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# **Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, March 9, 2017**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Larry Bagnell**



## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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•(1205)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)):** Good afternoon. This is the 54th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It is being televised.

Today, we are pleased to have with us the Honourable Karina Gould, Minister of Democratic Institutions. She is accompanied by two officials from the Privy Council Office: Ian McCowan, deputy secretary to the cabinet, governance; and Natasha Kim, director of democratic reform.

Committee members will remember that Minister Gould appeared on February 7 and agreed to return to discuss the MyDemocracy.ca website and the government's planned agenda for electoral reform.

Now we'll turn the floor over to the minister for her opening statement.

Thank you very much for coming back. We appreciate your being here. It's very helpful for the committee.

**Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be back just a little over a month from the last time I was here. It's good to see all of you. I'm looking forward to this conversation as well.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me to speak to the committee again. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you today, and I'm happy to contribute to your proceedings to the best of my ability.

Yesterday, we celebrated International Women's Day. I was very proud to have been invited to speak on March 7 at the Daughters of the Vote gala. The Equal Voice organization held the event to highlight the significance of the day. The Daughters of the Vote initiative brought young women aged 18 to 23 to Parliament. They came from each of our 338 federal electoral districts to represent their community and share their vision for Canada. Yesterday, these young women had the opportunity to meet with their MP and sit at their MP's place in the House of Commons.

[English]

It was inspiring to see the House full of young women and to look into what the future holds. All of us who have the privilege to serve also have the duty to support and encourage young Canadians to engage in our democracy. In particular, this committee has the unique opportunity to reflect on how to ensure that all Canadians are

best prepared and able to participate in civic life. Your study of the CEO report and its recommendations positions you as stewards and champions of the franchise. The Daughters of the Vote who are in Ottawa today, and all Canadians, are counting on your reflections.

This is why I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, specifically, for your work so far on the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations report. I read with interest your interim report, which was tabled on Monday. I am going to spend more time reviewing it and reflecting on your recommendations as the government considers its response.

I am very happy to see that you have reached a consensus on the key recommendations that are the core of the Chief Electoral Officer's proposed voting services modernization efforts. In addition, you have collectively supported a range of other recommendations, including recommendations to improve the delivery of voting services to non-resident Canadians and enhanced information-sharing authorities to improve the quality of the national register of electors, the latter being something that may come before you for consideration as part of Bill C-33. These are important recommendations that will improve our electoral process.

There was also consensus on many of the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations related to ensuring an accessible electoral system for electors and candidates with disabilities. Enhancing inclusion as a defining value of our democracy stands high among my priorities for the coming months and years.

[Translation]

I look forward to your upcoming work on the recommendations set out in the Chief Electoral Officer's report.

[English]

I'll highlight a few, I hope to hear your thoughts on the issue of the length of the election period and on the polling day, recommendations A21 and A22. These recommendations have implications for the political financing regime and the participation of Canadians in the voting process.

Recommendation A25 would address the question of partisan nominees for poll staff and promises improvements in Elections Canada's recruitment processes. In light of your support for recommendation A1, your view on this recommendation would be informative.

Recommendations A33 and A34 would provide additional tools for the Commissioner of Canada Elections. My mandate letter includes a commitment to enhance Canadians' trust in the integrity of our system, and I would value your thoughts on these recommendations.

[Translation]

Recommendation A39 concerns adjustments to the broadcasting arbitration regime. The way that political parties communicate with Canadians and the nature of media have changed considerably over time. These provisions have hardly been modified in recent years.

Recommendation B9 has a significant impact on gender non-conforming electors. In relation to Bill C-16, I think it warrants consideration, since equality could be ensured in all aspects of the federal government.

Recommendation B15 would affect the process in place to help electors with a disability.

[English]

Recommendations B12, B24, B18, B26, B27, and B43 are all related in different ways to the integrity of the process and Canadians' trust in that process. As trust is paramount to the success of any election and the peaceful transfer of power, I would welcome the committee's thoughtful input on these as well.

Finally, recommendation B44 raises the important issue of how we adapt to a fixed-date context for elections in a Westminster system. I would ask the committee, if you think it of merit, to reflect on how this and other recommendations are impacted, and what the challenges and opportunities are in relation to fixed-date elections in the Canadian experience.

All of these recommendations raise a variety of questions that would benefit from the expertise of this committee. They seek ways to keep our electoral laws up to date with the expectations of electors and political actors. Your considerate review of these matters is valuable.

As I noted during my last appearance, my mandate letter includes a commitment to enhance the transparency of fundraising activities. In meeting this commitment, I intend to introduce legislation that makes fundraising events public, and to require additional disclosure of who attends, and when.

We have heard Canadians' concerns in this regard, and we intend to act. I hope to introduce legislation this spring, and if referred to your committee by the House, I would very much appreciate your consideration of the bill and any recommendations you may have.

Of course, there's also Bill C-33. Your work so far on the recommendations report will well position you in considering this bill and its measures to reduce barriers to voting while enhancing the integrity of the electoral process. Bill C-33, I believe, complements the work that you are undertaking with the CEO recommendations.

The road to the 2019 election is getting ever shorter. I am committed, as I know all members of this committee are, to improving our electoral system before the next election to the benefit of all Canadians. To accomplish this goal, Canadians need us to work together. I hope to continue to receive your valuable input to

inform the direction of improving our electoral process to make it accessible, efficient, and equitable for voters.

Elections Canada needs sufficient time to implement any changes made to the Canada Elections Act before the next election and would like to be election-ready well in advance of an expected writ. The more time Elections Canada has to prepare, the better.

• (1210)

[Translation]

We must also take into consideration that other legislative changes may be necessary to implement your recommendations.

The development and preparation of this bill, and the important discussions and debates in the House of Commons and Senate, shouldn't be rushed.

[English]

To give Elections Canada the time it needs, as well as to give parliamentarians the time they need, my hope would be to introduce legislation before the end of this year that would build on your hard work with respect to the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations. It is our responsibility to take the time to get this right. It is also our responsibility to get it done. It's what Canadians expect. If the House could have your next report before the House rises for the summer, preferably by May 19, I think we would be well positioned to advance some significant reforms that would improve the electoral process for Canadians.

I am sharing my thinking with the committee because I sincerely want to work together with you. I respect this committee's independence and know the committee will set its own agenda. I hope my remarks today help provide insight to you about my thinking and perspective on the matters before this committee.

[Translation]

Thank you again for inviting me here today. I look forward to working with you on these important issues.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

You left lots of time for questions, so we'll go to Ms. Sahota.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

I'm glad you started by talking about the Daughters of the Vote. I thought it was a particularly striking sight to sit there in the gallery yesterday and see the young lady who was taking up my seat and the other women from across this country in all 338 seats in Parliament yesterday. I had the opportunity to really get to know my Daughter of the Vote in the months working up to yesterday, and we had the opportunity to sit and have lunch yesterday as well. Her name is Meghan Bottomley. She's a fourth year political science student from McGill. She's a very intelligent and politically driven young lady.

As you know, despite Parliament's having done very well this past election by electing some more women, we're still very far from gender parity. Also, as you know, I sat on the electoral reform committee, and this discussion came up quite a bit there. I wasn't, however, always convinced that that alone was going to get us closer to having gender parity without other particular mechanisms in place and other things that need to be done to modernize Parliament.

What are you, as the Minister of Democratic Institutions, doing to make sure that we increase the chances of women who would like to run for politics? We know they succeed and do very well once they are here, but it's the decision to run that troubles so many and that is difficult to make. What suggestions do you have in mind?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Thank you very much, Ruby, for your question. I, too, was particularly motivated and heartened to see the 338 young women who took up their seats yesterday in the House of Commons. I think it's an incredible window into the possibility that the future could hold.

I had the opportunity to address them on a couple of occasions on Tuesday 7th, one on a panel on women in politics and the other as their keynote speaker during their banquet gala on Tuesday evening.

One of the things that struck me was a question one of the young women asked about how I had the confidence as a young woman to run for office. It reminded me that so many times, when you ask young men to run, they often say, "Okay, sign me up, when do I start?" When you ask young women to run, they say, "Why me? I think I need to get some more education, or I need to do a bit more to be prepared to do it."

I think part of it is making sure we have those positive role models that young women or women in general see, and that they are able to see themselves reflected in the House of Commons and in potential opportunities. They also need to know that they have many champions out there to ensure that when they do get here, they are successful, and that sometimes the barriers we think are there in front of us are more imagined than they are real.

There are very real barriers when it comes to finances and when it comes to systems that are in place that discriminate against women, but there are often times where those limits can be society-imposed on us, where we say that as a young woman you don't have the experience, or you don't have the ability to do it, and it's going to be detrimental to your campaign. To demonstrate real examples of the fact that when women run, they succeed—I think—is really important.

I would be really curious to hear from the committee, as you're going through your reflections, on what you think some tangible measures are that could be done, and how we as parliamentarians, we as a government, we as Canadians, can do what we can to foster greater participation, not just of women but also of diversity in Canadian politics.

• (1215)

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Can I get some insight from you on one of the recommendations we passed in our interim report. Recommendation 37 proposed that child care expenses that are incurred as a result of running as a candidate would be reimbursable up to 90%.

This committee all agreed to that recommendation. The recommendation also included personal expenses for those with disabled people they are taking care of as well. That can be a real challenge, I know, as a mother of a young child myself. There are other women who are taking care of other loved ones in their lives. It can be quite challenging. Running as a candidate takes a lot of time away from those responsibilities and from getting the means, financially, to provide for the children or those who are dependent on you.

How do you feel about that recommendation? Is that one your department had looked at? Are there other recommendations you can point to as being significant in changing that decision for a woman to run?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Since the House received the report on Monday, I've been going through it. I think there are a number of really important recommendations that the committee has agreed to, which I'll be considering and bringing forward for the government's response.

In a more general response, I think what's important for me personally as the Minister of Democratic Institutions is that we're doing what we can to lower those barriers so that everyone can participate in politics if they so choose. This is something that is good to consider as we move forward with that line of thinking, but I think it's incredibly important that we're reducing barriers for people with different financial means and for people with different personal or family obligations, to make sure that we do get that full breadth and that full diversity of candidates who are able to participate in elections.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Do I have more time?

**The Chair:** You have 45 seconds.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Thank you for your answers. I look forward to the legislation that is to come.

I know that this committee has taken very seriously this topic of women running, and we want to make advancements in that area. I look forward to the things that are going to be coming out of your ministry.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thanks for being here today.

You probably won't be surprised that my questions will be about foreign influence in Canadian elections with regard to third-party spending. That was the topic in some of my queries the last time you were here, which I think was on February 7. I'm hoping that you'll have had a chance in the interim to get a bit more up to speed on the file and that today we can have a conversation that is a bit more substantive than what we were able to have at that meeting.

As I'm sure you're aware, given that we've had a conversation about it previously, the former Chief Electoral Officer said in November that there was really no way to restrict or prevent foreigners or foreign organizations from trying to influence Canadian elections, and that currently there are no restrictions on third-party spending for things such as polling, phone banks, websites, or anything that's not considered under advertising.

The last time you were here, you indicated in response to one of my questions that you were committed to ensuring that there would be no foreign influence in our elections, but I've read through the transcripts of your appearance at the Senate on February 14. There, you responded to Senator Frum by saying:

From the experience we have, we have found that this is not something that is currently present and so significant that it would impact the electoral system or the confidence that Canadians have during a writ period or during an election.

You also responded to Senator Batters by saying, "there's very little evidence to suggest that foreign money is influencing Canadian elections by third parties".

Now, I would say that there's certainly no question that in the last election we did see quite an unprecedented amount of spending by third parties. Third parties are able to spend essentially unlimited amounts outside of advertising, and they are of course able to take foreign money, which can be put into those things as well. I don't think that lines up that well with the statements you made in response to questioning at the Senate.

Given those responses, and despite the previous commitment that was made to ensuring that there would be no foreign influence in our elections, it really seems to me that this issue is being brushed aside by the government. That really is quite stark in its contrast with what the former Chief Electoral Officer testified to.

I have several questions. I'll ask you to try to be as brief as you can in response, but I certainly want to make sure that you have the chance to answer them. I want to know if, in this interim period since we first heard from you, this is something that your department, your staff, or you have looked into, and is it something that you've been briefed on?

• (1220)

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Thank you, Blake, for your question, and for your due diligence. I'll answer your question, and then I have a question for you, I guess. On the first question, yes: after we had that meeting, I did request a briefing on it and we did look into it. It's important to note that we don't have.... There's not much evidence to suggest that there is third-party influence in terms of spending.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Could I interrupt you there? I'm sorry. I got the gist of what you're saying, but there certainly seems to be some dispute about this. I'm wondering if you could provide that briefing to this committee so we could be able to—

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I'm wondering what evidence you have for the dispute on this or what suggestions you may have with regard to how to move this forward.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Obviously, we would be happy to have that conversation, but you received a briefing that indicates that something you believe is otherwise. I wonder if you would be

willing to table that with this committee so we could have the benefit of that information as well.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Yes. We'll provide information with regard to that.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That's great. Thank you, Minister. We'll look forward to that, then, and hopefully we could have a further conversation at that point.

I'm wondering if you could tell us a little more. There is certainly no question in my mind that under sections 331 and 349 of the Canada Elections Act there would be a need to introduce some changes, I think, to be able to ensure there's no foreign influence in our elections through third-party spending. I'm wondering if you might be willing to commit to looking at those sections and making the changes that are required in order to ensure that there wouldn't be this ability for unlimited spending by third parties for things like polling, phone banks, or election websites.

It sounds like there is some dispute on your part as to whether this is a problem, but whether it is a problem or not, it certainly could become one. I'm wondering if you would be willing to commit to making those changes to ensure that we don't see that kind of foreign influence in our elections. That obviously would have to be done for inside the writ period and outside of it. Is that something you could commit to looking at and introducing?

• (1225)

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Well, I would certainly be interested to hear your thoughts on what those suggested recommendations for consideration might be.

With regard to the information that I have and have requested, one thing that I think we should be quite clear about is that we do have very strict rules in Canada when it comes to foreign money in Canadian politics. That does already exist. Within my—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm sorry to interrupt again, Minister. You would be correct in saying that is true when it comes to political parties, but it certainly isn't true when it comes to third-party spending. There's clearly a huge loophole there. A very glaring loophole exists that would allow essentially unlimited foreign influence in anything outside of what's considered advertising. Given your commitment to us previously that you think it's important that we try to do everything we can to prevent foreign influence, I certainly hope this is something you would give considerable thought to. It's easy to repeat the talking point that there is no ability for that now, but in terms of third parties, there is. That's certainly different from what we're hearing, and I certainly hope you'll look at that and consider it.

I hope we'll get a chance to carry on in a future round.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Christopherson.

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

Minister, thank you again for your attendance. I also want to thank you for the recent meet-and-greet we had in your office. It's appreciated.

I'll take a brief moment to comment on the process you're offering. I want to say publicly that I am as impressed with the change in approach with regard to the government, your ministry, and the work of this committee, as I was outraged at the way that Bill C-33 was so unceremoniously dumped on us in the House. There was a commitment made that this was going to change, and we're still in the process of getting through that, but I do want to say publicly that I've been very impressed with the attempt by the government members and you to get us back on a positive track, where we are working hand in hand, as you promised in the campaign and as is best for Parliament when we—on this committee in particular—can work that way. I want to say that I'm very impressed.

You continue, however, to load up the agenda of the committee. I want to remind you that it's going to take an even greater effort at coordinating and talking, because you're not the only source of our work. We get it from all over. Some things trump—and I refuse to stop using the word—other things, and that can slow us down on our own well-intentioned agenda. That's still going to be a struggle. There's a lot of work in front of this committee.

Again, I want to emphasize that I was incredibly outraged at what your government did with Bill C-33, and I am as impressed now with the government's recognizing they were wrong and their attempt to make it right. I hope that continues. I look forward to working on this file that is critically important for all of us.

With that, Chair, I would like to give the balance of my time to my colleague Mr. Cullen, who is also our democratic reform critic, sir.

**The Chair:** Welcome, Nathan Cullen, from the second most beautiful riding in the country.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Oh, there he goes again. Point of order.

Thank you, minister, for attending.

Ostensibly, I think you're also here for MyDemocracy.ca. Do we know what the cost was for that?

**Mr. Ian McCowan (Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet (Governance), Privy Council Office):** The cost in terms of the contract with Vox Pop?

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** No, the all-in cost. We knew the contract to Vox Pop, but we were waiting for the all-in cost from the last time we talked.

**Mr. Ian McCowan:** In terms of electoral reform writ large, I think it's in the order of about \$3.8 million when you add in staff, contract, the mail out from Canada Post, and the minister's tour. If it would be helpful to the committee, we could provide a detailed breakdown of the costs that have been spent on electoral reform.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Okay, that would be very helpful.

Minister, do you think that exercise was a success? I'm referring to the MyDemocracy.ca part of the government's outreach?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Well, first of all, I want to thank David for his comments.

I am looking forward to working with this whole committee moving forward, and I hope that we do. I recognize that you have lots of work ahead of you and I know you have big tasks, but I also have confidence in the ability of all members of this committee to get through all of that. I'm looking forward to doing this together.

With regard to MyDemocracy.ca, I do think it was a worthwhile exercise. The fact there were 380,000 Canadians, roughly speaking, who participated was quite good. It's the largest participation in a consultation the government has had.

•(1230)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Was there a specific answer or result you got from that survey that led to your government's conclusion to abandon the electoral reform commitment? Was there some way that Canadians answered or didn't answer a question that led you to conclude from your consultation that we shouldn't go ahead with electoral reform?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** The decision was made based on all of the many different pieces of the consultation and the work—

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** But nothing in particular?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** —that went into the past year of engagement with Canadians.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** When did you get your mandate letter from the Prime Minister?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** My mandate letter was made public on February 1.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** When did you receive it?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** My mandate letter was made public on February 1.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Okay, I just want to know when you received it. I know when it was made public. I was there.

Did you receive it on February 1?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** My mandate letter was made public on February 1.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Okay.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** You can ask it many more times. That's when it was made public.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** I know, and you can not answer it many more times. That seems strange because the receipt of a letter doesn't exactly require the confidentiality of a state secret.

All I'm asking is when you received your letter. It's not a challenging question.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** And I'm responding that it was made public on February 1.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Okay.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Oh, oh!

There you go.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Now, regarding transparency, you watched the young women in the House, the Daughters of the Vote. Did you hear Chelsea Montgomery's question for the Prime Minister?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I heard all the questions.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** I'll quote it for you, just to refresh all of our memories: "Instead of waiting until 2090—that's the year it would take if we keep on the path that we're on right now to see gender parity in this House—what commitments are you making and what is the plan to go forward?"

There was some notion that we had had some great improvement, in terms of the results for women, from the last election to this election. Their representation in the House went up by 1%. The percentage of men in the House of Commons is still around 75%.

Chelsea's question for the Prime Minister was very direct. He chose not to answer it in specific terms.

We had put before the House, previously, the way parties are reimbursed for their election expenses if they nominate more women. Are you in favour of such a proposal?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I'm looking forward to hearing the committee's recommendations. I think there are many different innovative ways that we can encourage women's participation in politics.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Can you remind me? I was trying to look it up before this committee meeting. There was a bill in Parliament. Do you recall if you voted for it or not?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I would have to look at the record.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** You don't recall?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I don't recall. I don't think I voted in favour of it, but I would have to double-check.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Okay. Some of your colleagues within the government ranks did. It was one of the recommendations.

What Chelsea was asking the Prime Minister about was his broken promise on electoral reform, particularly bringing in a fairer voting system.

We know from Equal Voice and from a lot of studies that proportional systems tend to elect more women. The Prime Minister has declared many times that he is a feminist and is interested in electing more women, but he rejected the proposal that the committee of all parties put forward to him, as you did, for a proportional system.

Here is another way of getting at it. As my colleague said, we have to find other ways. One of the ways is through the nomination process, encouraging parties to nominate women and discouraging them from nominating men and other overrepresented groups in our Parliament.

You've seen the bill. You've had a chance to vote on such a bill. You've seen the committee report recommending this. The Conservatives joined with the Green and the Bloc in recommending this. I know some liberals had some interest in it as well.

Are you open to accepting such a proposal?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I'm open to receiving such a proposal and other proposals. I think it's important that we do think about innovative mechanisms to engage women in politics.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Time's up.

Mr. Simms.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I want to go to Bill C-33, if I may, and focus on the substance of it. I appreciate the other parts of it, including the tabling, as Mr. Christopherson brought up. I appreciate Mr. Christopherson's comments about that, and yours as well, but I do want to talk about what this is.

To me, there are two parts to it. There are things in there that we talked about when we campaigned and in terms of what we would do as part of the mandate letter. The other part, if I can try to describe it subtly, is to "untangle the tangly bits" that were left over from the unfair elections act from the last time. I've often described it as being a solution to a problem that never existed.

One of those is the voter information card. I am a huge fan for several reasons. The median age in my riding is high. We have a lot of seniors. It's also a rural area, so a lot of people lack the identification required for addresses and so on and so forth. I'm sure a lot of the opposition would say, well, you have to have a certain amount of identification to vote. A certain amount of identification is required. That I understand. But by doing that, and by creating so many barriers, and lifting these barriers, to a point where we violated a charter right, which is your right to vote....

The voter information card was essential. Perhaps I could describe it this way. Many seniors would take this card and put it on their fridge or somewhere in the kitchen to remind them about voting. They'd rely on that so much to be able to walk into the booth and say, "I want to cast my vote".

I appreciate that, and I'm wondering if you could comment on that.

• (1235)

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I also agree with that. I think it is very important. That's why in Bill C-33 we are proposing measures within that legislation to make the voter identification card one piece that could serve as a piece of identification in future elections. I think it's incredibly important.

I'm sure many of us in this room and in this Parliament have stories to tell of people who were turned away at the polls because they didn't have proper identification. We know that about 120,000 Canadians cited their reason for not voting as the lack of proper identification.

I think it's one way to ensure that people who have the right to vote are able to vote, and can do it as efficiently as possible.



**Mr. Scott Simms:** Thank you, Minister.

The second part deals with what we talked about on the campaign trail, about what we would do as a government. This is what interests me. When I first came to Parliament in 2004, there was a debate about lowering the voting age at the time. The whole point of the debate was to engage young people in voting. My colleague Ms. Sahota talked earlier about getting young people to vote, to get involved. It was about the involvement of young people, as was illustrated in *Daughters of the Vote*.

Registering youth from the ages of 14 to 17 is a very intriguing idea. I believe other jurisdictions around the world have tried this, to engage voters in getting involved—not voting, but getting involved—in the registration process. Can you or your officials give this committee a sense of how this will translate into more involvement for people between the ages of 14 and 17?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Certainly. Thank you.

I think this is an important issue. I know that when I go to speak to high school students, I always ask them to commit to one thing, and that's to vote when they turn 18. At that point, at least, they all raise their hands and make that commitment. I hope they do follow through with that.

One thing we know is that when young people start voting early, they end up voting often. What I mean by this is that it becomes a habit. It becomes something they do continuously throughout their lives. The more we can do to make it easier for young people to be engaged, to be registered, to already be part of that process, I think the better it bodes for the future of participation and engagement in Canadian democracy.

Do you have anything you want to add?

**Mr. Ian McCowan:** I would just say that studies from Canada, Australia, and the U.S. indicate that civic education has a positive impact on subsequent civic participation and voter turnout, etc. There's clearly a body of evidence out there in this area.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** The other thing too—sorry, Ms. Kim, I didn't mean to exclude you in this conversation—is that it also leads into the fact that one of the other things that Bill C-33 would do is to empower the CEO to be more involved with the educational aspect and publicizing some of the facts about voting. I guess that leads in well to allowing young people to register to vote. I commend you for that.

Ms. Kim.

**Ms. Natasha Kim (Director, Democratic Reform, Privy Council Office):** I was just going to add that one of the positive aspects of the pre-registration is that it could be used as a fairly concrete call to action when Elections Canada does conduct civic education activities with youth in high schools so that there's something they can do to be part of the process.

Then other aspects of the bill would then facilitate, for example, the receiving of voter information cards once you're registered, so you would have a piece of ID that you could then take to the polls at the same time.

● (1240)

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Going back to the voter information card again, am I right in saying that's the only piece of federal identification—a thorough federal identification—that exists currently across the country?

**Ms. Natasha Kim:** The Canada Elections Act provides a number of options to prove your identity and your residence. If it were just one piece of ID, you'd need the name, address, and photo—and really that's the driver's licence, which is provided by the provinces.

There's another option, where you can have two pieces of ID that collectively would establish your name and address. There are various federal pieces that Elections Canada has authorized for that list, but it would have to be used in conjunction with another piece of ID.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Thank you.

Minister, earlier you mentioned that you'd like some ideas and advice on certain issues. Here is one I would like to put forward for your evaluation. You don't have to answer yes or no, because it requires a bit of investigation. I do believe this exists now in Newfoundland and Labrador, where I'm from.

For the situation of vouching, one of the problems we have in rural areas is that a person walks in but has forgotten their ID. They've just driven about 20 or 25 kilometres to get to the poll, which is common in rural Canada. They get turned away for a lack of ID, or they forgot something—they didn't realize they needed a second piece—and as they were turned away, they don't come back because they have to drive long distances. It's hard when you're in a small town and you look at someone you've known for 40 years—

**The Chair:** Your time is up.

You're going to have to have a conversation with the minister at another time.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** That's very gracious of you, sir.

**The Chair:** Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I could tell that Scott was just warming up.

First of all, I want to thank you, Minister, for meeting with me on Monday afternoon. I thought it was a very informative and fruitful meeting. Likewise, thank you for adopting what I think is a business-like approach to the legislation that is necessary in order to act upon the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations. Again, that is much appreciated. Finally, thank you for the eight-page letter in which you responded to my questions regarding the MyDemocracy.ca survey.

I had some things I wanted to ask about on that, but I might hold off, given the exchange you had with Mr. Cullen and ask you this question instead.

Why won't you answer his question about the date on which you were given your mandate by the Prime Minister? What's the reason for not answering that?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Mandate letters are made public, and mine was made public on February 1. That's the day it was public, and that's the day it was official.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** It's not the date that it was official, actually; the date that it was given to you would be the date that it was official.

Let me ask you this way. You became minister on January 11 I think.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** January 10.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Okay.

Were you given your mandate letter at that time?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** At that time, I was sworn into cabinet and began to have briefings and to engage on the file.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Did you get your mandate letter on the date you became minister, or were you operating for some time as a minister without a mandate letter?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I was operating with the public mandate letter that was available until then.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I think you just lost me.

You're saying that you were operating under the mandate letter that had been issued to Minister Monsef.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** There's a mandate letter. It's made public, and I was operating under what was public at the time.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Okay, there was a mandate letter that was made public on February 1.

Was that the mandate letter you were operating under? Alternatively, were you operating under the mandate letter that had been issued to Minister Monsef a year and a bit earlier, or were you operating under some third thing? I'm now totally lost here.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** The mandate is public, and whatever was public is the mandate I was operating under at the time.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** The mandate is what's in the mandate letter. Is there some other mandate?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** No, that's....

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Right, so you were operating under the letter that had been issued to Minister Monsef, and not under the one that became public on February 1.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Whatever was public was the mandate I was operating under at the time for that minister.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** That means you did receive your mandate letter, the one that became public on February 1, on the date on which you became minister, January 10. That's the mandate you received on January 10, the mandate letter that became public on February 1, correct?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** The mandate letter that was public at the time of January 10 was the mandate I was operating under.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** So it was Minister Monsef's? All right. That's helpful. You did not receive your mandate letter on January 10, then.

Let me ask you this question now that we've established that you got a new mandate letter after January 10.

Around January 24 or thereabouts, the cabinet met in Calgary. There has been a leak about what happened in that meeting. We are told that you argued passionately in favour of moving away from a referendum on electoral reform, and that your arguments persuaded everybody in cabinet except one. There was one dissenting vote.

Did you have your mandate letter at that time, or were you operating under Minister Monsef's old mandate letter when that argument was being made to the cabinet?

● (1245)

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I was operating under the mandate that was public at the time of those discussions, but I can't comment on cabinet conversations.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** No, you can't, and neither can the person who leaked it, which raises the question of why there were two separate Liberal sources, according to the stories in which it was leaked.

I asked the House leader why there wasn't an investigation, and she just said, well, there isn't one. Of course, the answer is that the Prime Minister authorized this, which is a really unprofessional thing to do. It's not actually illegal, but it's certainly a breach of convention.

However, that doesn't answer my question. I think we've established, then, that you were issued your mandate letter—the one that was made public on February 1—sometime between January 24 or 25, whenever it was, and February 1. That now appears to be what you're saying. Is that correct? That's when you got the new mandate letter, not the previous one...?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** You're putting—

**The Chair:** You only have 10 seconds, Minister.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** You're putting words in here, and what I'm saying is that the mandate letter was made public on February 1, and I was operating under the mandate that was public at the time.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Which must have been Minister Monsef's mandate letter—

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Which is.... Yes.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** —because there is no other.... I have the public information, too, and there's only that letter and the February 1 letter, so it has to be one or the other. I think you've just told us it was the Monsef letter, which I accept at face value. Am I wrong on that?

**The Chair:** Your time is up.

Mr. Graham.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.):** I want to start by responding to a point that Mr. Cullen made earlier about gender balance. There's more to it than that. There's the commitment to gender, and at this table, there are three women members at this table, and they are all Liberals. On the electoral reform committee, there were only two parties that provided women for that committee: the Liberals and the Green Party. I just wanted to put that out there, but that's not the line I want to go down.

In your opening remarks, you said that you would like our report on the electoral officer's report by the end of June, or preferably by May 19, which I can understand. For the benefit of those watching—this is a televised meeting—can you explain the process of what happens after that? Can you explain how we get to a bill, why it's important to do it then in terms of the process, both with you and with cabinet, and also with Elections Canada, to get this ready for an election, and, therefore, why a deadline like that is actually important to us?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** It's not a hard deadline, of course. The committee is going to set the timeline for the work they're going to do. It's just that I do value the input of committee. I think you provide valuable contributions on these items and these issues. Therefore, to have that in its fullness feeding into the legislative process moving forward would be very helpful to me, and I think it would be helpful to Canadians to hear from the committee and to hear their reflections within that time period.

In October 2019 there is going to be an election. Elections Canada needs time to implement any potential recommendations or amendments to the Canada Elections Act in time to deliver them for the 2019 election. Though we don't have a set time frame, we know that it's likely a number of months, if not more. The more time available, the better it is for Elections Canada and the dedicated officials there to ensure they get that done right.

Moving back, that means legislation would have to be passed sometime within the next year or year and a half in order for this to be accomplished. For that to happen, legislation would have to be presented in the fall, perhaps, or by the end of the year at the very latest, in order for that to go through the whole legislative process and to have the time for the committee to study it and for it to be debated in Parliament. In order to do so, legislation would need to be drafted and would need to go to cabinet ahead of that.

All of that puts us within that two-and-a-half-year time frame. I know that this is important legislation. There are important elements of this—for all members of this committee—that we want to get done in time for the next election to ensure that all Canadians have a fair, accessible, and equitable chance to vote.

• (1250)

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** So it's clear that if we're still doing this study a year from now it will be a little late to act on it.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** The committee is in charge of its own affairs, but I think it's valuable input. I think it would be worthwhile to have that as part of the considerations moving forward, so I hope to be able to receive that so it can feed into my thoughts and recommendations to the government.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** That's great.

There is one more quick point I want to make: You listed quite a number of clauses in the report on which you are looking forward to our feedback. I very much appreciate that. I think it's a really good approach for our going forward, to know where the priorities are, because I think there's quite a lot left to get through in that report. There are more answers coming that we've already discussed, and I can't get into more details about that, but I really appreciate the conversation and the fact you came here.

I know that Scott Simms has been getting warmed up, and I want to know if he wants to finish one last minute of his question.

**The Chair:** Mr. Simms.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Someone else is gracious.

Thank you, David.

I was going to suggest that in smaller areas—and again, I'm not looking for an answer right now—you'll find that the poll supervisor has the power to vouch for individuals. It's bizarre when somebody walks up and says, "I'm sorry. Even though I've known you for 40 years, I can't vouch for you. I don't know you." That becomes a common thing throughout rural areas.

If someone in that position—supervisor or someone at that level—had the power to vouch multiple times and signed for it and swore to it by whatever legal measures are needed, that would go a long way, especially in rural areas.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Scott. You finished on time.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have another opportunity so we can carry on. I went off on a mini-rant at the end of the last round and you didn't have a chance to respond, so I wanted to be fair, obviously, and give you that opportunity.

To refresh where we were at, in the interim I again looked at the transcript from when you appeared before the Senate. I think this summarizes quite well what I was referring to, and I can then let you respond. It was in response to a question from Senator Frum.

As I think I mentioned earlier, you had said that with regard to foreign money in the Canadian political process, it's very important to know that in Canada we do have very strict financing laws. It was the same point you used earlier when I was asking you questions as well about who can donate to a political party, a third party, or a candidate during a writ period. During a writ period is obviously the key there.

Then in response to that, Minister, Senator Frum put the concern I have here quite succinctly when she said to you:

Minister, would you agree that it is possible for foreign entities to make donations to third-party organizations outside of the writ period; that that money ends up getting used during the writ period; that this is the loophole I'm referring to; and that this is a very serious threat to our political sovereignty?

You then thanked her for her questions and said that from your experience you found it wasn't currently present or that was significant, that it would impact the election. But then you did go on to say, "However, I take your point and I appreciate it. It's something that I will definitely consider."

Later on in that same meeting, in response to Senator Batters about the same topic, you also indicated the following:

I will continue to work with my staff and colleagues in this place and in the other place to ensure that we put reasonable spending limits for third parties between elections.

So it seemed, on the one hand, as if you were brushing it off, saying that this isn't something that there is any concern about, but then, on the other hand, you were saying that you'll consider it and you think we need to look at putting some reasonable spending limits in place for third parties between elections. I'm trying to get a sense as to which one it is. Do you have concerns, and do you think this needs to be addressed, or not? And if yes or no, why or why not?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Thank you again, Blake, for your question.

Addressing your first question with regard to the possibility of foreign money being used in advertising during an election, as it stands currently, third parties are required to report to Elections Canada all donations they have received in the six months prior to a writ's being announced. This is a mechanism that's in place at the moment. Of course, I am always interested to see if we think this is an issue and is of concern. At this point in time, it's not something we have vast evidence to be concerned about, but I welcome your concerns and any evidence you would have to suggest otherwise.

• (1255)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** In the briefing that you have committed to giving to this committee, was that something that was looked at? Was this something that you were briefed on in that briefing? You said you'll consider it and look at it. Obviously, that would imply that there was some intention to look at it. Now, this briefing, I suppose, could have occurred since those February 7 and February 14 meetings. Was it looked at in those briefings, and were you briefed fully on this and now feel that there's no need, or is this something you'll continue to look at now?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** It was part of the briefings, but from the advice we were given, we do not think it is something that is imminent right now in Canada. That doesn't mean we won't stop considering it, because I think it is important, but it's not of grave concern.

Do you want to add onto that?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'll let your respond, but I want to follow up on that quickly.

There certainly seems to be a dispute. There are certainly those out there who would say this is a problem. There are organizations that have—

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I would welcome your examples or suggestions that you have of this.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Let me just finish, because there is the possibility that it's actually a problem. You may have information to the contrary, and that's why we're asking for your briefing, obviously. But would you not concede that there is a chance that this could certainly be a problem? If it isn't already a problem, do you not see how it might be a problem in our elections? If a foreign entity could, in fact, give unlimited amounts to a third party prior to an election, that money could then be spent during an election. So do you not see—

**Hon. Karina Gould:** But there are limits on third-party spending within a writ period itself that apply to all third parties in Canada. I think it's important to look at it within the wider regulatory and legislative framework as well. That being said, I think it's always important for a democracy, for a government, for a country, and for a citizenry to be constantly reflecting and monitoring situations.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. That's it for time.

We'll go on to Mr. Chan.

**Mr. Arnold Chan:** Thank you, Minister.

I really want to express my appreciation for your being here today.

I want to follow up on the line of questioning that my colleague David Graham had started with respect to timelines. You specifically mentioned a May 19 deadline. The committee has received some information that there may be other substantive work that we need to consider as well. I'm following this line of questioning simply because I'm trying to figure out a process for dealing with what might suddenly be a very heavy workload for all of us. I want to understand. Is your deadline of May 19 when you want us to have completed the review of the Chief Electoral Officer's report and to report that back to the House?

That is my first line of questioning. My second piece is with respect to Bill C-33. Of course, we have not yet received that piece of legislation from the House for review. Would it be helpful for us to potentially prereview it on the assumption that it will come to us fairly intact?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Thank you for both of your questions.

I will reiterate that the committee is in charge of and responsible for its own work plan. It would be very helpful for me to have another interim report, because I found the first one very useful in my thinking. Moving forward, it would be particularly useful for the committee to reflect and focus on the recommendations I specifically outlined in my opening remarks. I recognize that there are over 130 recommendations, so that is quite the task. Maybe you won't be able to get to all of them by that date, but if you're able to provide some reflection and guidance and thoughts with regard to some of them, I would be appreciative. You may not get to all of the ones that I mentioned, although all of them would be welcome. I hope to receive as much as you're able to do in due course, because that will help as I move forward.

**Mr. Arnold Chan:** With respect to the first interim report, we asked for a response, obviously, from your office or from you regarding our recommendations going back to the House. It would be my assumption that we would probably go down the same line as we work through the rest of the report and report it back. Could you commit to providing us that reply as expeditiously as possible, and certainly before the deadline of May 19? I mean, obviously, it depends on when we, for example, submit our report to the House. I recognize that we have to give you a reasonable amount of time to respond, but, obviously, your comprehensive response to that would be helpful for us in terms of figuring out how to sequence our work. I suspect that at the pace we're going right now, we're not going to get there, and we might need to reconsider how we work as a committee to get as much as possible in front of you. The question I'm really leading to is whether you are anticipating further legislation coming from you, regardless of whether or not this committee reports to you.

•(1300)

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I will endeavour to report back to you as soon as I can. I think this is a priority. I think it would be possible, depending on the recommendations coming out of subsequent reports with regard to the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations. Obviously, this would be something that I would have to bring to cabinet and report back on.

Also, I think there are elements within the Chief Electoral Officer's report that would require legislative changes, and if we're favourable to that, that would be the process we would be looking to pursue.

**Mr. Arnold Chan:** Okay. I think we're out of time.

**The Chair:** We have one more round of three minutes for Mr. Christopherson, and that will end the session.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Very good, thank you, Chair. I appreciate your ensuring our last spot. I will turn my time over to my colleague, Mr. Cullen.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Thank you, David.

Thank you, Chair.

Minister, forgive me if I'm a bit confused. Let's circle back.

At committee, whenever a minister pleads the Canadian equivalent of the fifth amendment, we all sort of perk up a little bit and wonder what's going on.

There were two mandates. The first mandate, the previous one, said that your government was committed to electoral reform and to bringing in a new voting system before the next election. The second mandate says, "Not so much. We're going to break that commitment. We're doing something else."

You were brought into cabinet on the 10th of January. Correct?

Okay.

Cabinet got together later in January, on the 24th and 25th, and you made public your new mandate letter on the 1st of February.

Do I have everything right so far?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** Yes.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Okay. I just want to make sure I have the facts straight.

You can understand why some of us are a bit confused about why you can't just tell us when you received the new mandate letter.

Was there any point when you had an old mandate letter, previously Minister Monsef's directions to keep the promise on electoral reform, and were given a second one that was not yet made public?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** The mandate letter was made public on February 1, which was when the Prime Minister and I announced the new direction in the mandate letter, and that is how things have proceeded—

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Okay.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** —since then, and I'm looking forward to working on this mandate and to delivering for Canadians, and I'm looking forward to working with this committee to make sure that we get the—

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** We've heard that before.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** —the Canada Elections Act updated and repeal the unfair elements of the—

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** So here's the point.

**Hon. Karina Gould:** —so called Fair Elections Act, and I'm looking forward to getting that good work done because we need to work together—

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** I'm limited in time, Minister.

At the end of your statement, you said to this committee, "I sincerely want to work together with you." That pinged for me because those were almost exactly the words you said to me the night before you backtracked on your government's promise. In our conversation you said, "I sincerely want to work with you and go ahead with this."

At the time, when you were consulting with me and the Conservatives in the official opposition, and when you were phoning folks like Fair Vote and Lead Now, saying that you sincerely wanted to work with them, did you have in your possession the knowledge that you were going to be breaking this commitment on electoral reform?

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I still sincerely want to work with you, because I think there are lots of things we can do together to improve the electoral system in Canada. I think that's precisely what I hope to be able to do with this committee.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** But sincerity also implies integrity and honesty—

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I have a mandate to deliver. I have a mandate to work on, and I think that the valuable input from this committee is going to be really important to make sure that we get this right.

•(1305)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** You must see the irony, though, of being the Minister of Democratic Institutions and not being transparent.

If in fact you had a second, contrary, conflicting mandate in your possession when you were speaking to me or to others who are involved with this issue, or while you defended a position at the cabinet table, that would be entirely contradictory to the spirit on which your government was elected.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Nathan. Sorry, but our time is up.

We would like to thank the minister for coming here and the staff members who accompanied her.

We look forward to our next meeting, moving on with our report on electoral reform.

The meeting is adjourned.





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