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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1155)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Good morning. Welcome back to the 80th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. For members' information, we are now in public.

Today we are continuing our study on the creation of an independent commissioner responsible for leaders' debates.

We're pleased to have with us Paul Adams, associate professor, school of journalism and communication, Carleton University; Graham Fox, president and chief executive officer of the Institute for Research on Public Policy; and Jane Hilderman, executive director of Samara.

Thanks to all of you for being here and for coming on short notice. We know that you didn't have much time, but we really appreciate your expertise and we look forward to your input on this totally new project we've undertaken. You're our first witnesses, so it will be very exciting.

Who would like to start? Maybe we'll just go from left to right alphabetically.

Mr. Adams.

Mr. Paul Adams (Associate Professor, School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

For most Canadians, leaders' debates are as much a part of the election routine as lawn signs and paper ballots. Few likely give a thought to how precarious this important political tradition is.

Canadians have watched debates among party leaders in every federal election since 1968. These debates have provided voters with what might be called a third window on the election campaigns. The first window consists of party advertising mainly on television, although also increasingly now on social media. These ads are generally short, partial, and often negative. As I'm sure you will agree, at least with regard to your opponents' ads, some are even a little misleading. The second window is through the media. The media are changing, of course, but the so-called mainstream media continue to dominate. Their ability to connect voters to the political discourse is vital, as is their commentary and analysis.

As a former political reporter with both the CBC and the *Globe* up here on the Hill, and since 2005 a professor of journalism at

Carleton, I can tell you that news coverage in elections, like any other news, is driven by what we call news values. These are not values in the moral sense. They are rules of thumb we use to determine what is newsworthy and what isn't. Two core news values are conflict and novelty. If there is conflict, if there is something new, then that makes the news. If there is not, it's harder to grab the media's attention and harder to get the public's attention. I think you'll agree with me, though, that neither conflict nor novelty are necessarily values that voters need in the course of an election campaign.

For much of my career, my view through this third window of the leadership debates was from the media room outside the hall where the debate was taking place. As I wrote my stories, I was guided by the search for conflict and novelty. Though I did strive to do better than that—I hope I sometimes succeeded—the fact is that news is news. When I left the news business and started watching the debates from the couch, with my wife by my side, I noticed something interesting. Often just when I got fidgety because I had heard it all before, my wife started getting interested. She was getting unmediated access to the leaders. She was getting context. She was hearing them describe their views at length in a way she wasn't getting from news clips. Usually it was the first time in the course of the campaign she got any of that.

There was something else I noticed. Often the zingers, the so-called knockout punches that caught my ears, had the opposite effect on her. She wasn't interested in the fist fight that reporters record and partisans cheer on. She was interested in the information as well as the glimpses into the characters of the candidates. It was helping her make up her mind.

For millions of Canadians, these debates are the central event of the campaign, the only time they sit down for two or three hours straight and concentrate on it. Then, at the coffee shop the next day, or on social media, or at Sunday dinner, they talk it through, based on their shared experiences with colleagues, friends, and families. Once again, Canadians have no idea how precarious this important tradition of leadership debates is.

For most of their history, the debates have been organized by a consortium of Canada's major broadcasters negotiating directly with the political parties. Naturally, and perfectly reasonably, during these negotiations the parties sought their partisan advantage in terms of the number of debates, their format, the subjects they would cover, and who would participate. Everybody understands that. Less well understood is that the broadcasters brought all kinds of self-interest of their own to the table. They didn't want the debates to pre-empt hockey games or revenue-producing American comedies and cop shows. They wanted to showcase their network stars. And because these debates would be on their networks, they wanted them to be good TV shows, meaning that conflict and novelty were values that to some degree they were interested in encouraging. They said they represented the public interest, but that was never completely true.

In the last election, Stephen Harper, for perhaps understandable reasons, tried to free himself from the shackles of the consortium. Instead, we ended up with a series of debates following different, uncoordinated formats at more or less arbitrary times.

There was something to be said for allowing 100 flowers to bloom, but we know for a fact that the voters were not as well served. The most watched debate was organized by *Maclean's* before the writ was even dropped, and it had fewer than 40% of the number of viewers attracted to the 2011 English-language debate organized by the consortium.

Voters were denied the shared experience of a debate on the major networks in the late weeks of the campaign when many of them were finally making up their minds. It's time to institutionalize these debates that are so important to so many voters, just as we have made rules for spending, fundraising, advertising, and many other aspects of our campaigns. The debates should be organized by a body independent of the interests of either the parties or the networks. They should be organized in the public interest, in other words. That body could be Elections Canada or some stand-alone commission.

The aim of the debates should be to elicit information from the candidates while also providing significant interactions among them, with the understanding that there is no perfect format, and none will ever be entirely free from criticism.

The networks that enjoy the privilege—the very lucrative privilege—of access to our airwaves should be required to run the debates as the commission directs as a condition of licence. Party leaders, when they are invited, should be expected to show up. I would suggest some penalty if they do not, a substantial but not debilitating penalty, perhaps a period of several days during which that leader's party could not broadcast advertising.

Voters have come to expect and depend on their third window in the election, and we should make sure they have it.

Thank you very much.

•(1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Fox.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Graham Fox (President and Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Research on Public Policy): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

First of all, may I commend the committee's decision to examine issues related to the governance and management of political party leaders' debates during election campaigns. I thank you sincerely for giving me this opportunity to contribute to your study.

My name is Graham Fox. I am the President of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, an independent, non-partisan research organization located in Montreal, whose research perspective is pan-Canadian.

[*English*]

There is no question that leaders' debates have become an important element of how we conduct federal elections and how citizens come to an electoral choice. I'm speaking here not so much of the clichéd knockout punch or pivotal moment in the campaign, but more of the less newsworthy, less dramatic opportunity for citizens to hear from their leaders, understand their policies, and come to a judgment on their character.

[*Translation*]

This morning I won't go on at length about the history of leaders' debates since 1968. I suspect that you know it very well. I will, rather, highlight the 2015 experience and its consequences as they appear to me.

Several of the points I'm going to raise are taken from a report the Institute for Research on Public Policy, or IRPP, published in March 2016, in co-operation with the Carleton University School of Journalism and Communication and the Riddell Policy Management Program. This report summarizes the discussions held at a symposium we organized jointly a few weeks after the 2015 campaign, on the future of leaders' debates. Political party representatives, media consortium representatives, other journalists and university researchers were present at the symposium.

I note in passing that the report is available on the institute's website. It also contains a series of articles on the same issues published in *Policy Options*, the IRPP's digital magazine. I invite you to consult these articles and hope that they will be useful to you. I see that Mr. Scott Reid has a copy of the report on his desk.

[*English*]

Given that your study of leaders' debates is just getting under way, I will focus my remarks on issues that I think should frame the discussion on how to create the proposed independent commissioner and how we should think about its mission and its mandate.

I'll begin by going back to that symposium from December 2015, which was an instructive experience, to say the least. My first observation is that I was surprised at how strongly those involved in organizing the debates held their views. The event had been billed as a bit of a brainstorming session to imagine new ways of organizing debates, but not unlike the debates themselves, the discussion quickly took on the features of a zero-sum negotiation about who would have control over debates in future.

Despite these tensions, a consensus emerged that while the experience of 2015 was not entirely satisfying and that further changes were needed, it would be even less desirable to go back to the old ways. There were those who argued in favour of returning to the broadcast consortium model, and they certainly felt strongly about their position, but they were unquestionably in the minority.

So where do we go from here?

[*Translation*]

It seems to me that before examining the mechanisms of reform and the duties of the independent commissioner, it would be useful to reflect on three questions. Who should decide the format of debates, and what authority should be given to him? What should the nature of the exercise be, and what should be the format of the debates? How can we facilitate access to these debates for the greatest number of electors?

• (1205)

[*English*]

Who gets to decide, what is being decided, and how do we ensure wide and unfettered access to these debates?

As for who decides, until recently, it was relatively easy to come to an agreement on who should take part in the debates and who should make them available to citizens. The leaders of our three national parties seemed the logical choice, as they were the ones likely to become prime minister, and television seemed to be the logical means by which to make that debate accessible. Putting those two groups in a room together to hash out the details seemed reasonable; it made sense.

Today, however, the fragmentation of the party system and the technology-driven changes in the media and audience landscapes make those decisions much less obvious. Media organizations look to debates to hold party leaders to account. Political parties seek tactical advantage and an unmediated line of communication with voters. These are eminently reasonable positions, but what is missing in the equation is the interest of citizens.

More than broadcasters and political leaders, it seems clear to me that voters should own the debates, but to date, voters are the only ones not in the room when decisions are made. Whatever the model, we have to ensure that we put citizens' interests back at the centre of decision-making on the number and format of leaders' debates.

A commissioner could be mandated to be the defender of the interest of citizens, but that would necessarily have implications for determining whom the commissioner reports to and how the commissioner is to be held to account. Political parties and broadcasters have to be part of the conversation, but in my view, they should not lead it. Moreover, to add to the further transparency

of the process, perhaps the independent commissioner should find ways to take those discussions out from behind closed doors to design debates in the public square.

What is being decided? In terms of the format and number of debates, there were general points of agreement coming out of the colloquium. Giving voters more rather than fewer opportunities to see their leaders in debate is a good thing. Providing at least one opportunity in each official language for all citizens to see the major party leaders debate the issues, and making that debate available across all platforms, is something that was missing in 2015, and it should be reintegrated into the debate schedule.

Just as importantly, the diversity in formats and approach that various media organizations took in 2015 may increase the interest of some voters and reach different audiences, and that should be encouraged even further. We should also explore other debates, not necessarily by party leaders, to focus on specific issues, regions, or demographic groups.

As a final point, the logistical issues related to who organizes debates, who pays for them, who hosts them are not small issues and cannot be divorced from the design issues you are considering when it comes to the independent commission or commissioner. They should therefore be incorporated into that larger debate and not be forgotten.

[*Translation*]

As for the accessibility of debates, several participants at the symposium noted that it was an important issue for many electors in 2015. Mr. Adams referred to this in his presentation. Without a large meeting and without a big lead-up and production, there were fewer electors who watched any of the five debates, as compared to those in previous elections, and that situation needs to be addressed.

The participants at the symposium did not have the opportunity to discuss this in detail, but some of them suggested appointing a host broadcaster, as is done for the Olympic Games, in order to ensure wide distribution. Others suggested that broadcasting the debates be made a condition to obtain a broadcasting licence. Others mentioned that social media could play a larger role by making a more structured contribution.

We certainly need to think about the incentives that could be created to encourage participation by all potential broadcasters, and about the power that could be given to the commissioner to formally impose a certain behaviour.

[*English*]

In closing, I'd like to make two observations. First, no participant, in the manner in which we organize debates today, is satisfied with the process. Even those who argue in favour of the consortium model have not been happy with their experience, and I think this supports your decision as a committee and the government's decision to examine not whether to reform the system, but how to do it.

Second, at the core we have to decide whether debates are an exercise in journalism or an exercise in democracy. That fundamental choice will shape every decision that comes next. Even at the expense of entertainment value, shifts in party fortunes, and exciting journalism, I would argue strongly in favour of viewing the debates as instruments of democracy. That is the lens that should guide you in your deliberations.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fox.

Ms. Hilderman now has the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Jane Hilderman (Executive Director, Samara): Thank you very much for the opportunity to address the committee.

My name is Jane Hilderman. I am Samara Canada's executive director. Samara is an independent, non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canadian democracy through innovative research and original programming for our active citizens and leaders.

Thank you also to the committee for undertaking this study. Samara broadly supports the concept of stronger governance and clearer rules for the conduct of debates during elections. It sounds like I am in violent agreement with my fellow panellists. Debates matter. That said, research literature is a little divided on exactly how much debates can change the course of elections, but most would agree that leaders' debates are pinnacle events in elections and unique opportunities for voters to directly compare and evaluate the ideas and performance of party leaders.

Debates provide information to voters. In other words, they furnish a central democratic need. As such, the governance of debates should more closely reflect the approach to the governance of other aspects of elections. Currently, as we've heard, debates are largely ungoverned, their terms decided in an ad hoc and opaque way, and not always in the service of public interest.

We at Samara would welcome a move toward greater consistency, transparency, and impartiality in the governance of election debates. At the same time, in order to serve their intended function, debates must also attract and engage a changing public amidst new technologies that share information. An unduly bureaucratized or top-heavy system for organizing debates could also come at a cost, beyond just the material cost.

In short, we feel the committee should consider how to balance regulation with finding ways to permit the fluidity and dynamism that are needed for debates to stay relevant and reach a wide audience.

We believe it is useful to reflect on what should be accomplished in creating an officer or office to regulate federal debates. From a democratic standpoint, these are the two most important objectives in our view: first, to set some clear criteria concerning who should participate; and second, to institute a system of impartial decision-making, which should ensure that the public interest carries weight. As many have observed, the negotiations are otherwise dominated

by the competing interests of some parties and some broadcasters. These basic principles are also reflected in how we regulate other aspects of elections, such as broadcast airtime, party spending, and the creation of electoral boundaries.

We look forward to hearing from parties and broadcasters at your future committee meetings. Given the opacity of the process up to this point, we think there is much learning to be done, for us at Samara as well as the public, to understand all the issues at play.

In our early thinking about this issue, we see a range of possible responses that the committee can consider, responses that strike different balances between regulation and flexibility.

The status quo exists at one extreme end of the spectrum, with little or no effective public oversight. There is little certainty over what the debates may look like in the next election. This is especially true given the breakdown of the consortium model in 2015.

A more modest response would be to consider the formation of something like a debates facilitator, who would help create a set of standards to be upheld during election debates. Broadcasters and parties would continue to negotiate the terms of the debate among themselves, as they have in the past, but would be expected to meet standards updated by the facilitator, which would include, for example, who is participating and the types of accessibility required for the debate to be broadcast. This facilitator could also act as an ombudsperson, issuing public, likely non-binding decisions about whether the debates meet the prescribed standards. This approach could be accomplished relatively simply. It would simply add a layer of public transparency to where we are at now. It would also be very limited in its leverage, as said, and leave decision-making to the traditional actors.

A more mid-range response could include entrenching in the Canada Elections Act the role of a debates arbitrator. There is already a broadcasting arbitrator in existence, which may offer a model worth examining in this context. According to the Canada Elections Act, section 332, the broadcasting arbitrator is appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer but "chosen by a unanimous decision of representatives of registered parties" in the House of Commons. Notably, the selection happens well in advance of an election. By law, it must happen within 90 days of the last general election polling day.

• (1215)

This broadcasting arbitrator's purpose is to make decisions about the allocation of broadcast airtime among parties, which is guaranteed under the Broadcasting Act. Notably too, this happens well in advance of the writ being dropped.

During the election, the arbitrator is referred conflicts between broadcasters and parties, and makes prompt decisions that are final and binding. It is conceivable that a debates arbitrator could help make final decisions about the structure, form, and content of debates in areas where the parties and broadcasters are not managing to come to an agreement or where external parties have made complaints.

Finally, the more maximal response would be to create that stand-alone, independent commission with a broad mandate for determining the content and distribution of debates. Under this model, responsibility would be shifted from the parties and broadcasters to a public body. As a consequence, it may be necessary to contemplate stronger legislative powers, including to compel participation or disincentivize absence from a debate, of both leaders and broadcasters, to ensure that those debates reach a wide audience.

Our initial reflection suggests that maybe this mid-range approach might be most appropriate at this time, given that we are embarking on a somewhat new area of regulation. We don't want to create a structure that may interfere with the ability of debate organizers to stay nimble and fast moving in the information and communications landscape.

The appeal of the arbitrator model is, first, impartiality, provided through the appointment process. The arbitrator would have a mandate from registered parties but upon appointment would assume that decision-making authority.

Second is transparency in decision-making. The broadcasting arbitrator currently uses a formula to allocate broadcasting time. Similarly, a debates arbitrator could establish a formula for determining thresholds for participation, perhaps with input on those criteria from a committee. That formula should be available publicly in advance of elections, with a rationale, and over time decisions made by that decision-making authority would create precedents. This also offers greater transparency as opposed to the backroom process involving multiple actors.

Third, the benefit of this model is that there's still fluidity. It does not require the creation of a full office parallel to something like the Chief Electoral Officer. It would not eliminate the relevant input of parties or broadcasters who, I do think, have insight into delivering an engaging debate to a wide audience.

I would emphasize that our thinking in this area is early, but I hope that these comments can help frame a discussion.

While I have your attention, I would like to make one final point that returns to an earlier point in this presentation, that voters need information to help make their decision on how to vote.

In the modern campaign, digital advertising and campaigning is eclipsing the influence of more traditional avenues, like TV and radio, and for that matter, leaders' debates. Digital advertising happens every day in a campaign. It's delivered by political parties, by third parties, and even by citizens, and it can be highly targeted to the recipient, yet there is minimal oversight as to how these tools are being used, and with what transparency and to what standard.

Writing in *Policy Options* today, researchers Fenwick McKelvey and Elizabeth Dubois note that artificial intelligence is changing campaigns, and we are not ready for it.

From a regulatory design perspective, this is a highly challenging area that will require some serious study to design an effective regime that can remain current with technologies as they evolve. As we are less than 700 days away from the next election, which will be more digital than ever before, this seems like a rather urgent area.

I make this point to put into perspective the conversation about leadership debates. They are important, but they may not be the most important policy issue when it comes to the information environment for voters today.

We look forward to the committee examining all the available options. Thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's a wonderful introduction to our study. There is lots for us to chew on.

Before we go to questions, I forgot to let the committee know that next Wednesday, November 29, at 4 p.m., we have an informal meeting with the Ghana delegation.

We're going to seven-minute rounds. The seven minutes include the questions and the answers.

We'll start with Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our guests. This turned out to be a lot more enlightening than I'd imagined. I wasn't undervaluing your abilities; don't get me wrong.

Mr. Adams, you started out by talking about modern communications and advertising as short, partial, and negative; *ergo*, you have me to begin with as well. I'm not as negative, but the other two, I subscribe to.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Simms: I really liked your story that as a journalist you're guided by conflict and novelty, but it was your wife who was guided by the unfiltered access. This is probably the nub of the issue that we want to get to. I'm glad you brought that story up, but some of the things you mentioned seem, some might say, overly prescriptive.

To institutionalize the debates, a condition of licence for the broadcasters.... If a political party does not take part, on one side they will be disallowed any advertising for three or four days, or you could just say that come eight o'clock eastern time—8:30 in Newfoundland—you will find an empty podium on that stage: you're in it or you're not.

I guess this is a question for all three. In the United States, it's a not-for-profit organization. What we're talking about here is a commission, and some people in the last meeting alluded to the fact that some are appointed by government. I'm just trying, on the surface, to get how involved a commission should be. In other words, how arm's length from the government should it be, to start with?

•(1220)

Mr. Paul Adams: Let me address the role of the networks and the notion of it being a condition of licence. The experience we have from the last two elections is that it makes a big difference in terms of audience whether the major broadcast networks are involved or not. I can't repeat everything I've ever heard internally when I was working in broadcasting, but I know that the networks' participation is very much hinged on considerations that have nothing to do with the public interest or the voters' interest.

It's clear to me that when the major networks are all involved, it creates a critical mass of voters and a larger audience. A few hours once every four years is not a particularly onerous requirement. For sure, there will be losses. At the meeting organized by the IRPP, we heard some of those concerns from the networks, but those really don't concern me that much.

In terms of the leaders showing up, we have seen in other jurisdictions where leaders have skipped these that it's a question of expecting the leaders to show up for work. The voters have a right to access. As I said, I'm not trying to suggest that there's something wrong with advertising or wrong with journalism, but they provide a certain access for voters that's limited. The leaders' debates provide a different kind of access that's valuable to the voters.

Mr. Scott Simms: In essence, you get these small clips of leaders constantly trying to talk over each other, neither one relinquishing the floor for obvious reasons.

Mr. Fox, it's good to see you again. I like your quote about exercising democracy. Exercising democracy today, however, requires a hell of a lot more platforms than there used to be. Mr. Adams talked about the networks, but we're branching out in all different directions when it comes to the Internet.

As the same sort of question, how do you see this commission? How closely do you see it involved in things like who's involved, what's involved, and what platforms you use?

Mr. Graham Fox: It's hard to imagine the commissioner not being involved in those kinds of things. There's been an evolution in language here that I may have made up in my own mind, but it seemed that in earlier iterations, they were talking about an independent commission for debates. I've noticed the expression "commissioner" now creep into more recent documents. My sense is that nuance is probably advised and useful to avoid building the massive bureaucracies that Jane was alluding to. It may allow for more flexibility.

Mr. Scott Simms: If I may, very quickly, you would agree with what Ms. Hilderman was talking about, this...not arbitrator, but facilitator, as such?

Mr. Graham Fox: I think so. It has to be a

[*Translation*]

hub,

[*English*]

if you will, to bring in the multiple platforms.

I think there's a difference between compelling even traditional platforms—broadcasters and others—to carry the signal and bring it

to citizens. My sense is that making a leader's participation a requirement may be more difficult to police, and you might leave it to paying a political price at the ballot box for not showing up. But I think at least in the early days you want to provide some flexibility because we don't yet know what this thing will be.

•(1225)

Mr. Scott Simms: Exactly.

Ms. Hilderman, do you want to comment on that? I don't have a lot of time, but go ahead.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: I think, yes, there seems to be a balance here. If you want true independence, that independence often comes as you move farther away from both the partisan and the broadcaster's interests, which then means you need the ability of greater authority somehow. You need either a stick to wield or strong incentives to structure that versus leaving some room for that negotiation to happen among players in an election period.

Our point is that there's probably a role for a floor or some guidelines or aspirations for what we think we want to see and then allow for that flexibility to happen within a framework in elections.

Mr. Scott Simms: Do you mean guidelines provided in coming legislation? I'm trying to nail down how prescriptive legislation needs to be when it comes to this model that you're talking about. I think you're on somewhat the same page, all three of you, maybe.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: That's a good question. I think it needs to lay out what the commission should accomplish. I'm not sure if we're as well served by legislation that prescribes precisely the criteria or precisely how things should be or how the decisions should be made; otherwise, there's no decision-making authority or flexibility.

Mr. Scott Simms: Would Mr. Fox or Mr. Adams like to go ahead?

Mr. Graham Fox: I'd agree with that. Whatever this new entity will be, I think you'll want to give them some flexibility to adapt to the new environment. We're not sure how social media will play in future debate arrangements. I'm not sure you need to apply the same rules to every type of debate, particularly if we're looking for diversity. I think you want to empower and allow some flexibility.

To your point about whether the commissioner is appointed by government, you're going to want someone who has the trust of all political parties. Therefore, I think it is wise to spend some time thinking about whether it's a parliamentary process, but to make sure there is some buy-in from the get-go that this individual or these individuals have the confidence of those involved.

The Chair: Mr. Adams, go ahead.

Mr. Paul Adams: Very quickly, I would just say that in each election campaign in this period, we're going to see the broadcast networks becoming less important. There shouldn't be a mistake made that they are not still the central, most important vehicle through which Canadians will access these debates. Another time may come, but we're not there yet.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you to all of our panel participants. I found all of your presentations very interesting.

I want to start by making an assertion that I'm pretty sure is correct. Professor Adams, you proposed a penalty for the party leaders who don't participate. You made a specific suggestion relating to the ability to run advertisements. I think by definition you'd agree with me it would require a statute. There's no non-statutory way of getting from where we are presently to your suggestion. Is that correct?

Mr. Paul Adams: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I take it from that then that you favour a statute. I ask this because the minister suggested there might be a statutory or non-statutory way of getting to the objective laid out in her mandate letter. So you are in favour of a statute.

Let me ask all three of you the same question. Without a lot elaboration because I have other questions, could you just indicate whether or not you are in favour of a statute?

Mr. Paul Adams: Yes.

Mr. Graham Fox: I have no view as of yet.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: In the model of the broadcasting arbitrator, it does exist in statutes. If you were to go that route, then I think you'd have to have it reflected in law. As for the minister's observations, I would be curious to hear more. From reading the blues, I didn't get a sense of exactly how it would work through a grants and contribution scheme. Maybe it would. I couldn't really visualize that outcome.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes. I don't see how you'd get to certain things. You'd have to necessarily amend certain legislation, anything that affects financing for parties, for example, or the way in which broadcasters act during writ periods, because any change to it involves a change to the Canada Elections Act. I just don't see how one avoids that. I'm not saying you have to go down that road, but if you do go down the road of trying to be prescriptive, I think you have to be prescriptive through amendments to the Canada Elections Act. I'm making an assertion and seeing if you thought I was right or wrong about that.

Here's a problem that I think exists with these kinds of discussions. This is a zero-sum game, as Mr. Fox pointed out. It's a zero-sum game to some degree among the various broadcasters that have incentives to try to cause you to watch their network as opposed to getting the coverage online. That suggests to me very strongly, and this is related to my next question, that anything that comes out of this, if there were a legislative process, ought to be a product that is available instantaneously, and is under some form of.... I'm not sure creative commons is the right copyright, but effectively there should be no copyright control over it.

I'm wondering if you agree with that or not. The question is for all three of you. I'm asking it briefly, because I have to move on to my third question.

Mr. Fox.

• (1230)

Mr. Graham Fox: I would agree with that. I think you do need to take some of those decisions out of that negotiation room between political parties and broadcasters, because that's where the zero-sum game exists. I think general rules or principles that come from

elsewhere that are uniformly applied across platforms is a more neutral way to go about it.

Mr. Paul Adams: I agree.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: Yes. I don't think what we're asking our broadcasters to do is too onerous, given it's three hours in one debate every four years, to make it a common licence for everyone.

Mr. Scott Reid: Now I come to the part that I struggled with the most. We can argue over how much time should be given for opening statements and all of the structural issues, but the key issue of who gets to participate and to what degree is the key zero-sum game. Right now it tends to focus, and has for several years, over the participation of the Green Party.

Looking back historically, it is clear that participation or non-participation of a party in the debates has been absolutely critical to the potential success of parties. In 1993, for example, it was critical to the breakthrough of the Reform Party and Bloc Québécois. Had that not been available, the outcome of the elections might have been very, very different.

That is not a neutral question, and the problem we are therefore faced with is this. We can either lock that in statute, or we can leave it up to the discretion of some commission or commissioner, which means that the fate of our parties in the next election, of the Parliament we get, and the policy that comes out of that Parliament are to some degree at the discretion of somebody or some commission. That's a problem for which I don't have a clever response. I'm hoping that maybe you do.

That is my final question, so in the remaining time, I'd be interested in what you folks have to say about that.

Mr. Paul Adams: I would be cautious about overly rigid rules for a commission or commissioner ahead of time. Canada's party system is much more fluid than, say, the United States' or Great Britain's. If you look at the list of parties that have been competitive in this country in the last 25 or 30 years, you're at over half a dozen pretty quickly. The example of 1993 is very striking. Two parties that hadn't existed, at least at the level of official recognition, were the two parties that became the leading opposition parties.

I think, when you look back to the inclusion of Elizabeth May, that was a programming decision made by the networks based on what they thought would make exciting television. I'm not saying that it was a mistaken decision democratically, but those should not be the principles on which those decisions are made.

Mr. Graham Fox: I have two quick comments in response to your question.

First, I think there's an issue with the timing of those decisions. Often they're made either right on the eve of an election or even in the opening days of an election when people are still trying to decide who gets access to which debates. The fact that political parties are directly involved in negotiating with the broadcasters means that you can rely more on.... Tactical considerations of whether it's in my interest to have you standing next to me are more prevalent than if you made the decision months out, before I knew where you would be in the polling versus where I am and so on.

I also think it's a mistake to make decisions based on a specific circumstance in which we have a party and the leader before us. One could imagine that you could come to a set of principles or a set of guidelines that would inform all such decisions around which you could agree. Are there thresholds you can imagine in terms of presence in the House at dissolution, or in terms of where they're running candidates and how many? Is there a threshold in terms of public opinion support six months out of an election that is now set in any event?

I think trying to find a way to say that if you meet the majority of these conditions you're kind of in is a more useful way than having to ask on the eve of an election whether so-and-so will get access to a specific debate, which is obviously problematic.

• (1235)

Ms. Jane Hilderman: I would just largely echo Mr. Fox's comments.

Again the broadcasting arbitrator is interesting, because the criteria are in law but there's discretion. He's been able to, over time, sort of modulate that formula in terms of allocating broadcast time. Again, let's say these are the factors we think are most important, but you have some discretion given the circumstances. Take the point that you can do this before the writ drops, which takes some of the politics out of the room.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you all very much for being here.

I wasn't at the last meeting. I had another commitment, so I just want to express my enthusiasm for this. It's not that it's not a bad idea and stuff. I am really gung-ho.

That last time was just a zoo. That was ridiculous. Democracy and Canadians were not served. We're all guilty. I'm not casting aspersions here. Every political party has its share of the blame for that circus.

I read the blues from the last meeting when I was prepping. I noticed Mr. Reid raised similar issues the last time about statutes and legality. If that continues to be unclear after we've met with the Chief Electoral Officer who has a great amount of expertise, then, Chair, it might be wise for us to spend an hour at least with our parliamentary law clerk to understand exactly where we can go and can't go, and the legal pitfalls of going in one direction in terms of Parliament. I'll just leave that with you, sir.

I have to say that initially I thought a stand-alone commission made a lot of sense. I didn't really give it a lot more thought. Since then it's crept back into my own mind whether or not we really should be looking at setting up a whole new stand-alone entity that really only comes to life once every two to four years, depending on whether it's a minority or majority Parliament, versus keeping it somewhere within the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. The advantage of it being with the Chief Electoral Officer is of course that the partisanship is already removed; it's an agent of Parliament. That person works for Parliament and not the government, and that's crucial.

Maybe within that framework the supports are already there. They can be ramped up as they get closer and ramped down. I'm wide open as to which is the way to go. I wonder if you have any further thoughts on that or you can expand on your preference or your thoughts on whether a stand-alone commission would serve us best or we could save a whole lot of money and be a lot more efficient if we went with an already existing structure and modify that.

Could I have your thoughts, please, from all three of you?

Mr. Paul Adams: My initial thinking in the wake of the IRPP event a couple of years ago was that it should go under Elections Canada because of the existing structures and for all the reasons that you articulate. I put an "or a commissioner" in my remarks, because to me that's not the most fundamental thing. I think the fundamental thing is to have somebody who's not partisan, who is politically neutral, and who serves the interest of the voters. But yes, Elections Canada was my first thought.

Mr. Graham Fox: I think form should follow function. Decide on what you want to give this commission or commissioner as a mandate, and then governance decisions will flow from that.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: I think we ask our Chief Electoral Officer to do a lot, so I would be hesitant to go beyond making sure that the post is filled with a competent person who can help manage the process. In particular, I think our election system is served by being above the fray, and political debates planning tends to get pretty close to the fray. This would have to be something that the committee considers carefully. Yes, Elections Canada may have a role, but it needs to be somewhat insulated from directly planning the debates.

• (1240)

Mr. David Christopherson: That's excellent advice. Thank you all very much.

Before I go on to a broader question, Ms. Hilderman, you raised the issue—and based on my age this stuff is twice as difficult for me to understand—of artificial intelligence and the implications it may have. Can you expand on that a little, so I can get a broader sense of how you see it? I think you're right, but I just couldn't make the argument.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: I wouldn't consider myself fully conversant in artificial intelligence, but I know it's a debate that's coming to legislators. Truck driving is often brought up as the example that's most immediate, but I think it's going to change everything. It's coming to politics, and we haven't thought about it as carefully as we should.

It's already playing out. You have artificial intelligence or machine learning using existing data to select people, through social media or other platforms, to target and test messages. This involves not one or two different messages, but hundreds, sometimes thousands to perfect that targeting. We don't always have a sense of the information in these messages, or a sense of whether the people being selected know why they're being singled out. If you think about the public square or the public discussion, it's very easy for some voices to get extremely amplified, thanks to the artificial intelligence being used to create bots and other things that are seeking out certain points of view and amplifying them, or other people's points of view are not heard at all.

The bottom line is that this is distorting the public square. We're saying that debates are trying to equalize access for the voter, but in the midst of it, a lot of other pieces are going around that we would be remiss not to consider in thinking about the information environment.

Mr. David Christopherson: Right. As for artificial intelligence coming to politics, I know a lot of Canadians who would welcome any kind of intelligence coming to our politics.

The next clear thing for us is going to be the powers and the mandate and how prescriptive we get. The key issues are going to be the dates of the debates, the number of debates, the inclusion or exclusion or participants, the location of debates, the format of the debates, and who will broadcast the debates. That, in my view, captures an awful lot.

Each of you has spoken to one degree or another about not being too prescriptive and maintaining some flexibility. How would you see the mandate? Would you suggest that we say, "You are responsible for the number of debates and you will make that determination", or would you see them being told there needs to be a minimum, a maximum, a range? I'd like your thoughts on prescriptiveness, non-prescriptiveness, nimbleness.

Mr. Paul Adams: I think there should be debates on the major networks in the last weeks of the campaign. There should at least be one debate in each language in the last, let's say, two weeks of the campaign.

Mr. Graham Fox: There's probably a way you can have your cake and eat it too in this case. You could probably select, as Paul was saying, a strict minimum of debates that are available across all platforms where you could be more prescriptive while not stifling other debates that may have a more particular format or more specific audiences. As we saw in 2015, specific audiences are apt to sprout up. We don't want to preclude the mandatory audiences but we want to allow diversity to flourish.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: Ditto. I think Canadians would find it eminently reasonable that they're guaranteed at least one debate, and setting a floor for that, I think, is not too burdensome on parties or broadcasters.

Mr. David Christopherson: Excellent. Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): I would follow that last comment by saying, guarantee at least one debate in each language.

I really have no idea where I'm going to land on this. I really appreciate that you're all here with your opinions, because I hadn't thought of half the points you have brought up.

One of the concerns I have—and I think Mr. Nater brought it up with the minister—is there's a risk of de-emphasizing local candidates and local campaigns when we formalize a debate structure. I think we already have an ad hoc presidential system in our country which doesn't actually have a presidential system. In your opinion, does this make matters worse or does it not have any impact?

That question is for all of you. All my questions will be.

● (1245)

Ms. Jane Hilderman: I'm very sympathetic to that point of view. Samara Canada obviously does exit interviews with departing members because we believe that individual members matter. I think we know for a fact that national debates among party leaders are already a feature, and we think they're a valuable feature. I think the sales piece comes from reminding voters that the local election happens both during the election and then while you're here at Parliament, to remind Canadians that they each have their own member of Parliament and that being involved in the public debate matters.

Mr. Paul Adams: I think many Canadians have shown that these are very important events in making their choices. What I'm arguing for is a continuation of that tradition in a more institutionalized way, because I'm afraid it stands on a rickety basis at the moment. I would hope that it would not in any way disparage political conversations at other levels and I don't see it would need to.

Mr. Graham Fox: I would have to agree. I think we're talking about providing more predictability and structure to something that occurs in any event. I think there is a way to make sure that it doesn't interfere with what happens at the local level.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I want to build on some of the comments from both Mr. Reid and Mr. Christopherson regarding participation.

Mr. Christopherson mentioned the participation of the Chief Electoral Officer. I want to put a thought out to all of us to think about; it might be a Pandora's box, but that's what we do here.

If the CEO is involved, I think the baseline becomes: we have 15 registered parties; they all get equal play all the time, and the whole idea of thresholds is out the window, because the CEO has to be a neutral arbiter. As soon as the CEO says only parties with members can participate, then he is no longer a neutral arbiter from the perspective of elections management. That's a concern that I'm wondering if you agree or disagree with, or how you feel about it.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: Yes, the Chief Electoral Officer recognizes that Elections Canada must serve all registered parties, but I think we also recognize the fact that not all parties are, in practice, equal. I go back to the broadcast piece: not all parties get the same amount of broadcast time. We have agreed, both in legislation and.... It is in some ways overseen in a way in the Canada Elections Act, and the Chief Electoral Officer has a role to say that we managed to find a balance. It's about striking that balance. As you move toward maybe formalizing debate structures, you're probably going to be subject to judicial review, that there will be a challenge in courts. Of course, we'll be testing that reasonableness. We have a long history in Canada of trying to be accommodating within reason. I think that can be struck here, but we may not get it right immediately.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I'm from Quebec, so talking about reasonable accommodation is a whole other topic.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Graham Fox: In support of Jane's point, I would add that the more you get to a place where you have a basket of criteria that parties have to meet, you're not making decisions based on a specific party at a specific time. The more there is public support for that suite of boxes a party needs to tick to be able to access the leaders' debate, I think the less you get into personalities and specific circumstances.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I think we have to avoid a lot of the specific things, like having seats. If you look at 1987 in New Brunswick, Frank McKenna won all the seats, so he would have had a really interesting debate in the next election.

Mr. Graham Fox: I think that's why there needs to be some common understanding of meeting a majority of those criteria, or two-thirds of those criteria. For parties that have regionally concentrated seats, if you require them to have candidates across the country and other things, that may not help either. Finding a way to say they have enough so there's a public case to be made might provide more of a grey area than we'd like, but I think it's the only way to go.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Fair enough.

On another slightly different topic, what besides the debate itself needs to be regulated? What about the use of clips or the availability of the full tapes after the fact? How can people access the debates after? How can the content of that be used? One thing we often see in debates is somebody says something, it gets taken out of context and put in an ad. How do you regulate that kind of thing as well?

• (1250)

Mr. Paul Adams: I think, as Mr. Reid referred to before, the debates have to become a kind of creative commons, and parties can use them, and news organizations can use them, and they do that within the rules and the mores of our system. I wouldn't go beyond that, but I think they should be generally available. They should not be restricted by the networks.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

I will give my last minute or so to Ms. Tassi.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Thanks for being here today.

I have three questions. What I'm going to propose is, I'm going to ask three questions, and each of you answer whichever one you like. Don't feel compelled that, if one has been answered, you can't answer it. If you want to answer the same question, that would be great. It's my way of getting the best out of each of you.

The first is, each of you has mentioned putting people first and citizenry at the centre. How does the commissioner do that?

The second is, what roles do you see for networks and parties in this?

The third is, there has been some question of cost. Would you comment on the justification of the cost in setting up this plan?

Mr. Paul Adams: I think the costs of the debates can be borne mostly by the major networks. I think they have done that in the past, and I don't see any reason why that would change.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I mean the cost of setting up a commissioner and the salary of a commissioner.

Mr. Paul Adams: I'm sorry. Right.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: [*Inaudible—Editor*] debates for people, how important this is, is this a cost the government should—

Mr. Graham Fox: I'm going to do a very quick answer to all three.

First, on what the people want, let's start with research. There's no empirical evidence that I know of where we've ever asked people what they expect out of the debates. I think we would be surprised by the answers, and that should inform the work of the commission, so I would strongly support that.

In terms of networks and parties and their role, I would say the role should be input but not decision.

In terms of public costs, I would say in the grand scheme, given how important these debates are, it's a small price to pay.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: I have a similar note on the research point. We have very little in Canada, as I'm sure you may be encountering.

On the role for parties and broadcasters, I think there's still a significant one, because they are such critical players that they need to feel a sense of ownership so that they want these debates to happen. Maybe they should not make final decisions, but I think, for the most part, they have been able to negotiate agreement, and maybe having an external person to help enforce agreements or arbitrate those agreements would make sure that they are making smart decisions.

I think cost is a factor to be considered. Obviously, we need to invest in our democracy. I often think we get pretty good value for how little we spend on our democracy in Canada, but it's a recognition that, again, you shouldn't have to create a huge apparatus to serve what is a pretty narrow function during an election campaign.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will have our last questioner, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Again, thank you to our participants today. I enjoyed all the conversations.

I enjoyed Ms. Hilderman's comments about the MP exit interviews. As a grad student, I made extensive use of the transcripts, so I do appreciate Samara's work.

I also appreciated your comments in your opening statements about the other issues, about new technologies, about a digital world. I'm somewhat perplexed by Professor Adams' focus on the major broadcasters as almost a centrality, the comment that thou shalt have a major debate on the major networks.

Canadians are less and less turning to the major broadcasters. During the last campaign, CBC was running *Coronation Street* in place of the debates. Canadians aren't turning to the news outlets as their major source of information. Groups such as Abacus Data, for example, showed that more and more Canadians are turning to Facebook and to online sources. I think 51% of Canadians are now turning to digital sources.

For millennials, my generation, which will make up the largest voting bloc in the next election, somewhere around 12% to 20% turn to the TV news as their source for information. Facebook is their biggest outlook. Instead of saying thou shalt have a network debate, you could just as easily say thou shalt have a Facebook debate to appeal to the generation that will be making up the major voting bloc.

It is not that the networks don't play a role; absolutely they do, including CPAC. Mr. Fox, the IRPP report notes the role of CPAC. I think that's something that's very much worth considering.

I guess this is more of a comment, but I welcome your reflection on the role of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as platforms for future debates, which would really address a segment of the population that is growing and is, truthfully, not as politically engaged as it ought to be, despite an uptick in the last election.

I'm not sure if anyone has a comment on that.

• (1255)

Mr. Paul Adams: I'll repeat, first of all, something I said earlier, which is that it is clear the networks and television will be less important over time. That shouldn't lead us to think they are not still the single most important source of news at election time, and that's where most of the eyeballs are.

I'm a pretty motivated viewer for these things but in the last election on a couple of occasions, I knew there was a debate on and I spent five or 10 minutes trying to find where, on my cable box, I could find that debate. Not everybody is as motivated as I am. I think when they're on the major networks, they're available and people know where they're going to find them.

I'm not trying to diminish the digital piece, which I think is important, and increasingly important, but for the moment I think that will happen to a degree, spontaneously.

Mr. John Nater: Even in your comment about the cable box, I'm part of a generation that doesn't have cable. I don't have satellite at home. I exclusively use other devices to view, so I don't use a remote

to find things on TV because I don't use TV. I don't want to belabour this issue because I do have a short amount of time.

I have a very simple question for Mr. Fox. You mentioned that the IRPP at the end of the report mentions their willingness to host potentially another colloquium. Is that something you're planning, and is that something that could happen in the future?

Mr. Graham Fox: We're not actively planning just yet, but we're absolutely open-minded about it. I think we are waiting for the issue to evolve a bit. I think what you're doing as a committee will contribute a lot to that, so watch this space.

Mr. John Nater: On the need to be flexible, the need to be nimble, I think that's a worthwhile comment.

Bearing this in mind, then, from a report standpoint and what we're going to be asked to report on, what side of things would you encourage us to report on in terms of recommendations? How prescriptive ought we to get? Should we simply recommend a commissioner structure, and leave all that to the commissioner, or should we be presenting some degree of rules in terms of participation, in terms of a threshold, in terms of an actual debate itself?

I'll leave that for anyone who is interested.

Ms. Jane Hilderman: Well, at this early point—and maybe I'll revise my comments after we hear from more witnesses on this study—I think the answer is probably have some guidelines for the commission so that they have something to also point back to and say, “This is my job, and I'm doing my job here”, but not too much in the way of overprescribing in the sense of exactly.... I think there needs to be some discretion, some flexibility in the system.

On your first question on platforms, we may get to a point where Facebook or Netflix do want to be involved as a carrier of the debates. Why not? I think we need that openness because the legislation, we find, gets set. It does not get reviewed always, so there needs to be some thought about the framework of what could apply in a decade, 15 years, or 20 years from now.

The Chair: We really appreciate all of you being here. We're going to end the formal time, but I'm sure you would all be willing to stay a few minutes because I think some of the individual committee members might want to talk to you. You had some wonderful input.

Yes, go ahead.

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, I just have a point before you conclude the meeting.

Given that we're talking about democracy and participation, I had raised the issue before, although I don't think we took a decision. You will recall that in 2013 we reviewed the BOIE. Again, because that represents the interests of all members of the House and the three political parties that are recognized, it doesn't cover everyone in the House. We still have independents. The issue of the Green Party—let's call it what it is—in the debates or out of the debates, as Mr. Reid has noted, has often been a point of controversy in the past.

I'm wondering, in the 2013 example, the language we used was that one member who is not a member of a recognized party be allowed to participate in the hearings as a temporary, non-voting member of the committee.

Rather than going to a motion and creating any possible division, I just wonder how colleagues feel about adopting that and allowing the independents to have that opportunity for a say here. They would be members, and they have every right, but they can't vote. Just in the element of fairness I wonder what people's thoughts are, Chair.

• (1300)

The Chair: That was a decision of the House, would you say, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Lauzon): Correct. That was an order of reference from the House.

Mr. David Christopherson: From the House. Okay, but could we still adopt it if we wanted to?

The Clerk: Yes, the committee is free....

Well, the question of membership does not belong to the committee, but participation is something the committee could accommodate.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm in your hands, Chair. I just seek some means of giving those who aren't represented here, given that this impacts on them as much as us, a chance to have a say. That's all.

The Chair: Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): I know Mr. Christopherson wasn't here last meeting, but Ms. May did participate and did ask questions. Perhaps we can continue as a respecting, understanding group and, should they wish to participate, we can continue to allow them on a going-forward basis.

Mr. David Christopherson: Sorry, but if I may, the downside of that is it ends up being a charitable case. One of us has to give up our spot to the poor little member who doesn't have all the rights that we have. We're talking about democracy and fairness right from the get-go. It affects those other folks. Could we not just find a means where they would have a spot in the rotation of questions in their own right, rather than the crumbs of charity from other partisans?

I'll make a motion. I move, Chair, that a member who is not of a recognized party be allowed to participate in our hearings with all rights except that of voting. Word it whatever way you want, but so that they get a right to be in the speaking rotation and participate fully, but they can't vote, obviously.

But I'm open to amend that.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): There would be a member from the Bloc and Elizabeth?

Mr. David Christopherson: They'd pick one collectively. They did that before. They worked collectively together to represent—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Would the two parties pick one representative?

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes. I think there may be independent, independent, but....

The Chair: Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Is it in keeping with the Standing Orders? Are we permitted to do this?

The Clerk: The Standing Orders allow for members of non-recognized parties or independent members to attend all public meetings of the committee. It is up to the committee to decide whether or not they are allowed to participate. If the committee wanted to, they could adopt a motion to assign so many minutes per meeting or change their rotation for the questioning of witnesses. That is up to the committee.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): This raises a lot of questions, and there are a lot of answers we can't provide, not here at this moment in time anyway.

There are questions about how the one person who will participate would be selected. What happens to the rounds of questioning? Whose time is lost? This raises all kinds of questions. Maybe it's something that we should reserve for a future date. I don't know how we resolve it, if it's at a steering committee or during committee business in the future or something like that, but at this point in time this raises a lot of questions that we don't have answers to at the moment and wouldn't be able to come up with in the next two minutes or so.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, then Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Reid: I agree with that. I think the best way of proceeding is, if I may suggest, not to debate the motion that's being presented to us, but rather to debate a motion that has a specific rotation of questioning, which is ultimately what we're talking about here. Put it before the group so that we can look at it together.

I don't have any suggestions as to what it would be, but maybe if Mr. Christopherson does, he could bring it back at our next meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: Actually, I'd rather go to David to address that.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, if you want, I'd be glad to take a stab at trying to find a motion. I could work with everybody and see if we could get some common ground. The worst-case scenario is we bring it in, debate it, and vote. But I'd be glad to do that, Chair, on behalf of the committee.

The Chair: Okay, let's do that.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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