here.

Fernand Deschamps and Marc Heckmann, you may take microphones Nos. 1 and 2 respectively.

Mr. Deschamps, you have the floor for two minutes.

• (1940)

Mr. Fernand Deschamps (As an Individual): Good evening, everyone.

First, I will say this: I strongly object to the fact that our speaking time is limited to two minutes. I believe that an issue such as citizen participation in democratic life is so fundamental that it merits more than two minutes. I think everyone here in this room will agree with me on that.

Second, your committee must limit itself to choosing one of the four systems that are presented to it. That is not your fault; that is the mandate you have been given. However, debate and discussion cannot be limited.

As committee members themselves have said, as well as the people who have come to speak, there is a very serious problem of citizen participation in democratic life here in Canada, particularly in elections.

I would like to bring to everyone's attention important issues that are not addressed in this mandate and that merit consideration. If we cannot do that here, we should do it outside. We need this space.

Allow me to cite a few examples.

How is it that, in 2016, we citizens are always limited to marking a ballot. We live in a modern, industrialized society. We are able to say many things. We work in workplaces that have an impact on our country's economic life. How is it that citizens cannot participate more fully than by simply marking a ballot? Let me explain.

There is the matter of candidate selection, for example. As you know, it is traditionally the political parties that make that selection.

Why can we not imagine, in a new Canada, a situation in which Elections Canada partly releases citizens from their work so that they can hold regular meetings in their neighbourhoods or workplaces all year round in order to raise the issues they consider important and to invite experts wishing to take part in the process, as we have seen this evening. In that way, citizens would be politically educated by election day.

There would be no more scenarios like the ones we have previously experienced, such as political parties telling us what the choices are and presenting the issues on which we must take a position. It would be the reverse.

I will submit one final point to you. Why should we citizens not have our say in candidate selection? I think that would open up a big space. We need it.

The Chair: I would like to say that, in the Liberal Party, you are not even required to be a member in order to vote for the party leader.

Mr. Fernand Deschamps: Yes, I know. I know your new arrangement.

The Chair: You need only join the movement, and I imagine the other parties—

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: In the Bloc, it costs five dollars.

The Chair: Really? Perhaps it should be free.

Mr. Fernand Deschamps: However, I would be interested to know who selects candidates in the districts.

The Chair: You have exceeded your two minutes, Mr. Deschamps. Thank you.

I would ask Diane Johnston to step up to the microphone No. 1.

I now turn the floor over to Marc Heckmann.

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Heckmann (As an Individual): I'd like to say that I have been waiting for this all my life, ever since I was of voting age. I am really happy that this is going on. Thank you.

I am in favour of some sort of mixed proportional system, with a strong focus on regional representation, given our geography. I am not going to elaborate on the benefits of such systems, because I think other citizens who spoke today did a pretty good job on that.

However, what I would like to add to the debate is one thing that I didn't really hear much about here today, but perhaps you guys talked about it in other committee meetings. It is the word "coalition". If some sort of proportional system is used, we are going to have either more minority governments or more formal or informal coalitions. Right now, at least in the past few years in Ottawa, it seems that it has been sort of a dirty word, at least with some of the political parties.

It really shouldn't be. My feeling, just from talking to friends and family around me, is that people want stable governments. Yes, absolutely. Can we have stable governments with minority governments or coalitions? I believe we can. I think countries like Germany show that they can have strong, stable governments. Even if it's just a minority government, I think our government could behave accordingly. I think most Canadians want stable governments.

The other thing I'd like to talk about is the referendum question. I think some sort of compromise will have to be made. I am personally not in favour of a referendum, but I do sympathize with those who are strongly in favour of a referendum on this issue, because I think this process is, unfortunately, in peril. I have spoken to friends, family, and workplace colleagues about this process. While most are aware of the election promise, and many of them support the election promise, unfortunately most, if not all, are not actually aware of this process, and this is the most important piece of the promise.

• (1945)

The Chair: I'll just mention something about coalition. You're right that it hasn't come up here, but everywhere else we've been, it's come up at least once or twice. There seems to be a common understanding that with a system of proportional representation, you have a higher probability of minority governments and coalitions. So it has come up, but you're right that it hasn't come up yet today. You're the first to bring it up. Thank you for your comments. We appreciate them.

Mr. Marc Heckmann: Am I done?

The Chair: Yes, but I just want to remind everyone that if you have a longer opinion that you would like the committee to consider, you can submit a brief—it could be a letter—in writing to the committee, as long as it doesn't exceed 3,000 words. You just go to the committee website. There's also an electronic questionnaire. If you don't want to do a brief but you want to do a questionnaire, you can do that as well. In addition to being here tonight, there are many, many ways for you to get your views across.

[Translation]

Ms. Elizabeth May: What is the deadline?

The Chair: The deadline for submitting your questionnaires or briefs by mail or email is October 7.

[English]

Mr. Marc Heckmann: I'd briefly add that I do support this process. I don't think it's too late to recuperate it. Use the mainstream media. Get out there. Get the word out.

The Chair: We're working on it.

Mr. Marc Heckmann: I think the committee could do a better job of using the media.

The Chair: Yes, we're trying very hard.

[Translation]

Daniel Green, please step up to microphone No. 2.

Diane Johnston, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Diane Johnston (As an Individual): I think that here in Canada, we're facing a very serious legitimacy crisis regarding the political process. I think that even for what's taking place right now, it was the Trudeau government that put this exercise together partly to try to claim legitimacy. I think that everything is being done in a very rushed way. There were town hall meetings. There was a whole scenario put together with certain questions and almost multiple-choice answers. There's a very serious need for democratic reform and for democratic renewal. I think people feel completely disenfranchised from what's taking place. This has been going on for a long time and it really has to be addressed. People have to be able to participate. People have to be able to select their own candidates, to discuss what programs should be put forward that would favour their interests, and to hold their candidates accountable. There have to be measures or mechanisms to make sure that gets done.

Here in Canada, everybody has the right to elect and to be elected, but people don't even have the right to an informed vote. For example, there were something like 18 political parties and independent candidates that participated in the last election. They were not even called on to give their views. This committee here that was put together will make its recommendations in a very rushed way. I believe it has to submit its report by December 1, and then it's going to be up to the PMO and the cabinet to do what they want with it. So I think there's a very serious need for change in Canada.

• (1950)

The Chair: Our committee is just gathering input, and there will be a whole series of decisions to come later. I don't want to prejudge what those decisions will be and so on, but I take your point that you feel there should be more time. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Veronika Jolicoeur, please step up to microphone No. 1.

Mr. Green, go ahead, please.

Mr. Daniel Green: Good evening. My name is Daniel Green. I am deputy leader of the Green Party of Canada.

The message I would like to deliver to the committee this evening is that there is hope. There is hope because I can see it. I see you working together. I see there is a spark, a connection.

I did not attend myself, but last Friday, MP Simon Marcil held an evening event in Mirabel during which a proportional system and the referendum were discussed. Perhaps we do not need that if the parties can reach a consensus.

We are quite familiar with the position Mr. Deltell has adopted in the past. He was in favour of a proportional system. I am persuaded that Mr. Deltell can convince his Conservative colleagues on the committee to be on his side because that is good for democracy.

I am persuaded this committee can form a consensus.

As to whether there will be a referendum, the Chief Electoral Officer has said it would be possible to hold a referendum and to put a modified system in place for 2019.

However, I encourage you, ladies and gentlemen, to work together and to do us a favour and come to a consensus. Your report must be submitted on December 1. Give us a nice Christmas present, a consensus and a more democratic system.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Green, thank you for your words of encouragement and your kind Christmas wishes.

[English]

Michael Jensen, please, go to microphone two.

[Translation]

Ms. Jolicoeur, go ahead, please.

Ms. Veronika Jolicoeur: Good evening.

We have talked a lot about how important it is to inform the population. My suggestion would be to amend the electoral list to include voters' email addresses. Voters who do not have Internet access may be contacted by mail, somewhat as is done for the census.

The other thing I would like to say is that I am very apprehensive about male-female parity at all costs. I think we should give priority to competence. That is why I suggest that applications should be anonymous. In that way, we could select the best candidates. If we discover there are not enough women, we will have to offer training to those who are interested.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Jean-Claude Noël, please step up to microphone No. 1.

Now we will hear from Mr. Jensen.

[English]

Mr. Michael Jensen (As an Individual): Greetings, all. This is the moment we've been waiting for for a very long time. I'm very happy to be here to talk to all of you.

First, on proportional representation, I think this is obvious, and I think everybody knows it's obvious, but the question is, how do we do it and how fast can we get there?

Second, I'm definitely in favour of minority or coalition governments. It doesn't matter who the majority is, a majority government has too much power. It's as simple as that.

The reason more people aren't participating in the electoral process is cynicism. The reason more people aren't here is equally cynicism. Nobody believes this is going to happen, but maybe it will. It would be fantastic if it did.

I've heard that there's a lot of talk about a referendum. I'm aware of Elizabeth May's opinion on this. She does not think it's a good idea. I'll let her defend her points on that. I don't consider myself qualified to judge on the issue. The point is, if people feel it's very important to have a referendum on the issue, then, fine, do a referendum, but keep the process moving, keep people talking about it. Get it done.

The system I propose, I think it's called mixed proportional. I would propose to have two separate ballots. Each person would vote twice, and perhaps we'd have a system of stars so you could rate, say, six stars or something, distributed among the maze of parties that are running so you could say which ones you like the most or the least. There would be another separate vote for a local candidate who could be for a party or could be running as an independent. Say the Liberals get 40% or so of the vote on the ballot for the party and they also get 40% of the members in the assembly from the local votes, then they don't get any other people. It makes sense. Then the rest are filled in from the party.

• (1955)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Michael Jensen: If I could just comment on online voting, it would be fantastic, but it's dangerous. If one cracker gets in, it's—

The Chair: Yes, we've heard that. I have to go to—

Mr. Michael Jensen: Lowering the voting age, I don't know too much about it yet.

The Chair: I have to go.

Mr. Michael Jensen: I would encourage a fine for not voting. That's a little dangerous, but—

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Jensen, I have to go. You can submit your paper here. We can take that from you.

Mr. Michael Jensen: A solution for the people going and doing the vote, just put the top, the top vote can just be a spoiled ballot.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jensen.

[Translation]

Before turning the floor over to Jean-Claude Noël, I would ask Samuel Fanning to step up to microphone No. 2.

Mr. Noël, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Claude Noël (As an Individual): Good evening.

I will be 60 years old on October 15. That means I may have 20 years to live. It also means I will not see the worst potential effects of climate change.

I was about 10 years old when I voted for the first time. My father, who had taken me along with him, told me, once we were in the booth, to pick up the pencil and draw an X, taking care to do it inside the circle. That day, my father voted for Jean Drapeau, who subsequently became mayor of Montreal.

I think you should conduct an advertising campaign encouraging every Canadian father and mother to take a child into the voting booth and educate him or her about voting. The child may be very young and understand virtually nothing, but the experience will be beneficial if that child knows how to mark an X. It should also be repeated. I say that seriously.

I am moderately progressive but fiscally conservative, and if there is one cause that is important to me it is climate change. So I ask you, for whom should I vote?

I understand what Mr. Trudeau is trying to do by investing in infrastructure. Everyone says that is a good thing, but one day we will nevertheless have to balance the accounts. I have a daughter who is 29 years old, and I would prefer not to shovel debt into her backyard.

My purpose this evening is to present a voting system that I believe has not been presented anywhere else. It is the direct party and representative voting system. On that subject, I invite you to take note of the following address: www.dprvoting.org. Judging from your reaction, I would say you have never heard of it.

The Chair: In fact, we may have heard of such a system, but, since we are talking here about an entire system, could you tell the analyst about it after the meeting? Otherwise it would be a bit long to explain.

Mr. Jean-Claude Noël: I will explain it very briefly.

Voters are presented with a list of candidates, all of whom are affiliated with a party, but that is not the most important part. What counts is the relationship they have with the candidate.

On the other hand, there is a list of parties across the country. All parties appear on it. However, the Bloc Québécois could appear only in Quebec, not in the rest of the country.

I will submit a brief to you.

The Chair: Yes, please.

Seriously, could you describe it in a few paragraphs, in the form of a brief, and send it to the committee's email address? Then we will translate it and post it on the website.

It is too difficult to explain the entire system in two minutes.

• (2000)

Mr. Jean-Claude Noël: All right, that is what I will do.

[*English*]

This voting system is too good to be true.

The Chair: Then we're going to look at it.

Mr. Jean-Claude Noël: Now you have homework for tonight. All of you, go on the website and find the video, the eight-minute video that describes the system. It was done by Fair Vote Canada, from Newfoundland.

The Chair: Yes, could you maybe put the link to the video in your brief?

Mr. Jean-Claude Noël: Yes. It's their website.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to have to go to Mr. Fanning now, but thank you.

Mr. Jean-Claude Noël: Please go to see the video.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We thank you for your idea about getting kids exposed early to voting.

[*Translation*]

I would invite William Gagnon to step up to microphone No. 1.

Mr. Fanning, it is your turn.

Mr. Samuel Fanning (As an Individual): Good evening, MPs and fellow citizens.

I am a member of the Young Liberals of the University of Montreal and I am responsible for policy. I am here somewhat in that capacity.

We have discussed blank ballots. This is something that young people are very interested in. Many of them are cynical about voting, and a blank ballot is one way for them to say they are not interested in the people on the list. However, the fact that blank ballots are not counted anywhere encourages them even less to vote. If they could express their discontent by casting a blank ballot, it would encourage them to vote, if mandatory voting were not instituted in that case.

We have also discussed voter territoriality. You said it was important for candidates to be declared winners in their own district. However, even though candidates have won, the people in their districts who did not vote for them may feel they are not represented by the MPs in office. This is what often happens in districts that are considered safe seats. A member from the same party is elected every time, and people who do not support that party will never be represented in their district.

That is why proportionality is extremely important, especially among young people. People say that electoral distortion is much too great and even ridiculous, and that the important thing is to have a mixed-member or other type of proportional system, if we are moving away from the majority system at all costs.

There is another very important issue. It would be interesting to establish regional districts in every province, one for Gaspésie, for example, another from Montreal, another for Montérégie, and so on, where the number of seats would be proportional to the population, or there would be provincial districts.

You will say that the problem, in that case, would be that MPs would not have a local base or be representative in their area. We could arrange for MPs to be mobile across the province and their region, or we could establish a mixed system in which an MP would be assigned to a region and another would be—

The Chair: Yes, we have heard more or less the same idea on the number of occasions during our tour. So you want a certain proportional regional representation.

Now I must turn the floor over to Mr. Gagnon.

I would ask Stephen Scott to step up to microphone No. 2.

Mr. Gagnon, go ahead.

Mr. William Gagnon (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

I want to thank the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for your work and devotion on this very important issue.

I'm William Gagnon. I sit on the federal council of the Young Greens of Canada and I represent Concordia University Young Greens.

[Translation]

On September 19, we organized a round table on electoral reform at Concordia University, a partnership between the Young Greens of McGill University and the Fair Vote Canada group of Montreal. The four participants were: Antony Hodgson, from Fair Vote Canada in British Columbia; Krzysztof Majewski, from Fair Vote Canada; Henry Milner, from the Canada Research Chair in Electoral Studies of the University of Montreal; and Daniel Green, deputy leader of the Green Party of Canada.

In addition to the live audience, there were about 1,000 live stream social media viewings. The discussions were very heated. Based on the opinions of the participants present, we drew five conclusions, which I will share with you.

The first is as follows.

[English]

Yes to a proportional voting system in which the number of parliamentary seats assigned to each party matches the proportion of popular votes received by each party.

[Translation]

The second conclusion is that a referendum could cause more confusion among the electorate in addition to extending the reform process and constituting a significant taxpayer expense.

[English]

Third, a consensus-based decision-making voting system is preferred as it forces everyone to work together as in coalitions rather than single parties.

Fourth, a ranked ballot might be a false solution if not coupled with proportional representation.

• (2005)

[Translation]

There is also the fact that this is a disguised version of the winner takes all system.

Fifth, the mixed-member proportional representation system was supported by the majority of participants and viewers.

[English]

Please make effective use of the power that is in your hands to leave a very positive mark on the history of Canada.

[Translation]

Thank you.

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

I would invite Katie Thomson to step up to microphone No. 1.

Go ahead, Mr. Scott.

[English]

Mr. Steven Scott: I would just like to say first that I was very impressed with Ruth Dassonville's presentation. It was very well done. I was sort of sitting on the fence about that but she convinced me it's a good idea. However, unless we actually change the system as well, I don't think it's going to be much good. The fact is, the

current system does depress the vote. I know it's hard. There are no [Inaudible—Editor] studies on this, but I think that's just sort of a veil of obscurity. It's quite clear that if you don't think your vote is going to count, why bother to vote. Why bother doing something if you don't think it's going to have any result? Unless you change the system, you may still go out and vote, but it doesn't give much incentive to convince other people of a position or to do anything.

When I was young, I was very informed on politics. It wasn't a question of whether I was informed. There just wasn't a choice for me. This was 35 years ago. Back then, my group of friends and I were quite well aware of greenhouse gases. This was around 1980. Perhaps we wouldn't be in the mess we are in right now if we had had a different system—just on that one point.

In regards to other systems like ranked balloting, the majority of people are centrist. That's just what defines where the centre is. Clearly, to go towards ranked balloting is going to favour the most centrist party, which in this case is the Liberals. It would be a hard job selling this to anybody else. It's a well-known fact that usually most people who vote NDP would rather have the Liberals than the Conservatives, and most Conservatives would probably rather have the Liberals than the NDP. It's simple. You don't need to go through [Inaudible—Editor]. There would be different strategies.

With regard to a referendum, I'd say there are three problems with it. One is information. I went through the Ontario referendum system. People were not well enough informed in the first place. They had to actually put on the ballot definitions of what the systems were, because most people didn't really understand what they were voting for.

Also, it favours centrist parties because the system right now [Inaudible—Editor] centrist. It favours them because most people are sort of happy with the system because they are centrist.

I think it's very hard to get people to change to another system. It's always an uphill battle.

The Chair: We've heard that, yes.

[Translation]

Diallo Amara, step up to microphone No. 2, please.

[English]

Katie Thomson.

Ms. Katie Thomson (As an Individual): Thank you very much for coming here. I'm really excited to get to talk to you all.

My name is Katie, as you mentioned. I spent two summers working on Parliament Hill as a tour guide so I have a lot of experience explaining the electoral system to everyone.

I'd like to talk about three things today that are important to me. I want to inform you of something that is near and dear to my heart. The three main points are about engagement, diversity and collaboration.

First of all, in my experience, in speaking with people in an educational setting in general, and specifically in talking to people about the electoral system, people are really engaged if they feel that what they say matters and if they feel that they can participate. I feel that people don't really understand how our electoral system works, which is another matter entirely. People feel that they can make a difference if they see that their vote is reflected in the composition of the House of Commons. Really, the easiest way to do this is with a proportional system. If you can take the popular vote and say, "Look, the popular vote looks like this, and the House of Commons looks like this," that makes people feel like they are making a difference. That's one reason I believe a proportional system is really important.

Second, I'm sure you've had many witnesses who have given you lots of data about how a proportional system better reflects the diversity of Canadians. I'd just like to reiterate that. I've travelled a lot across Canada. I've lived in a lot of different areas. My parents actually live in Elizabeth May's riding, so that's very exciting. Going back to something that we touched on earlier today, I think the importance of regional representation is not to be underestimated because Canada is so big. It's huge. You know because you've travelled across it. It's really important for people to feel that they have someone who goes to Ottawa and represents them in Ottawa, because Ottawa is really a long way away from a lot of places in Canada.

Finally, I'd like to touch on collaboration. I think, as was mentioned earlier today, that there is a fear of the word "coalition" in government. I'd like to remind everyone that Canada was formed from a coalition between Sir John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier. The Great Coalition was what brought Canada together, so we really shouldn't be afraid of it. I think, as Dr. Tremblay said, multipartisanship is really crucial, and that's what will allow us to make better decisions for the country.

If we want laws that represent all Canadians, we first need to have a House of Commons that represents all Canadians. I support a mixed member proportional system.

● (2010)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

I ask Jean-Philippe Fournier to step up to microphone No. 1, please.

Go ahead, Mr. Amara.

Mr. Diallo Amara (As an Individual): My name is Diallo Amara. I am the Green Party candidate for the district of Outremont.

I was fortunate to take part in the proportional voting citizen awareness campaign. At first I thought it might work, but today I see it is actually working. The groundwork that has been done is working well. I want to thank the citizens who had the courage to take part in the awareness campaign. I hope it works out.

I have no further comments. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is Jean-Philippe Fournier here? Are you Mr. Fournier?

Mr. Pierre Labrèche (As an Individual): No, I am Mr. Labrèche.

The Chair: Then I ask Resham Singh to take microphone No. 1.

Mr. Labrèche, go ahead, please.

● (2015)

Mr. Pierre Labrèche: Good evening. I am an ordinary citizen and I would like to propose a voting method that would help solve a number of problems in our electoral system.

I am well aware that the two minutes I have are not enough to explain it to you clearly, but I will try my best in the time allotted to me.

The Chair: You may submit a brief to us.

Mr. Pierre Labrèche: Yes, that is what I will do.

In fact, I am going to list the principles I believe in.

I believe that fair representation based on the proportion of ballots cast is very important for all districts and every region.

Furthermore, all citizens must feel that their vote counts, that their ballot can help elect a candidate who reflects their own choices.

The voting system must be easy to implement and must not cause any delays associated with the conduct of a first round, a second round and so on.

The other important factor is that the candidate who carries the district should be elected. I do not think it would be normal for a person who has not carried the district to be elected as a result of the number of votes in a region.

We must prevent the candidate with the largest number of votes from winning where a majority of voters have voted for other candidates. For example, if offered the choice between black and white, some people will vote for white and others for pale grey or black, supposing there are no votes for dark grey. As a result of the distribution of votes, the black candidate wins because he has received the most votes.

I believe the system I am proposing could solve all these problems.

The territory of the districts should be doubled so that we do not double the number of seats in the House of Commons. Half of candidates would aspire to the position of MP and the other half to the position of regional representative. In the election, each party would nominate a pair of candidates in each district, one for the position of MP, the other for the regional vote. At the time of the election, voters would indicate their choice for the party, and both party candidates would receive votes. In fact, voters would cast one vote for their first choice and a second vote for their second. It would be a kind of preferential system, but with only two choices, which would vastly simplify the electoral system. I propose that a quarter of a point be assigned to the second-choice candidate.

The Chair: With a slight variation, your system resembles systems that have been presented to us and that have undergone our analysis. I suggest you present it to us in writing.

Mr. Pierre Labrèche: I can leave you a copy of my presentation.

The Chair: What would be better is for you to email it to us at the committee's address. Your presentation will be translated and posted to the website.

Mr. Pierre Labrèche: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before turning the floor over to Mr. Singh, I invite Fred Bild to take microphone No. 2.

Mr. Singh, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Resham Singh (As an Individual): Members of the committee and members of the public, my name is Resham Singh. Thank you for giving me a chance to speak.

I heard arguments from both sides of the issue this evening, the present system and the PR system that the committee is proposing.

At the end of the day, it's going to be a democracy. In a democracy, if there are 11 members on a committee, they may have to decide on an issue. There may be 10 members on one side of the issue, and one member on the other side, and if those 10 members are wrong and only one member is right, we may have a situation as was the case regarding the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

This happens in all committees and at all levels. I have to admit that. How do we settle this fundamental drawback in democracy?

Suppose there are 11 members on the committee.

The Chair: On a committee like this committee?

Mr. Resham Singh: Anyway, if 10 members are wrong, but one member is right, the issue will be decided by a majority.

The Chair: This is the whole thing. You don't really know. It's not always science where you can say that this member has the right answer and everybody else is wrong. It's hard to determine that outcome in advance. I guess it happens sometimes that the minority is correct and it's proven to be the case later on, but there's a democratic process. We all put our heads together to get all the information we can, and make the best decision we can as a group. But there's no guarantee in a democracy.

Ms. May

Ms. Elizabeth May: With permission, you've just put your finger on it: when we all put our heads together. There's one form of decision-making that's efficient, fast, and done by whoever has the power, and there's consensus decision-making which may take longer, but we all put our heads together.

The Chair: I know. I could see that coming. And some people feel that proportional representation—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Some people say that.

The Chair: Regardless of the system, that's how it should work in committees, and that's what we aim for.

Have I answered your question, Mr. Singh?

Mr. Resham Singh: I think so. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Bild, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred Bild (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Fred Bild. I congratulate you, and through you, all the members here for facilitating such a sensible and imaginative discussion on an extremely important issue.

I have been attending meetings of this kind for several weeks now. I initially thought I would never be able to decide. There were so many possibilities and problems. Fortunately, at one point, my decision was made, not by the majority, but simply based on common sense.

I am more or less convinced we should have a mixed-member proportional system, with certain adjustments, of course, which have been discussed. I am speaking simply because I think I have a solution to propose to you to resolve some technical difficulties that have been raised today.

I was initially afraid we would tend toward mandatory voting. I thought it would never be adopted, but, after reflecting on it, I think mandatory voting would be a very good thing. I will tell you why. I am sure all of us here are in the habit of reading the polls, both political and otherwise. For every poll, they say the more people are polled, the more representative the poll. Under mandatory voting, it is as though you had nearly a 100% poll result.

● (2020)

The Chair: Then you are in favour of proportional representation and mandatory voting.

Mr. Fred Bild: Yes, because it is a voting system that will establish a very accurate idea of what the electorate wants.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fred Bild: The second solution I have for you—

The Chair: That solution will be very brief, I hope.

Mr. Fred Bild: As you will see, it is very simple.

There is a way to resolve, in one go, the issue of the number of vacation days that people should be given, including under mandatory voting, and the issue of the time difference across the country. We select one holiday for the entire country, and polling stations will be open for 24 hours across the country. In this way, no one will have an advantage, and all results will come in at the same time.

The Chair: That is an idea that should be considered.

Thank you, Mr. Bild. The time allotted to you is up.

We will continue with Mr. Gorchkov, but I would like Ms. Luthi to step up to microphone No. 2.

Yes, Ms. May?

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Chair, it's a teeny biographical detail. Fred Bild was the Canadian ambassador to the People's Republic of China and to Vietnam. He's had a distinguished Canadian diplomatic career, and it's an honour to have him here.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

It is an honour and a pleasure to have you with us, Mr. Bild. Thank you very much for being here.

Mr. Gorchkov, you now have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Alexandre Gorchkov (As an Individual): I am Alexandre Gorchkov, resident of Côte Saint-Luc, in the Mount Royal riding.

Ever since I became a Canadian citizen I have taken part in all provincial and federal elections, and have voted honestly in accordance with my political convictions. I did not understand how the system worked; I just assumed it was working. When it was explained to me, I was appalled.

Every time, time after time, my vote was simply wasted. My political participation never went past the polling station, because the parties I was voting for never stood a chance in my riding. Of course my vote was counted when the results in our riding were calculated, but as a result it was never counted in Ottawa. It is never counted in policy-making in the legislative process. It's the same with the votes of other members of my family and other Canadians who share similar political views, but never make a majority within their riding.

In the last election, I voted strategically for our Liberal candidate, although the Liberal Party wasn't even my second choice. Then I went to meet my Liberal MP, Mr. Housefather, and found out that our political views are very different, even on such a fundamental issue as the principle of proportionality in sharing power in a democracy. I haven't even hit on other political issues, and yet our MP insists that he's representing the interests of our community, as if all 100,000 citizens share the same interests.

Every time I wanted to raise a problem with parliamentarians, I had to appeal to some other MPs or MNAs whose political views align with mine. My representatives were deaf and dismissive.

My MP pretends that single member representation serves the constituents the best. He's reducing the political interests of citizens to their lawns and backyards, but we care about national and international issues. We care about the pipelines, arms deals, climate change, quality education, and taxes, and we want our representatives in Ottawa to care about all of Canada, too, and not just their communities.

I call on all MPs to stop downgrading us to the few you think you represent at the king's court in Ottawa. The proportionality in representative democracy is not an exotic extravagance. It is necessary condition. It is the value in itself. The number of MPs in a riding and the geographical limits of a riding are not values in themselves.

● (2025)

The Chair: No, they're not. When we are elected, yes, we're representing our constituents, but we're representing the whole country as well, on big issues like the ones you mentioned. I think you'd find agreement around this table for that point of view. Would you like to submit that on the web, as well, and have it translated?

Mr. Alexandre Gorchkov: Yes, absolutely.

Could I just wrap up?

The Chair: Yes, very briefly could you—

Mr. Alexandre Gorchkov: Absolutely.

I believe the elected Parliament has the power and responsibility to implement the democratic reform based on consultations with experts and citizens. I don't believe that a referendum is a tool for democracy. It's a hammer, and it's a hatchet that's used for maintaining the status quo.

The Chair: That's understood. Thank you.

Would Rhoda Sollazzo come to mike number one, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Luthi, now you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Kathrin Luthi (As an Individual): Good evening, members of the committee and all the audience members as well. It's a pleasure to be here this evening and to be allowed to exercise our democratic vote to speak freely.

It's clear by the discussion that what I'm going to say is nothing new. I don't know that much about politics, but it's obvious that we need a new electoral system that is more democratic than the first-past-the-post system that we have today and which would translate into some form of proportional representation. I'm not an expert. I've been to some information evenings, and it seems to me that mixed member proportional makes a lot of sense. As well, to me, the STV was very difficult to understand, and I don't consider myself a dumb person. I think it's important that voters understand what's happening, and the vote will be more meaningful that way.

Canadians obviously want to feel that their votes count, so it's unfair under our current voting system that a party that receives less than 50% of the votes can hold 100% of the power in Parliament. Our Parliament should reflect our diversity. Every vote should have equal value. I don't like the fact that votes in swing ridings have more value than votes in so-called safe ridings. I do like the fact that voter turnout is generally higher in countries that have proportional representation. The point was made by many here tonight that it's important to engage the public, inform the public, educate, so that people will be wanting to come out and give their opinion. I like the fact that countries with proportional voting systems have a higher number of female and visible minority legislators.

Finally, countries with proportional representation electoral systems have parties that work together for the good of the country and its citizens. That's the coalition that has been brought up a few times this evening.

I think it could really make Canada more democratic if we adopt some form of proportional representation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Sidney Klein, please go to mike number two.

Go ahead, Ms. Sollazzo.

Ms. Rhoda Sollazzo (As an Individual): Thank you so much for this opportunity. I just want to say, first of all, that I don't feel we have a voter turnout problem. I think that's an easy measurement for civic engagement, and we have a civic engagement problem, but I don't think it's the best measure. I just want to say that in the past six months I've had more opportunities to engage with the political system, and with my local MP, and with you, than I have had in the previous eight years, so I think that's the place to start.

I want to say just broad things that I know have been said before, but I figure this is my vote, and I will submit a brief with more specifics. I'm a mathematician, so I can't resist getting into the details.

As many people here, I really think that whatever we switch to should be a proportional representation system. I don't think it's a coincidence that's the common view here, but it's probably not the common view out in the world, because it takes some time to wrestle with and to come to that conclusion. It did for me.

I have voted strategically my whole life. I didn't like it, but it's what I felt I had to do. At first blush, a ranked system seems okay, because then at least I can say what I feel, but at the end of the day that's not enough. I want everyone's first choice to matter. Ultimately, what people have to wrestle with, I think, is that's what's more fair, and we all come to the same conclusion. If I live in a society where 60% of the people disagree with me, I want that to be represented, even if it's not my favourite thing. That's what collaboration is. That's what living in a society is. It's understanding differences between people and having that represented fairly. I really think that's the most crucial point. I could get into detail about different systems, but that's not as important as that value.

I also want to say that because it takes some time to think those things through and come to those conclusions, and it seems like everyone who has thought about it in the room has mostly come to that conclusion, that's why I think a referendum is not a great idea. But I do like the idea of changing the system and then having a referendum afterwards on whether or not to keep that system.

Thanks.

• (2030)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I invite Alain Charbonneau to step up to microphone No. 1.

Mr. Klein, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Sidney Klein (As an Individual): At the risk of sounding a bit arrogant, I don't think this is very complex. If you have simply one alternative expressed on the ballot, which is mandatory for it not to be considered a spoiled ballot, the issue would be resolved. My MP said that Justin Trudeau was leaning toward or was sympathetic

to having, if there were five people on the ballot, that voters should list their second, third, fourth, and fifth choice, but it was mentioned on election night by someone that this would allow for a fringe party to get involved and have representation that was not intended. In other words, if Albertans had just voted for some guy who's really crazy because they don't want to vote for NDPers or Liberals as even a second choice, that could create something unintended, whereas if it's Elizabeth May or the NDP or Liberals, at least it would be reasonable.

Some of the things I've heard have nothing to do with democracy, such as paying people to vote, or making it mandatory, or anything like that. What is necessary is for the MPs to actually know the issues. Then people vote. But they don't feel that the MPs know the issues.

If I were to say something to Elizabeth May, who has received an 80-page document multiple times, we have a couple of issues that are unfolding right now. Canada has no gold, and Canada is the only country that is not engaged in QE. So we're very close—much closer than people realize—to losing the sovereignty of our currency, and if you lose that, you are no longer sovereign.

You may think that this is not today's issue, but it is, because that's why people won't vote. Here in Quebec, people are aware of the issues, and when they don't show up, it's because they don't feel that people are representing the issues. That's where democracy starts: the MPs actually knowing the issues.

The Chair: Yes. That's why we have these committees, because there are many issues that come across the floor of the House and they're very complex. So we create committees of about 10 or 12 members and we bring in witnesses, and sometimes we hear from the public. That's how all MPs, really, build their knowledge base, and that builds confidence, as you say, if citizens have felt that their elected representatives weren't well-versed on the issues.

Mr. Sidney Klein: I appreciate that, and I don't mean to be cynical, but they're typically Canadian-sounding flowery words. But I'm talking about something that's happening right now. You consider it—and I saw your reaction—as a fringe issue when I say we have no gold and consider that the rest of the world has. It's powering into it; it's not an accident. It was an intent to merge our currencies. There's a reason that everybody in the world has a ton of quantitative easing and Canada has none. We are basically paying taxes to the Americans, and we don't have anybody in government who is even aware of these issues.

The Chair: I'm sure you're sympathetic to the fact that there are limits to our mandate.

• (2035)

Mr. Sidney Klein: Fine. It's simple: one alternative party, and then it's gone. Alberta will have 12 to 14 seats go non-Conservative right away.

The Chair: Proportional or majoritarian?

Mr. Sidney Klein: What you have right then is, if you don't have plurality in a particular riding—

The Chair: But would you prefer proportional? That's what we're trying to gauge.

Mr. Sidney Klein: Obviously there can still be a minority government, but at least we'll be at 43% or 44%. The idea is, very simply, that if you don't have a plurality, you only maintain the top two—

The Chair: Fair enough. Mr. Klein, I'm going to have to go to Mr. Charbonneau.

Mr. Sidney Klein: I'm going to clarify for you.

The Chair: Please, if you could do it in writing, we have the—

Mr. Sidney Klein: I'll do it five seconds. The top two parties remain, and all the other parties, second choices, are split up among them and it's over. It's very simple.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

[*Translation*]

Alain Marois, take microphone No. 2, please.

Mr. Charbonneau, you have the floor.

Mr. Alain Charbonneau (As an Individual): Good evening.

Thanks to all those who have come here this evening. Citizens are the most important people.

I am in favour of a mixed-member proportional system, as are most people here. Citizens would first vote for a local representative. Then there would be a regional vote that could subsequently be divided. Whether this involves a list established by the parties, an open or closed list, no matter, I do not see a major difference. The election of regional representatives would guarantee gender equality while taking the region's demographics into consideration.

So there would be a local vote and a regional vote, which would reflect regional parity and demographics. I think this is the fairest system.

[*English*]

There was some talk about mandatory voting. Personally, I kind of lean that way. I think if something is left optional, then there's less engagement. If you have to do something, then you kind of have to get involved.

I would also encourage that this be put together with a form of civic education of some kind. We used to have it when I was in elementary school and at the beginning of high school. We don't have it anymore. I think maybe a civic education system, mixed in with mandatory voting, would be a good thing.

The Chair: We heard a lot about that, about the need for good civics education. I believe one of Dr. Dassonville's points was that if you had mandatory voting, it would change the dynamic.

Mr. Alain Charbonneau: Exactly. Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Serafino Fabrizi, please go to mike one.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marois, you have the floor.

Mr. Alain Marois (As an Individual): Good evening, members of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

I am speaking to you this evening in my capacity as vice-president of the Fédération autonome de l'enseignement, which represents 34,000 teachers from school boards in six regions of Quebec.

Since our federation is currently considering the issue of electoral reform, we have not presented an official opinion to the committee. However, we have adopted some basic positions.

A year and a half ago, we conducted a broad-based consultation of our 34,000 members in which several questions were asked on societal issues, including one on a potential reform of the electoral system and democratic life that generated the highest response rate. Some 63% of our members called for the establishment of a proportional voting system to reflect all votes cast by the population.

Among all the issues, including social programs and the fight against poverty, electoral reform drew the most interest among our members. Less than 5% of them said they opposed it. They also had an opportunity to express their opposition to the choices that were proposed to them.

Mandatory voting did not draw the same amount of interest. It ranked seventh. In fact, 27% of people voted against that choice.

The option to allow Canadians to start voting at the age of 16 ranked even lower, in ninth position.

In other words, the most important thing for our members is really to change the system of representation so that every vote counts.

The second choice among our members is a question I have not heard discussed as part of your proceedings. It is what is called the recall process in the United States. That was very important for our members.

As has often been repeated here—I even heard it this afternoon—it is very important to maintain a relationship with one's MP. If it is so important, perhaps it should be taken into consideration.

● (2040)

The Chair: We will take note of that, Mr. Marois, although it is not part of our mandate.

Sylvie Boulianne, please step up to microphone No. 2.

Mr. Fabrizi, you have the floor.

Mr. Serafino Fabrizi (As an Individual): Good evening, members of the committee.

I dare hope that, at the conclusion of these proceedings, two possibilities will be clearly ruled out: the present system and the fully proportional system.

As you may guess from my name, I am of Italian extraction. If you follow Italian politics, you may know that, as a result of that system, there have been more governments than years since the second world war. The situation in Israel is very interesting too.

The mixed system is very interesting. The perfect system does exist, but it dates back a long time, to Greece, Athens and the agora. Everyone assembled and made decisions together. Given the current population, however, it would unfortunately be impossible to apply it.

However, I expect your committee will submit simulations to us to illustrate the various ways of operating the proportional system. We must absolutely be able to see what it looks like.

I have heard people speak out against the idea of a coalition. However, a coalition that represents 60% or 70% of the population is nevertheless preferable to a single party that manages to impose its views even though it represents only 30% of the people. It also prevents excesses. I believe we have managed to avoid them every time we have had coalition governments. The problem is that they do not last long in our present system.

I especially expect that your committee will recommend an obligation of result, not to your parties, but to the population. It is the population that elects you. You therefore have an obligation to establish and present to us a system that will represent the population as a whole, not your parties. This is one opportunity, but there will not be 10 of them. I expect everyone to work together to come up with that result. If we fail in our attempt, this kind of opportunity will probably not arise again for a very long time. There has to be an open discussion. Show us simulations that demonstrate what the various systems can do.

There are a host of ways to do things. There could even be a two-round election for the section in each of the districts, and a proportional election at the regional level. We have to ensure that things work well and basically that people can take part in electoral life.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now invite Laurie Neale to step up to microphone No. 1.

Ms. Boulianne, you now have the floor.

Ms. Sylvie Boulianne (As an Individual): Good evening, everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you this evening.

First, I would like to emphasize one point. Canada is a very old democracy on this planet. It dates back to 1867. Italy's dates back to 1870. I wanted to mention that simply to put things in perspective. In fact, what was a good electoral system 150 years ago is no longer fair today.

I have major reservations about what I hear when people say there might be a referendum on this change. I think it is essential that the government shoulder its responsibilities and change a system that is now unfair and no longer represents the mind, collective unconscious, or will of every Canadian citizen. It is absolutely essential to make this change.

I am not familiar with all the proportionality-based systems because they are extremely complex. I therefore trust you to select the best system. However, I think it would be unacceptable to maintain the status quo following the work this committee has undertaken.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, madam.

I invite Anne-Marie Bouchard to step up to microphone No. 2.

• (2045)

[*English*]

Go ahead, Ms. Neale.

Ms. Laurie Neale (As an Individual): I want to thank you for the opportunity to come here and speak. I'd like to congratulate the committee for actually going around and listening to citizens. I think that's very, very important.

I'm coming here as a Canadian who returned to Canada in the last couple of years after living for 27 years in the Netherlands, where they have an open list proportional representation system of government. With coalition governments, they do last longer than in Italy, although sometimes they are very short. It's a system that has its pluses and minuses. Some of the problems include one-issue parties, but they tend to be short-lived, maybe one term in Parliament.

One of the problems with a system like that is there is a disengagement between the citizens and the members of Parliament. They don't know who the members are. They know their cabinet members, but generally people don't know the members of Parliament. In a country like the Netherlands, which is maybe two-thirds the size of Nova Scotia, that can work, but in a country as vast as Canada, it can't. I would be very much in favour of something like the mixed member proportional representation.

Europe, of course, is based on proportional representation, where the small countries are represented and have a say in what is happening Europe-wide. It's not for nothing that the European Union was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize a number of years ago. The whole thing is a project to encourage people to feel represented and therefore engaged in what is happening, despite quite a large feeling of disengagement in the political system.

I'd also like to say that I would be against a referendum. Referendums are known for answering questions, but the trouble is that it's not usually the question that's being asked. They are hijacked by either national issues or fringe issues. It would be very much a shame if that were done.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I invite Jean-Sébastien Dufresne to step up to microphone No. 1.

Ms. Bouchard, you now have the floor.

Ms. Anne-Marie Bouchard (As an Individual): Ladies and gentlemen, representatives of the population, fellow citizens, I want to share my very humble personal experience with you.

I still feel I belong to the age group that is referred to as young people. When people talk about young people, they often label them as cynical or uninterested in politics, which is absolutely not true in my case.

Personally, I have joined an organization that is fighting for electoral reform, more specifically for a proportional voting system, or at least a proportional representation or a mixed-member proportional system. Before engaging in this cause, I was interested in politics, but I was somewhat depressed and frustrated by what I heard. My engagement in the cause has renewed my interest in politics and my hope that, as a citizen, I can help change things.

I also thought electoral reform could help change the way some of my fellow citizens view politics. I do not think I am the only person who believes proportional voting might result in more coalitions and teamwork. A government's ability to work as part of a team is a good quality.

We have witnessed teamwork here in Quebec with the end-of-life care bill, a currently delicate subject with the federal government, but let us not dwell on that. The experience was positive for the people who worked together on that bill. I imagine you also work as a team on a number of issues. The people take a positive view of teamwork.

I want to comment briefly on the right to vote at the age of 16. Once again, I recently did not have an opinion on the subject, but I developed one as the consultations advanced. I work in education and was fortunate to be born into a family that introduced me to the way things work in politics. Not all children have that chance.

I have not read any studies on the subject, but my impression is that the earlier young people get used to voting and the more educated they are, the earlier in their lives they will start voting. The more informed young people are about the question, the better. Young people can choose their occupational path starting at the age of 15 or 16, and if they are not introduced to politics at that age, there is at great risk they will not become engaged citizens.

• (2050)

The Chair: We have heard that view quite regularly across the country. Thank you, Ms. Bouchard.

Maksym Kovalenkov, would you please step up to microphone No. 2?

Mr. Dufresne, it is your turn.

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne (As an Individual): Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

You previously heard from me in Ottawa a few weeks ago, when I spoke as president of Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle.

This evening, I am wearing my citizen's hat. I am also an individual, a private individual, a citizen who has his own opinion.

First, let me tell you I enormously admire the work you are doing. I have been following your proceedings and may be one of your greatest admirers. There are probably not a lot of people in the general population who follow your proceedings with as much regularity. It is impressive to see all the energy and time you are devoting to the cause.

Over the past week, I have attended several citizens assemblies organized by MPs and the riding associations of various parties, including Liberal associations in districts that are not necessarily Liberal, as well as Bloc Québécois associations. This really gives me

hope. I see these assemblies are fanning the flame of citizen engagement in many people and making us want to take part in this debate.

In those assemblies, I heard people who recommended that we take the time to debate the question and consider the interests of the population as a whole, not those of a party. That is the message I want to deliver to you this evening.

I would not want to summarize the issue very quickly, but, when you analyze everything that has been said, you clearly understand that some voters are concerned about the connection with their local representative and that a system of lists does not address that concern. Others lament the fact that the present system creates false majorities and therefore think we must put an end to the status quo. We also hear people calling for regional representation. All these concerns vastly limit the options, having regard to all possibilities.

Let us quickly consider the results of the consultations and presentations made to the committee. Three-quarters of the experts were in favour of a proportional representation system. Two-thirds of that number supported a compensatory mixed-member proportional system. Twice as many citizens spoke out saying that a referendum was unnecessary. That alone provides a clear picture.

Earlier one witness asked whether it was possible to produce a consensus report. I think that is really the message. People are asking you, please, to do that. I know it is somewhat naive on my part, even though I am very much involved in this issue, but here we have an opportunity to transcend partisan lines, to think in the interests of Canadians as a whole, and genuinely to restore confidence and hope to the entire population. You have that power and we expect you to make the right decisions in everyone's interest.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We have come to our final speaker.

Mr. Kovalenkov, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Maksym Kovalenkov (As an Individual): I guess I'm one of those who believes this system doesn't work.

I'm an immigrant. I came here when I was 15. My parents brought me. I didn't get my citizenship until maybe three years ago, after three years of waiting. It took a while—great—and I voted in the last election.

When I looked into it before voting, it turned out that my vote was going to be lost. I'm one of those people who was disappointed and doesn't believe it works, but I'm here today and I'm really happy to see you listen to us and to be among those who actually care in one way or another. It's great. This sort of process gives me hope.

I'm just putting my two cents into the box for the proportional system, and with no referendum, because that will suffer from drawbacks very similar to the drawbacks that the elections suffer from today.

Thanks for doing a great job.

The Chair: Thanks for ending this day on such a positive and encouraging note. That's wonderful. Thank you for your thoughts.

Before I close the meeting, I want to remind everyone again that on October 20 at 7:30 at the McGill University New Residence Hall, which is located at 3625 Park Avenue, the Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship will be organizing a public forum on the Canadian electoral system.

● (2055)

[*Translation*]

Thank you, everyone.

Tomorrow we leave for Halifax to begin a tour of the Atlantic provinces.

As you know, the committee must table its report in the House of Commons on December 1st.

Thanks to the MPs, thanks to the members, thanks to the public.

Till next time.

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