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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1900)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We'll call ourselves to order, please. It's seven o'clock. We're here for meeting number 28 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, under order of reference of Monday, February 10, on Bill C-23.

We have three witnesses in the first hour tonight. We have Susan Eng, from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. We have Pat Kerwin, from the Congress of Union Retirees. We have Danis Prud'homme, the chief executive officer of Réseau FADOQ. All will be giving us an opening statement, but I think we decided we'd start with Ms. Eng.

There's a point of order.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Chair, I didn't know if you were going to get to it or not.

The Chair: I knew you would jump in if I missed it, so Mr. Christopherson, you have a point of order before we start.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks, Chair. Not to take up any time, I have just a couple of issues.

The first one, just to advise you, Chair, is I have raised with the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader our request that we move Sheila Fraser from the evening to the day, for obvious reasons. The daytime has been recognized as the prime time, when everybody is here. We make no bones about it. There have already been discussions that had people and groups moved as a result of that recognition. I have yet to hear back from Mr. Lukiwski. We're hoping for a positive response. It's not a big deal, but certainly I think it's in the best interest of this bill that Madam Fraser, given her importance, be given a spot in prime time, if you will.

The second one, Chair, is a little more serious. I want to take exception to the letter sent by Mr. Lukiwski to you.

The letter that was sent to you asked you to ask witnesses if they have any connection with the Chief Electoral Officer. The letter is here to be read in full, if you want.

First of all, let me say that somehow we've gotten into this notion that the Chief Electoral Officer is some kind of opponent or enemy of the people or of the interest...I will get to my point. This is an important...

The Chair: Get to your point of order. Editorializing on a point of order is not what I'm looking for either.

Mr. David Christopherson: Do I still have the floor?

The Chair: You do, but get to your point of order.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you.

I want to make the case that, number one, I think it's insulting to suggest that being attached to Elections Canada is anything other than a positive item on your resumé, but lastly—

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Chair, on the same point of order.

Mr. David Christopherson: —if somebody wants these questions asked, they can ask them themselves and not ask the Chair to ask their questions.

The Chair: I've not ruled on that, Mr. Christopherson. It's nice to get advance points of order.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I wonder if you could make it a practice of requiring us, when we bring a point of order, to actually deal with the point in the orders that we think is being violated before we get into editorials.

The Chair: Look. This committee has done so well at being really good friends and getting things done by consensus. The editorializing during points of order does cause us some grief. I understand what's been said so far. I had some other hands, but if you're fine with it, I'll just move on.

Mr. O'Toole, be really quick.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Chair, in fairness, I only became aware of this advisory board last week. In my questions to Professor Thomas, I asked him to either clarify or correct a part of his submission to this committee. Had I known about his special role as an adviser, I would have asked for clarification on that as well. Perhaps some clarity could be given on his role on the advisory board, because one of the subjects they're advising Elections Canada on is electoral reform.

The Chair: I think you just did.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): I have two quick points.

On the former, we're quite happy with the schedule as it has already been presented. I appreciate David saying, yes, we'd certainly like to highlight Ms. Fraser in prime time. Obviously she's made comments critical of the bill that we're all aware of. We understand that. I'm sure she'll get as ample coverage in the evening, but the chair and the clerk have gone to great trouble to put together a schedule that I think works, so we're quite happy with that.

With respect to David's second point, let me give you a quick analogy. He said he feels insulted, and that somehow this is inappropriate. If we were the industry committee studying a bill or a piece of legislation on telecommunications, for example, and we had a witness come forward to offer testimony, I would want to know whether or not that witness was giving a viewpoint based on all the facts, or whether or not that witness was perhaps being contracted out by a telco. That certainly has some impact on public opinion, at least on testimony being given, so I think it's quite legitimate to ask anyone.

Not only have we found after the fact that Professor Thomas had signed a contractual agreement with Elections Canada, but we also found out that Mr. Neufeld had a contract for up to \$25,000 as well, which we didn't know in advance, which could have changed some of the testimony we asked for.

I think it was a legitimate request.

• (1905)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Scott, I'd like to get to our witnesses. I know they've come a long way, and they would love to share with us.

Mr. Craig Scott: No, no, exactly; I think I can help the chair.

It seemed that you weren't planning on actually doing this—I hope you weren't—but the point is that each one of our colleagues over there is perfectly capable of asking those questions to the witness, using their time in doing so and in associating themselves with that kind of questioning.

Do you want to put us in the position of setting this kind of precedent, asking the chair to ask these kinds of questions of every witness? Do you want to put this throughout the system of the committees? Do you want this? I don't think you do.

We're perfectly happy if you guys ask these questions, but to ask the chair to do it? No way.

The Chair: We'll go on. Thank you.

We have three witnesses with us tonight. I have introduced them already.

Ms. Eng, I'm sorry. We had to do a little committee business there, but we will try not to let it cut into your time.

Please make your opening statement. You have five minutes or less, please, if you could.

Ms. Susan Eng (Vice-President, Advocacy, Canadian Association of Retired Persons): Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee on Bill C-23, the fair elections act.

CARP is a national non-profit, non-partisan organization with 300,000 members across the country in its 56 local chapters. The average age of our members is about 69. Like most Canadians in this demographic, they vote regularly and have a deep commitment to our democratic institutions, especially something as important as the electoral process.

In preparation for my remarks today, we polled our members for their reaction to some of the major provisions of the bill. Over 3,600 members responded with a very clear message. The vast majority of CARP members, 80%, disapprove of the fair elections act, fully two-thirds in the strongest terms. They see it as a diminishing of democracy, and they want it withdrawn or amended significantly.

On specific provisions, CARP members see reduced voter participation as a bigger problem than voter fraud by a factor of 4:1; 72% do not think vouching is a source of voter fraud; 75% think banning vouching will suppress voter participation; and 80% disapprove of prohibiting the Chief Electoral Officer from promoting voter turnout, and reject the notion that such promotion can lead to bias.

It's worth noting that the specific part of the mandate that is being eliminated is in section 18 of the Elections Act: The Chief Electoral Officer may implement public education and information programs to make the electoral process better known to the public, particularly to those persons and groups most likely to experience difficulties in exercising their democratic rights.

We recommend that this mandate be properly restored.

Among our members, 83% think the bill does not do enough to deal with robocalls. We recommend that records be kept of the script, as well as to whom the robocalls were directed, for five years, not for just one year.

As well, 89% disapprove of allowing political parties to nominate polling officials and allowing the party with the most votes to nominate the central poll supervisor. Given the strong reaction to the proposal, we recommend that all elections officers be appointed based on merit, and not be nominated by the candidates' electoral district associations or parties. A full 75% disapprove of raising the campaign contribution limits.

On the specific issue of voter identification cards and vouching, one-tenth of all members actually themselves either had to have somebody vouch for them or knew of somebody who had to be vouched for. One-third of them used the voter identification cards.

Given the commitment to voting from CARP members and older Canadians generally, I think it's reasonable to suggest that CARP members themselves would be inconvenienced by the elimination of vouching and the use of voter identification cards but not disenfranchised. They would find the necessary identification to allow them to vote. However, they are clearly concerned with the impact on others, especially those in seniors homes or long-term care.

I'm going to mention a person who sent a letter in to a chapter of CARP in Edmonton. She wrote on behalf of her 97-year-old mother who is in long-term care now. It was a letter the content of which she asked us to convey to this committee.

The mother is frail, but fully capable of voting, and has done so regularly with the home's workers vouching for her. She no longer has a driver's licence. The Alberta health card does not have her address. Her daughter handles all of her banking and other needs, so all her mail goes to the daughter. To be able to vote now, she has to ask the home to issue her an attestation of residence, which will also be necessary for all the other residents in the home who wish to vote.

The option of vouching in such a case has the obvious advantage of leaving little to no opportunity for voter fraud, especially as many nursing homes and seniors residences have polling stations right in the building.

We recommend that vouching be reinstated and the use of voter identification cards be made permanent. Having well-trained and non-partisan polling officials will protect against any irregularities.

CARP members are avid voters, and clearly see this bill as detrimental to voter participation and detrimental to a fair and transparent electoral process and to democracy itself. As such, we believe that at a minimum the bill should be amended to reverse the provisions highlighted above. Otherwise, Bill C-23 should be withdrawn.

Thank you very much.

• (1910)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Mr. Kerwin, for five minutes or less, if you could, please.

Mr. Pat Kerwin (President, Congress of Union Retirees of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Congress of Union Retirees of Canada, whose affiliate membership represents a half a million retirees and their spouses, welcomes the opportunity to present our views to the committee tonight.

Voting is an important right and indeed a duty to seniors, as they see it. It is therefore not surprising that retired people have the best rate of turnout to vote of all age groups. We do not want to lose that right. We are concerned that changes proposed in Bill C-23 will mean that some seniors will lose that right. If we, as Canadians, really believe in encouraging and enabling people to vote, we should make it easier for people to exercise their franchise. Instead Bill C-23 will make it harder for some seniors to vote, specifically those who have moved since the last election.

There was a time when the government actually did enumeration when elections were called. I'm old enough to remember that. This didn't produce a perfect list, but it did always get seniors on the voters list because they would be there when people came around. The governments, though, decided they would save money and they'd do it by having people do something on their tax form. The problem there is that not everyone will check that spot off. Also, those tax forms are probably filled out in February, and if the election comes in October, someone may well have moved in between those two dates. This is especially true as people grow older. They often have to move out of their homes at very short notice when health issues come upon them. They often move in with their family, their son or their daughter, or into, as Susan talked about, a residence of assisted living.

A senior in his or her late eighties is not likely to have a driver's licence, probably doesn't have a passport anymore, and a health card in some jurisdictions has your picture on it, but in Ontario at least doesn't have your address. The bills that they would get for gas, electricity, or whatever go to the son or daughter—that's who has their statement—or the residence they're living in, so they're not going to be able to produce these other sorts of identification.

Our basic question to members of the committee is: why should not a daughter or son be able to vouch for their parents to vote if that's who they're living with? I think it just doesn't make sense. The rationale offered by the minister for this change is the need to eliminate serious voter fraud. From what I read—in the press and that—about the study he quoted to prove it, the author says that's not true.

There are also these stories about the bogus collection of vote-at cards that are being used incorrectly. That also appears not to be true. In fact, under the current act, Elections Canada doesn't allow me or you to go in and vouch for 50 people. You have to be in the riding and you're limited to one person. It's not as though somebody can go around doing this with vote-at cards without limit.

To us retirees, the removal of the right to vouch is a solution looking for a problem that has not been found. If concern of future fraud was the real issue, we would think you would increase the powers of Elections Canada to deal with this. Instead, unfortunately, Bill C-23 seeks to lessen the role of Elections Canada down to the point—it's already been mentioned—that they can no longer run programs to encourage people to vote. In every democracy it's important that the rules be set fairly and with due consultation. Indeed, Canadians are often found around the world trying to ensure that elections are fair.

It may have taken radicals to get the vote for everybody in Canada, but the thing that's interesting today is that frequently the criticism of this bill is coming from sources that would normally support the Conservative Party. *The Globe and Mail* hasn't supported the Liberal Party since George Brown left, but they've been very adamant about how they see this bill as being the wrong way to go. On the fraud argument, they said:

As for fraud, Canadians are more likely to think about political insiders misdirecting voters with robocalls than about voters trying to cast ineligible ballots.

They talked about a number of issues, but the really important one was about Elections Canada. This is what they wrote:

The legislation seems to be trying to make it harder for him—

—the Chief Electoral Officer—

—and his agency, Elections Canada, to do their jobs – a non-partisan job that is essential for the health of our democracy.

It just baffles my mind why the government's so intransigent to everyone coming forward saying that there are problems here. Frankly, it doesn't even make sense for you as a Conservative. Seniors tend to vote more for the Conservative Party than any other ones, yet you're going to limit them in voting. It betrays common sense and even political sense to me.

I'll conclude with one last quote from what *The Globe and Mail* said about the bill:

On a matter of democratic principles, which should be above partisanship, the government feels no need to work with the other parties, to consider proof or to provide it, to consult experts or, god forbid, to listen to them. It is government disconnected from the rules of evidence, and it points the way to government disconnected from the rules.

● (1915)

I would hope this committee would take the opportunity to amend this bill and not leave it to an unelected chamber to do it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kerwin.

We'll go to Mr. Prud'homme, please, for five minutes or less.

[Translation]

Mr. Danis Prud'homme (Chief Executive Officer, Réseau FADOQ): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, let me begin by thanking you for inviting the Réseau FADOQ to participate in this consultation on Bill C-23.

The Réseau FADOQ is Canada's largest volunteer-based organization representing people in the 50-plus age group. With more than 300,000 members, it is active throughout the province of Quebec. Its mission is to safeguard and enhance the quality of life of seniors.

The Réseau FADOQ has submitted a brief to the committee concerning Bill C-23. Allow me to present the main conclusions of that brief.

The Réseau FADOQ is shocked by the implications of several of the provisions in this proposed reform by the government. In our opinion, several key elements of this bill will have serious implications for Canadian democracy. Since we are fervent defenders of the "one citizen, one vote" principle, we are asking the House of Commons to reject Bill C-23.

Firstly, we find the provisions that would no longer allow certain pieces of identification or voter information cards to be used as proof of residence particularly upsetting. This would have a major impact on seniors and would systematically restrict their right to vote, since many seniors no longer have a driver's licence, have not renewed their passport, do not have a lease in their name, and so on. There are 45,000 seniors in nursing homes, and 110,000 individuals in seniors' residences in Quebec. Consider the case of those seniors. Or consider the case of seniors living with peer caregivers, who are mostly women aged 60 and over.

How can their right to vote be fully protected under these provisions? This fundamental right would be taken away from thousands of Canadians by the changes in this bill. The government must adopt mechanisms to facilitate access to ballot boxes for these people, not make such access more complicated.

Secondly, we feel the government must obtain a consensus on political fundraising rules so as to guarantee a fair and level playing field for the various political parties and eliminate the possibility of financial fraud in politics. It seems entirely logical, in our view, that such rules should not be unilaterally decided by the party in power without a consensus from the other players in the political arena.

Lastly, we wish to emphasize how incongruent it is to want to limit so-called election fraud and to increase election spending and political fundraising, while at the same time limiting the authority of the only body with the power of oversight in these areas—Elections Canada. What brand of logic is the government applying to justify such a reform? We have to wonder.

The Réseau FADOQ is strongly opposed to limiting the disclosure, communication and oversight powers of the referee charged with safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process. Elections Canada must absolutely be able to encourage people to participate in the voting process so as to guarantee a representative election. It must also be able to disclose the details of investigations that are in the public's interest. And it must be able to oversee the democratic character of our elections, and by the same token, of the elected government.

How can such a reduction in Elections Canada's powers of oversight be justified?

In short, we want a democratic system that is transparent, unbiased and consistent; an electoral reform that takes into account public consultations; enhanced protection of Canadians' right to vote; and an equal voice for everyone. Those aspects do not seem to be a priority in this government's bill.

To summarize, we are asking that the government conduct an adequate consultation of Canadians before adopting amendments to the Canada Elections Act that will affect the rights of Canadians. We are asking that the government amend the relevant provisions to continue to allow the use of previously accepted forms of identification and the use of oaths in order to vote. We are also asking that, as is the tradition, the government obtain a consensus from the parties in opposition as to what amendments should be made to legislation governing political fundraising. Finally, we are asking that the government amend the provisions that reduce the powers of Elections Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

• (1920)

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

We'll go to a seven-minute round, starting with Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you all three witnesses for being here this evening with us.

I appreciate your testimony. I have some questions. Hopefully, we'll get a chance to question all of you, but we'll do the best we can. There is a limited amount of time, obviously.

I'll start with you, Ms. Eng.

I see that your organization undertook a bit of a survey of some of your members. I'd like to ask some questions in relation to that survey.

The first one I'd like to ask because I noticed that among the results, one was that when you asked about the different ways people had voted, 62% reported they had used official photo ID, and you indicated that 34% had used a voter information card—I guess this must have been in the last election, in some of the pilot projects that took place—and that 10% had at some point used someone to vouch for them in the past.

Some people will choose to be vouched for, for various reasons. It may not be that there was no other way they could have voted. They may just have forgotten their ID and didn't want to go out to the car to get it, for example, or it may have been at home and they may not have wanted to run back for it. There are various reasons to explain why someone may have chosen to be vouched for rather than use the 39 pieces of ID. In many cases it's because they weren't aware of what ID they could have brought and so took that option. The same applies in the case of the voter information card. It may have just been something they had with them, so they used it.

I'm curious as to whether you asked your members a couple of questions. Would you have asked whether they actually had the ID available to them to vote, if they couldn't have used one of these methods? The second one is, were they aware of what types of ID they needed to bring to the polls?

Ms. Susan Eng: We did not ask that specific question, because we were concerned with the people who needed the extraordinary measure of either using the vouching.... And frankly, they don't look at the voter identification card as extraordinary. They just thought, "The government sent this to me, and they have my name and address correct, so I'm going to bring it to the polling office." I'm sure they didn't have any greater concern about it, other than that it was convenient and was enough to prove their right to vote.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's fine. I should clarify that it is actually a voter information card, not an identification card; it really isn't ID. But I understand what you're saying. You're saying that they chose that. What you're saying is that it was there and it was handy, so they used it. But it doesn't mean there weren't other options that they could have used.

That's one of the concerns I have. I think it would be an interesting question for you to ask your members whether they were in fact aware of the various forms of ID they could use.

I noticed in one of the other questions you had in your survey, you asked what the best way is to promote voter turnout. One of the most significant responses was advertising and awareness raising by Elections Canada. I think that probably one of the best things Elections Canada could do, which, if they are doing it at all now, they are not doing very well, certainly, is inform people of the where, the when, and the how and, the most significant part, what ID they need to bring.

Looking at some of the research Elections Canada themselves have done, we've had indications that particularly with young people one of the biggest barriers was not knowing some of the logistics. Also, we've had witnesses before this committee who have very clearly indicated that they didn't know, in fact, what ID they could have used to vote.

Given that fact, I wonder whether you would find it useful if Elections Canada were to do a better job of informing people of what IDs they could use, because there are 39 of them.

I listened to all three of you give examples. Some of them may have been hypothetical, but others were specific examples of people you were aware of. I listened to all three, and immediately there were several options that popped into my mind that could have been available to those people, but they probably just weren't aware of them.

Would it be helpful if Elections Canada were to better inform people of what pieces of ID they could bring? That might be able to alleviate some of these concerns.

• (1925)

Ms. Susan Eng: First of all, one of the reviews that Elections Canada did looked at voter turnout. They looked at it by demographic. Indeed, people over the age of 60 vote all the time, approximately matching their age as a percentage turnout. Our members are even more engaged than that and they practically all vote. So when it comes to voting, they've had no difficulty doing it. If they use the voter identification card, it could be simply that the people there accepted it and didn't ask for something else.

In any event, they are not going to be the people who specifically have difficulty voting. If something else was required of them, they probably would have gotten it and used it. The key here is that they're worried about other people, friends they know who are in homes. They know very well that they don't have these second pieces of ID.

By the way, when it comes to many of those items on the list, including things like utility bills, bank statements, and so on, which are sent to your home, all of these companies, utility companies in particular, are starting the process of using e-mail notifications of your bill. So there's going to come a time when you're not going to have easy access to something with your address on it.

They are concerned about it. They see that as a problem. But I would say that our members would jump over any number of hurdles to vote, because they are that avid.

Mr. Blake Richards: Right.

That's why I would submit that, given the 39 pieces—and there are a lot of pieces on there. In fact, I will even point out that if someone has had a driver's licence but it has expired because they're no longer able to drive, they can still use that as a piece of ID as well. There are also, of course, the government benefits. Many seniors receive their OAS or other types of government benefits, so that's another option. Of course, there's an attestation from a residence, if they're living in a seniors residence.

I'd like to—

The Chair: I know what you'd like to do, but you're out of time.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'd like to do something, but I guess I'm out of time, and I will not be able to.

Thank you very much for your answers.

The Chair: We'll move to Mr. Scott.

You're starting off, and then—

Mr. Craig Scott: I'm just thinking about expired IDs being used as identity, but I guess if that's the case, that's the case. I'd love to hear the proof for that.

I'm going to take about four minutes.

The Chair: Great. I'll let you know when we get there.

Mr. Craig Scott: Great.

Thank you, everybody.

I want to probe a bit more.

When Mr. Neufeld, who testified here, spoke to the press, he estimated that between 100,000 and 400,000 people might well have used VICs and/or vouched. I didn't know where these figures came from, so I contacted Elections Canada, and asked if there was a combination of reports that they could look at, because I don't recall this being in the Chief Electoral Officer's testimony.

My understanding is that the numbers I'm about to present are ready and are being translated, so in the next day or two this will be on their website in both English and French. We do know that 805,000 people—this is in all their reports—were eligible to use VICs, voter information cards, in seniors homes and care facilities. We can estimate that the voter turnout was around 65%, because for lower age bracket seniors, it's about 75%, and for higher age bracket seniors, it is about 60% or 65%. According to data in the 2011 report, after the 2011 election, 73% of that group of 800,000 eligibles, the 65% who voted, actually used the VICs.

The bottom line is that out of the 805,000 who could use VICs, the estimated figure is that around 380,000, which is close to 50%, did use the VICs. Does it surprise you at all that in seniors residences and long-term facilities such use would have been made? Would you suggest that this is a good reason we would want to use VICs in general across the country in future elections?

●(1930)

Ms. Susan Eng: I'm happy to answer that question.

The example of the woman who told us about her 97-year-old mother is actually replicated across the country in nursing homes and seniors residences. I think we have a stereotype of people in nursing homes as being pretty incompetent. While that might be true for a few of the residents, in fact the vast majority are quite able to vote. Elections Canada has facilitated their ability to vote by putting polling stations right in the building, with the home's administrators facilitating it and wheeling people down to the polling stations, etc. There is a good effort made to make sure that people are able to vote if they have mobility challenges.

The issue of identity was covered by the issue of vouching. That made it easier for a lot of people who, while they're well and capable of voting, you're dealing with a difficult group to move around, and so it's a lot easier if they can be vouched for. That makes sure that they're not going to be prevented from voting.

I must say that I know very well that the on-the-ground voting exercise is very unpleasant sometimes, with some campaigns actively trying to suppress the seniors vote by making it difficult. I'm aware of situations where people stand outside the polling stations and interfere with the process thinking that people in such circumstances are easily distracted from their purpose. It's important that the easier we make it for this population, the better.

The Chair: Four minutes.

Mr. Craig Scott: Thank you.

I'll pass it over to my colleague.

The Chair: Madam Latendresse, for the other part of this round.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will continue in the same vein as my colleague. I have a question for Mr. Prud'homme.

Earlier, you brought up a figure I was not familiar with. Unless I'm mistaken, there are currently 45,000 individuals in nursing homes, in Quebec alone.

According to our understanding so far, one of the main issues affecting seniors in particular is not identification per se as much as the ability to prove where they live. It's not hard for me to imagine that, with 45,000 people in nursing homes and 110,000 people in seniors' residences, those individuals in particular will have more difficulty than others to prove their address on election day.

Is that right?

Mr. Danis Prud'homme: Yes, absolutely.

If we look at Quebec, 22% of the population is aged 65 and over, while the Canadian average is around 14%. So these are two different perspectives when it comes to aging. Canada will eventually reach that percentage. For the time being, we are second in the world, behind Japan, in terms of population aging.

It goes without saying that we may have to deal with these issues more than other provinces. Indeed, there are 45,000 people in nursing homes and 110,000 in private residences. In Quebec, most of the informal caregivers are women aged 60 and over. They're often over 70 and live with the individual they are caring for. So they don't have an address, as the home is not theirs.

So oaths are used—as in the case of passports—or voter cards.

Today is an election day in Quebec. I voted this morning. They accepted my voter identification card. I tested it myself. I don't see why the card could not be used in Canada if it can be used in a province.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Can you elaborate on the types of problems seniors living in nursing homes or residences have with proving their identity? Our colleagues like to talk about the 39 IDs. However, the reality is that someone could go to the polls with 20 pieces of identification and still not be able to vote if they are unable to prove their address.

What's the reality of the people you represent when it comes to their ability to prove their identity and their address?

Mr. Danis Prud'homme: Every time the way to identify ourselves or to prove our address is complicated further, additional stress is created. We know that, when people age, they experience more stress over things that may have seemed insignificant when they were younger. That's how we are made. So, any time difficulties and stressful periods are added, an individual will be more uncomfortable. As a result, they will often not vote because the process is complicated or stressful.

We want citizens to participate in society, regardless of their age. We want them to live and die in dignity across the country. Of course, access to voting has to be facilitated for them, so that they can remain full members of society. If there is a lack of information, if information changes and if certain things are no longer being done on the federal level, but are done in a province, problems arise.

As I was saying this morning, in Quebec, the identity card can be used at the polls. If the situation is not the same in Canada, a senior becomes confused. They no longer understand why the government is changing the rules. So there are some issues when it comes to that.

• (1935)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simms, please, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Thank you to our witnesses today.

There are several aspects of this bill you've addressed that are equally as important, each and every one, but vouching seems to be the issue here. I agree, because the average age in my riding is well over 50, and I have a lot of seniors residences, so this is a big thing.

If I can start with this one question, and before I am cut off, it's actually related, but Canada Post is now eliminating door-to-door delivery. It's a big issue for you three, isn't it?

Voices: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: And you're hearing a lot about it. This is going to have a mass migration of people from street addresses to post office boxes. Is that correct?

Voices: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: This is going to be a big problem, because in the past, as you know, if you do have just a post office box.... I have one. It's to the point now where I get my bills electronically, so I now have to go to my utility and get a paper bill in order for me to vote. I can't imagine what it's like for many people in residences, in their own dwellings, who are of the age, say, around 60, or in their late fifties or that sort of thing. It's going to be very difficult for them to do.

I'll quote from your input, and thank you, because some of the points are very good.

Mr. Kerwin, I'm going to quote from yours. You say, "A senior in his or her late eighties is not likely to have a driver's licence, probably doesn't have a passport anymore, and a health card in some jurisdictions has your picture on it, but in Ontario at least, it doesn't have your address." That's one very important point that's left out of this debate all the time. You say that the bills for the utilities that they use, like electricity and gas, will be in name of their children or the assisted living residence.

A lot of times, seniors of that age are vouched for by their kids.

Ms. Eng, I'll start with you for your comment on that.

Ms. Susan Eng: Yes, you're absolutely right. For the whole list that we talk about, it's that they're not 39 different things; many of them are the same thing, such as utility bills from various different utilities. As soon as we get into online billing, which is coming and is enforced under threat of paying for a paper bill and, of course, the elimination of home mail delivery, it's going to make it that much more difficult to have ready at hand something that's going to have both photo ID and your address on the same card.

It is an important feature. It highlights the concerns that our members have about all of the provisions of the bill. I wouldn't say it was our members' most important concern, however, because the most important concern is actually the transparency and the fairness of the whole process. The highest number of responses was actually in relation to parties who won the last election nominating the most senior of the local election officials.

It's the process that matters, not the specific numbers of people who would need to be vouched for. That just represents the fact that there is a group of people who will necessarily be disadvantaged. They don't really care if it's a huge number or just 100,000 or 500,000 people who will be affected. They think that process should not be so unfair as to actually suppress voters.

Mr. Scott Simms: Before I get to Mr. Kerwin, there's this one other tidbit. I've been involved in elections now as someone on the ballot for 10 years, and longer than that as a volunteer. Would you agree with me when I say that for people who are above the age of 50, that voter—I know we keep being corrected that it's a voter information card, but to these people, this is an identification card.

Ms. Susan Eng: It totally is.

Mr. Scott Simms: There are so many people who really rely on this and truly believe, it's ingrained within them, that this is their ticket to vote.

Ms. Susan Eng: Yes. I—

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm sorry, but I'm just going to go to Mr. Kerwin.

Mr. Pat Kerwin: Yes, because when they go to wherever the place is where there's a ballot, that's how they know they're supposed to be there. They all bring it with them because they say this is what shows that they have the right to vote there.

This is what we're dealing with. Identification that may exist may be out of date. This is what I was trying to say. They've moved because they got ill or maybe they've even moved between provinces since the last time they were enumerated. I think this is really important.

On the point you make about going to Internet billing, Rogers was going to charge me \$2 to get my bill at home every month, so I did switch to online billing. All the companies are going to do this now that Canada Post is putting up its bills. Also, this problem with Canada Post generally, with regard to any home deliveries, is another big issue.

• (1940)

Mr. Scott Simms: Monsieur Prud'homme.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Danis Prud'homme: Between the three of us, we represent about 800,000 individuals. When we say our members have some issues with the current bill, I think we know what we are talking about. We meet with members of our various chapters.

Our network has 840 chapters across the province. People are telling us that, whenever they get wind of developments, they talk about them and give us comments. Being recognized by someone is, in many cases, what they need because that's the easiest thing for them.

On the other hand, you said that the card I mentioned was not an ID. However, that's what it is considered to be. On the card, it is clearly indicated that, if your name is not on it, you do not reside at the address in question and you will not be able to vote. So this card is used in our province as an ID, whether we like it or not. That's an issue for us.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms: I like what you said earlier and I'm probably attributing...I can't remember who said this, but someone said this is indeed a solution that's looking for a problem that doesn't necessarily exist. I think that was you, Mr. Kerwin.

Do you think this system could be improved, given some of the irregularities that happened? It's not chalking it up to fraud; it's just irregularities as we've seen in some of the Supreme Court musings about it a short time ago. They're not all about fraud. Are you legitimately surprised that they just threw the whole vouching system out, given the importance of the people you represent?

Mr. Pat Kerwin: Absolutely, yes.

I would like to see this committee or Parliament talk about the problem of voter turnout. That's the issue. It's not just for old people. I've already said we tend to get out to vote. This is the issue you should be addressing and trying to find a solution for on a cooperative basis.

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

Mr. Scott Simms: It was a pleasure to talk to you today. I'm of the party of George Brown, by the way. On behalf of George and others, thank you very much.

The Chair: I always look like the mean guy. I try to do it as smoothly as I can.

We're going to go to Mr. Lukiwski, for a four-minute round, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you very much.

I have a number of questions, but only four minutes, unfortunately.

I want to start with Ms. Eng.

I'm not sure if I heard you correctly, but if I did, to me it's quite serious. I thought you said, and please correct me if I'm wrong, that you are aware of voter suppression campaigns against seniors attempting to vote. Did you say that, or something like that? I'd like some clarification.

Ms. Susan Eng: No, I'm not saying that.

I've seen at voting stations the idea that you can disrupt the process and make it more difficult for a group of people to vote, on the theory that if you make it disruptive enough, some people will just turn around and go home. I have seen that happen. I'm not sure how widespread it is, or, in fact, if it happens everywhere, but it is one of those kinds of things where we should not be putting more barriers in front of people who may be fragile, who maybe can't wait in line that long, and so on. Rather than make it more difficult for them to vote, we should make it easier for them to vote.

That was my only point.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Sorry to go back to that again. Specifically, what have you seen? Because that's why there are elections officials at the polling station, to prevent that sort of action from taking place.

Ms. Susan Eng: Well, that's why the elections officials are important. They can't get around to everybody. They're not as well trained as they could be in all cases, and that's why when you're worried about the irregularities—as to a previous question—you want to make sure you have well-trained elections officials who are in fact impartial and appear to be impartial as well. I think that's why that role is so important.

It can happen that people are disrupting the voting process. That's why I'm just saying that any kind of measure that allows people to vote without interference, that makes it easy, that makes sure they can guarantee their own identity, should be allowed rather than restricted.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'll leave it at that, but clearly if you've seen campaigns, or if you've seen instances where people were trying to disrupt someone from voting, that should have been reported immediately.

Let me just point out, because it seems a lot of witnesses are saying that the voter information card should be used as legitimate IDs, that it's certainly far, far from perfect. I'll give you one example, but I could go on for the rest of the meeting with other examples.

In my first election, in 2004, several—when I say several, it's probably in excess of 100 to 200—people in my riding were given wrong information on voter information cards. Why? They lived in a certain area, but they picked up their mail in a neighbouring riding. That happens quite frequently throughout Canada. They picked up their mail; there was a voter information card, and it had the postal number from their Moose Jaw address. Based on postal numbers in identification, they were told to go to a different polling station. Luckily none of them did, because most of the members of those border communities had been long-time residents and know where they're supposed to vote. They know they didn't vote in Moose Jaw. They know they went to a polling station, but the point is all of the information was incorrect.

There's more than just my example. There are 308 ridings across Canada, many of them in rural Canada, that would be exactly the same situation.

I think there's a responsibility for all individuals. Yes they have the right to vote, and I will defend that to my dying days, but I also believe the sanctity of the vote has to be protected, and that means that you have to be able to prove proper identification and proper address.

• (1945)

Ms. Susan Eng: I do agree it is important to have identification and to prove who you are and that you're entitled to vote at that station. In fact, the kind of irregularity, or inefficiency, or deficiency that you're talking about can apply to all of the pieces of ID that you're talking about. You know utility bills can be sent to the wrong place. Many driver's licences are out of date as to the address, and so on. It's not as if every one of those pieces of identification and their systems are absolutely perfect.

I think that there is work to be done to make sure that the voters list is more accurate, more up to date, so that the voter identification cards are correct. It's up to the citizens themselves to try to correct that information on the list. But given that there are possibilities there are deficiencies and so on doesn't mean we should throw out the process all together. I think what we want to do is improve it so that it's more reliable.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you all very much for taking the time to be here today.

I have to tell you, listening to Mr. Kerwin, I can't help but sort of reflect on this bizarre world we're in right now dealing with this bill: there's actually a formal bill in front of the House that is likely, within weeks, to become law; the Chief Electoral Officer was not consulted and is opposed; the previous Chief Electoral Officer has said they're opposed and there should be major changes or withdraw it; the Commissioner of Canada Elections was not consulted and also says that the bill should be either dramatically changed or withdrawn, and the previous Commissioner of Canada Elections, and we can go on.

It's also a shame, and we've seen this already with other presentations, aboriginal women who were here earlier come to my mind.... It's a shame that we aren't doing exactly what you said, Mr. Kerwin, looking at a series of proposals and talking about them, putting them to people and asking if it helps. Does this help people to vote, does it make it easier, does it strengthen our democracy?

Instead you're here today, as were the aboriginal women who were here recently, fighting just to get a fair shake in the election and trying to defend yourselves against the new law that's going to hurt you.

The whole scenario that we're in is just completely mind-boggling. I mean you almost have to be in Parliament to believe that this could be the real world.

Having said all of that, I want to focus a bit on the voter information card, because more and more, we're getting people coming in and saying that it either should be a voter identification card, or we should actually be providing a voter identification card free of charge by the government to the people to help them to vote.

Here's my point about the voter information card. The information that's on it comes from all the various databases that Elections Canada could reach into. The current Chief Electoral Officer has said that the most accurate document, certainly more than driver's licence, is the voter information card.

It makes common sense. You don't have to be an expert in the field. If you have one database to draw on, and that's the driver's licence database, you're only going to have accurate information as good as that one database. But when you're reaching into virtually every other database that Elections Canada can tap into, the odds are that this document is going to be the most accurate and the most up to date. That's what's so frustrating. Something that would be a help to Canadians, a voter identification card, is being rejected by this government, and we know it's deliberate.

Do you have further thoughts on the voter information card in terms of the current proposal that's in front of us? What do you think about the idea that Elections Canada and the government could undertake providing people with an actual ID card, exactly what many Canadians on election day believe that they have in their hand? That's for whoever wants to jump in.

• (1950)

Ms. Susan Eng: I think it would be a big help, because we wouldn't be arguing about the weakest link in the electoral process, that of identifying yourself and not being able to use whatever else you have in your possession for identification. In circumstances where, because of the stage in your life you no longer have the other pieces of ID, there should be something that you as a voter could use.

Indeed in Ontario, for people who don't drive, they are offering government-issued photo ID for those individuals. They partner with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, for example, so that people can get an ID card.

I guess Canadians have always resisted government ID cards, but I think at this point, because it's required for everything we do, including exercising our franchise, it would probably be better received than being told that all the pieces of information that government sends to them are not useful. I think that's an important thing.

The only other point I want to add here is that even if the vouching and voter information card provisions were withdrawn from the bill, there are other significant pieces of the bill that are equally important. We would not be content with just having that one section eliminated.

Mr. David Christopherson: Excellent.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

We'll go to Mr. O'Toole, for four minutes, please.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, it's tough getting everything done in four minutes, so I'm timing myself.

Thank you all for appearing, particularly on behalf of your members. They're certainly engaged, and I appreciate your presentations.

I'll ask questions of two of you quite quickly, and I'll try to keep us on time.

First, Mr. Prud'homme, certainly all the interested political watchers in Canada, once they've finished watching us here, will turn and watch the Quebec election tonight, maybe a few more than are watching PROC.

Can you vouch in Quebec? Does Quebec have a voter information card that can be used as identification to vote at the polls today?

Mr. Danis Prud'homme: Yes. As I said this morning, I did use my voter information card basically to vote. That was good enough.

To answer the other question, yes, you can be vouched for basically in Quebec.

What we're looking at here is—

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Now, I have to correct you there. It's my understanding that in Quebec, beyond residency, you actually have to show an intention to remain in Quebec. Some of us have followed the students at McGill who certainly would not be getting a voter information card of any type, nor would their status qualify them to vote.

Mr. Danis Prud'homme: With regard to the students, you're right. With regard to seniors, if they live in long-term care or if they live in private residences, they can be vouched for. I'm not talking about the students; I'm talking about my members basically.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Okay, not the students.

Mr. Danis Prud'homme: It's in the process right now with the students—

Mr. Erin O'Toole: So limited vouching would be the best description?

Mr. Danis Prud'homme: No, prior to this election, students didn't have any problems. I can't explain why this time around they did have problems.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Sure. Absolutely.

Ms. Eng, you're Toronto based. Certainly after the Quebec election maybe the Toronto mayoral election is one of the most interesting and watched races in Canada. Can you vouch in that municipal election on election day in Toronto?

Ms. Susan Eng: I don't have the answer. I don't know.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: The answer is no.

My second question goes a bit to voter engagement, and Mr. Kerwin, you raised that good point. We've heard testimony from some witnesses that ID or administration requirements actually have nothing to do with engagement. People decide either before or after to vote.

I have a suggestion, Ms. Eng. We've heard a lot about groups—seniors, students, first nations—that some people are suggesting would be disenfranchised by the elimination of vouching, even though the Neufeld report, which outlined significant errors of over 50% in vouching transactions in 2011, did not connect those 120,000 vouching cases to those groups.

A question I would ask of you, and maybe put out to your members, is this. In terms of annex C of the Neufeld report, the list of the 39 IDs we talk about—a shelter, soup kitchen, student or senior residence, long-term care facility, and we talked about the letter or attestation from them—if Elections Canada actually were to leverage this, could you not foresee a program where we would reach out through your network to inform administrators, to inform band councils, to actually, when the starting gun goes off for an election, produce an entirely new address-driven piece of identification to actually increase voter participation in all of those disenfranchised groups under the current rules, if Elections Canada took it upon themselves?

Do you have any comments on that suggestion under the rules now?

• (1955)

Ms. Susan Eng: To my knowledge, the staff at many of the seniors homes and nursing homes already put in extra effort to get people out to vote, to help them vote, to set up the event, all to make it easier for their residents to vote.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Can I jump in there quickly?

Many of the homes are owned by long-term care companies that own several of them.

Ms. Susan Eng: But the staff are pretty good about making sure

Mr. Erin O'Toole: But if we didn't engage directly with them at that high level, Elections Canada, encouraging that form of producing that ID for all of its members, they'd have it in hand.

The Chair: Thank you. I'll allow an answer.

Ms. Susan Eng: That would be one more step that you would ask them to do instead of the time that they allot on voting day to actually vouch for their residents. It means having individual letters of attestation for each resident, which they'd have to set up, and the person would still need another piece of ID. Sometimes they may not even have that other piece of ID.

The point is that you're asking the staff to do a lot more than they already do, which is already beyond what they have to do in long-term care, as such. So, they are taking good time away from those other duties as it is. Adding that additional burden would seem to be an unnecessary step just so the whole issue of vouching can be eliminated.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you all for coming. We will suspend for a couple of minutes while we change panels.

Mr. Prud'homme, thank you for coming on election night. I know you'd rather be home and watching, but we'll all get there eventually tonight, as well.

Thank you.

• _____ (Pause) _____

• (2000)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order. We're in the second half of tonight's study.

We have, from the Canadian Federation of Students, Jessica McCormick.

We have, from the Canadian Teachers' Federation, Calvin Fraser.

We have Élise Demers, and you're going to have to tell me the name of your group, please. My French is not as good as it should be, and I will apologize for that.

We're going to start off with opening statements just as we do in all our rounds.

Ms. McCormick, you have suggested you'll go first. We will do opening statements of five minutes or less and then we'll do questions from the members.

Thank you.

Ms. Jessica McCormick (National Chairperson, Canadian Federation of Students): I'd like to thank the committee members for allowing me to testify this evening.

My name is Jessica McCormick. I'm the national chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students, Canada's largest and oldest student organization, uniting more than 600,000 students across the country.

Since Bill C-23 was tabled, students have been clear in their calls for substantial amendments to the bill. The elimination of vouching will directly disenfranchise many young voters.

Additionally, new restrictions on Elections Canada's ability to do outreach and promotion are of great concern.

Changes to voter identification regulations that will eliminate the use of vouching will serve as a barrier in accessing the polls for many groups, especially students. More than 100,000 Canadians used vouching in the last federal election. In fact, I am one of those thousands of voters who had many pieces of identification that are accepted by Elections Canada, but none that also included the address of the riding where I was living and voting. Luckily, Canada has a system in place to ensure that I wasn't denied my right to vote. However, if this bill is passed and vouching is eliminated, I know that many Canadians like me will be blocked from the ballot in the next election.

Under increasing debt loads, young Canadians are less likely to own a car and therefore less likely to have a driver's licence, one of the few pieces of identification accepted that includes both a photo and an address.

Students also move surprisingly frequently between home addresses with their parents, on-campus housing, or subletting an apartment for the summer, for example. Maintenance of one's current address on official ID is difficult and costly. In fact, Elections Canada noted in a survey of electors, following the 41st general election, that 40% of youth had moved at least once in the two years prior to that election.

Many young Canadians live with roommates, and while they are paying for utilities, the accounts may be in a roommate's name. For those with bills in their names, it is common to receive bills and notices online now rather than in the mail, and since electronic bills that are printed out at home are not acceptable forms of ID, proof of address becomes difficult.

Broad sweeping changes are being proposed with the argument that they will prevent voter fraud. However, evidence that links voter fraud to the vouching system has been greatly exaggerated and often refuted by the investigators of the reports cited by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

Despite low voter turnout, Canada's youth are highly politically engaged and deserve an electoral system that empowers us rather than suppressing our vote. Eliminating vouching and requiring strict proof of address is simply not a system that supports young Canadians' right to vote.

I warn you that if Bill C-23 is adopted in its current form, then the government will purposely deny students across the country our fundamental right. Currently under section 18 of the Canada Elections Act, Elections Canada is empowered to strengthen our democracy through public education and meaningful partnerships that enhance voter participation, as well as conduct research to improve voting.

When compared to peer nations, Canada already has some of the lowest voter turnout. In the last election, only 38.8% of youth ages 18 to 24 cast a ballot. In other words, 1.8 million young Canadians did not vote.

Since the last election, Elections Canada has been making efforts to better understand why turnout among this group is so low, and to develop and promote evidence-based strategies to increase youth voter turnout. For over a year the Canadian Federation of Students has engaged in a series of consultations and meetings with Elections Canada to expand and promote voting possibilities for youth. However, due to Bill C-23, a pilot project to expand polling stations on campuses, targeted engagement and advertising campaigns for youth, and mock elections to foster habits of young voters to cast a ballot may all be eliminated.

The changes contained in Bill C-23 will only serve to further cement the notion that politicians do not care about issues that affect youth. This decline in democratic participation is a clear threat to a healthy democracy and must be meaningfully addressed, not enhanced.

Studies have shown that electors who vote in their youth are more likely to vote throughout their lives. By eliminating current programs and efforts that address low youth voter turnout and curtailing options for new programs, the government is encouraging a generation of uninformed and disengaged citizens.

One must ask what the intent of this fair elections act really is. If the intent truly is to protect our democracy, then you must listen to the nearly 100,000 Canadians who have already added their voices to the opposition, and seek to understand the realities of students' lives. If our goal is to protect our democratic institutions and let people vote, then our efforts should be focused on reducing the barriers to voting, and not creating more.

Thank you.

• (2005)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fraser, you have five minutes or less, please, for your opening statement.

Mr. Calvin Fraser (Secretary General, Canadian Teachers' Federation): Mr. Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present our brief and our opportunity to share our concerns about Bill C-23 before this committee.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation is an alliance of 17 organizations representing nearly 200,000 teachers from coast to coast to coast.

While we agree in principle that the Canada Elections Act should be updated to address issues such as robocalls and unsolicited phone

calls, we're concerned that this bill goes well beyond what is needed to support democratic participation.

Throughout Canadian history we've seen many amendments to the elections process to make voting easier, not harder, and to encourage more Canadians to vote in a federal election; however, Bill C-23 is the first that aims to restrict voting rights and discourage people from voting. If passed, Bill C-23 will end Elections Canada's civic literacy program in Canadian schools, undermine electoral participation, and stifle public debate.

Many of our teacher members have been involved in preparing their students to participate actively in their democracy through the student vote program organized by CIVIX. Teachers are also involved in national democracy week, in which CTF is a partner with Elections Canada.

In the 2008 and 2011 elections, Elections Canada provided 100% of the funding for the student vote program. In the last federal election, 15,000 Canadian teachers engaged 563,498 students in student vote in 3,750 schools. Since 2003, CIVIX has engaged 9,000 schools and three million students from across Canada in a parallel election process.

Based on this unquestionably successful program, why is Bill C-23 intent on preventing the promotion and education of students about their democratic right to vote? What message does Bill C-23 send teachers and students as it includes barriers, obstacles, and restrictions for so many Canadians?

Furthermore, we also ask why Bill C-23 is being rushed through the House of Commons without proper debate and consultation with the people of Canada whose rights are being affected. Democracy works best through debate, consultation, consensus building, and respect for diverse voices. The right to vote is at the heart of our democracy. Any attempt to change legislation governing voting rights must be done fairly and with great care in a non-partisan manner. As teachers, we welcome and invite the diverse voices of children, parents, and families in the education community.

Here are the recommendations of the Canadian Teachers' Federation:

We recommend that Bill C-23 be referred to a non-partisan committee consisting of equal representation from each political party with representation in the House and that the committee use a consensus decision-making model.

We recommend that Bill C-23 be amended to ensure that Canadian elections are a transparent process and that Elections Canada's educational programming, including full funding in support of civic education, the student vote program, and other public education outreach initiatives be maintained.

We recommend that Bill C-23 add the voter information card, VIC to the current list of valid ID and provide the authority and funding to Elections Canada to enable it to hire and fully train all election workers for elections well before each election, and to make the voter registration list and ID checking even more accurate.

If passed, Bill C-23 will build potential partisanship, create an unbalanced elections process in Canada, and will further alienate an electorate whose participation rates are already low. We therefore invite the committee and the government to either amend the bill as we and others have suggested, or withdraw it in its entirety and then initiate a fair process for reform.

Thank you.

• (2010)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Ms. Demers, please, you have five minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élise Demers (Advisor, Citizen Engagement and Training, Table de concertation des forums jeunesse régionaux du Québec): Good evening and thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am here today on behalf of the Table de concertation des forums jeunesse régionaux du Québec—round table of regional youth forums of Quebec. Our name is difficult to pronounce, even for francophones. Today, I will bring forward the concerns of regional youth forums with regard to Bill C-23.

Among the mandates of regional youth forums is to encourage the civic engagement of young people and to play an advisory role with regard to youth. We are funded by the Secrétariat à la jeunesse du Québec—Quebec's youth secretariat.

During provincial and municipal elections, we also have a financial partnership with the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec. I want to point out that we have never had a formal or informal partnership with Elections Canada. We are also helping organize an electoral simulation in Quebec. That initiative is called Voters in Training, and it is also funded by the youth secretariat and the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec.

For the federal elections, the Voters in Training project is undertaken in partnership with Civix's Student Vote. Similar programs exist in a number of countries, including the United States, where the program Kids Voting has been around since the early 1990s.

Youth forums are engaged in activities throughout the year to increase young people's interest in politics. During an election, we have outreach activities for young voters to stimulate their vote and inform them of the various terms and conditions of voting.

At the latest federal election, 37.4% of young Canadians aged 18 to 24 voted. Individuals aged 25 to 35 did a bit better, with a turnout of 48%. It is of the utmost importance to work on youth voting

because studies show that young people who vote as soon as they become eligible for the first time are likely to continue going to the polls throughout their life. So working on youth voting is akin to working on the voting habits of all Canadians.

Why are young people not voting? Two types of factors need to be considered. There are factors related to motivation, such as political interest and relevant knowledge. There are also factors in terms of voting access, such as being on lists, lack of an ID or unfamiliarity with voting procedures.

The National Youth Survey measured the relative impact of all those factors on the decision to vote. That survey concluded that obstacles related to motivation had as much, if not more, of an impact as obstacles related to access.

Currently, at Elections Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer is already providing information on the technical aspects of the vote. So it's a bit difficult to understand the desire to legislate to prevent him from doing that, either through citizenship education, vote promoting public campaigns, or information on the main barriers to voting or aspects related to motivation.

Elections Canada must continue to be able to provide citizenship education because that is an effective approach. Elections Canada has commissioned an external review of the Student Vote program. The study shows that the program has a positive impact on many factors associated with voter turnout. Among other things, the program increases the young participants' knowledge, their interest in politics, and their perception that voting is a civic duty.

Of course, some young people can use the excuse that they did not receive information on where, when and how to vote. That's probably true for those who are living outside their home region, especially for students.

However, we need to be a bit careful with those figures. We could put up posters all over the country, but if someone is not interested in politics, they could still say that they did not know where, when and how to vote. Claiming that information was not received sometimes conceals a feeling of incompetence or disinterest. After all, young people and people in general who have voted said in 98% of the cases that they thought the voting process was straightforward.

Vote promoting public campaigns also play an important role. They help create a healthy social pressure to vote. Here is what I mean by that.

Research indicates that people are sensitive to their environment when deciding to vote. Young people are especially susceptible to influences from their family, peers or society.

In Quebec, the Chief Electoral Officer has assessed those vote promoting campaigns. According to the results, 34% of people said that advertisement encourages them to vote. The fact that over a third of people are influenced by an advertisement is quite significant. The federal government itself uses those social ads, as they are called. For instance, an advertisement against cyberbullying is currently being aired.

I will now present our conclusions with regard to the bill.

We share the government's concern over providing quality information to voters and its willingness to make the actions taken as effective as possible. However, we think it is entirely possible and desirable to continue working on both the obstacles related to motivation and those related to voting access.

First, it's important to revert to the original wording of section 18 of the Canada Elections Act. That way, Elections Canada would maintain its flexibility to independently carry out campaigns more focused on motivation, information or both, at its discretion.

Second, we feel that the organization's research component is crucial, and that its findings must continue to be accessible to the general public and to organizations that, like ours, are working on the country's democratic health. That research helps ensure that the actions taken are effective and consistent with the known causes of participation or lack thereof.

● (2015)

Finally, education must remain at the heart of Elections Canada's actions, be it through projects carried out by the organization itself or through the funding of other non-partisan organizations dedicated to education and citizenship. I remind you that we are not part of that group of organizations.

The promotion of voting and democracy—be it through friends, family members, teachers, independent organizations or political parties—is critical for avoiding the free fall of the participation rate among young people.

We sincerely hope that the parties will be able to agree to amend this bill in order to work together on the country's democratic health.

Thank you for listening.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

We will go to our second round. Mr. Richards, you are up first, please.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you to all of you for being here today.

I'm going to focus my questions on our two student and youth representatives here tonight, Ms. Demers and Ms. McCormick.

There are a couple of things I'd like to ask about. The first one is brought on by some comments that you made, Ms. Demers, about what leads someone to vote. You talked about motivation being one of those things. I certainly agree that motivation is an important part for someone choosing to vote or not. I think political parties and those of us who are candidates have a very important role to play in creating that motivation by bringing forward issues that young people or other voters care about. We can encourage them to vote based on the issues we're bringing forward and create that interest and the motivation.

That is one of the things we're responsible for. I think Elections Canada is responsible for, which it currently isn't doing a very good job of, providing that information, which is another thing that's important for people to have to be able to vote.

I want to quote from some research that Elections Canada conducted after the last election, talking about young non-voters and trying to determine some of the causes of their not voting. They discovered that for 25% of them, not knowing where to vote was one of the causes; for 26%, it was not knowing when to vote; and for 19%, it was not knowing how to vote. I suspect that a lot of them would be people who were not aware of different types of ID that would be available, those kinds of options among a list of 39.

Before I ask you to comment on the second question, I'd like to ask both of you if you have any comments on whether you feel it would be helpful for Elections Canada to focus a little better on their role in providing that information about when and where and how to vote, and whether that might help to facilitate more students voting.

● (2020)

[Translation]

Ms. Élise Demers: I will begin by answering your question on the role played by political parties.

I do think that political parties have a very important role to play in this process, but I don't think we can rely solely on their work. Since the 1970s, the membership in political parties has been declining steadily. That's a current reality. I am talking about Quebec, but I assume the situation is the same in the rest of Canada.

Young people are now less likely than their elders to be reached by candidates. They have a 40% likelihood of being reached by a candidate during an election period, while that figure is 75% for people aged 75 and over. That's a fairly significant difference. They're definitely more difficult to reach. That work should be done jointly by parties, independent organizations like ours and Elections Canada.

I will now talk about the quality of the information provided. It's entirely possible to focus the promotion campaigns simultaneously on information regarding the location, the time and the way to vote. As I mentioned in my opening statement, most of the time, using a lack of information as an excuse for not voting may conceal a lack of interest in politics. Yes, the information could be improved, but young people's knowledge will be increased through education on citizenship. That way, at election time, they will definitely look for the information themselves if they did not receive it at home—for instance, if they are in a student residence.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: Ms. McCormick, I only have a little more than three minutes. I'm trying to keep it fairly brief so I can get my second question in as well.

Ms. Jessica McCormick: Yes, absolutely. I agree very much with what my colleague has said. I think that there certainly is a role for politicians to play in all this. That being said, I think that a lot of the youth disengagement that we see right now is as a result of not seeing the issues that matter to them being reflected in the candidates who have put their names forward, or in the platforms of the political parties, for that matter.

I'd be interested in knowing what report you're referencing when you cite the lack of information. The one that I'm looking at says that only 7% of the people who didn't vote in the last federal election cited a lack of information, and there were other factors at play. I think that Elections Canada certainly does a lot to provide information on where and when and how to vote. Of course we can always improve on the measures in place, but I think there is a role to be played there in talking to youth, people who don't generally vote, about the importance of engaging in democracy and the value of casting a ballot. I don't think that is necessarily primarily a role for political parties. I see Elections Canada playing a significant role in that education and outreach.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, and I don't disagree. I really believe that the focus should simply be on how to vote, and where and when to vote.

I don't have a lot of time remaining, but I would like to talk a little bit about the second question and hopefully there will be time for you both to answer.

With regard to the ID, there are 39 choices. That's one of the things I think Elections Canada needs to do a far better job of informing young people and others about. One of the things for student voters—and Ms. McCormick, you talked about student voters—who are away at post-secondary institutions, they are sort of in that unique situation where they almost have a choice to make as to where they're going to vote. Essentially, it centres around them deciding what they consider their residence to be, whether they consider it to be where they are residing at school or whether their residence is actually their parents' residence that they'll return to back home. When they make that decision, obviously, their ID would centre somewhat on that decision.

So, if they make the decision that their residence is in fact their parents' residence, you've indicated that doesn't seem to prove who they are. Generally, the problem is proving something that shows their residence.

Now if they choose their parents' residence, obviously, if you're saying that all their information is going to their parents' residence, they can choose to vote by special ballot through their parents' residence. But, if they're in fact saying that all their correspondence goes to this other residence, including probably their voter information card which would also go there in that instance, they have to then make a decision about what they're going to do.

If they live in residence, obviously they can get an attestation of residence. If not, then they have other choices as well that they can use to vote at school. So, they have to make that choice and then that choice determines where their ID would come from that would prove their residence.

I didn't get a chance to ask the question, but I think you see where I was going with that.

● (2025)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Scott.

Mr. Craig Scott: I'd like to start with Jessica McCormick and Élise Demers.

Elections Canada said about a year and a half ago that they were planning to add polling stations on a number of university campuses. It was obviously with some intention to increase engagement and student voting for a lot of the reasons you've given.

Do you think if they go ahead and do that in 2015 it will work better if two things also happen, that they make sure to enumerate the student residences on the campuses and they allow voter information cards to be used as one of the pieces of ID? Do you think the whole experiment in increasing student vote would go a lot better if VICs were part of the picture in 2015?

Ms. Jessica McCormick: I do think that would, in fact, be the case. It's not a bad thing that we are taking a look at the Elections Act. We should be taking steps to improve it and create a more flexible system of voting. The survey that was done after the last federal election cited a number of different reasons why people weren't casting a ballot. Many of them were that they were too busy or that they had obligations at work or school. Having polling stations on campuses eliminates some of those barriers.

We should be trying to reduce those barriers. Having polling stations, having opportunities to use the voter information card, for example, as a proof to cast a ballot, those are ways to reduce the barriers to voting. I think that many of the measures that are contained in Bill C-23 would in fact create more.

[Translation]

Ms. Élise Demers: Polling stations in educational institutions were tested for the first time during the Quebec election, which is actually wrapping up this evening. About 200 polling stations were set up in educational institutions and enabled 400,000 young people to exercise their right to vote at their school.

What was extremely interesting about this experiment was that it clearly did not take place on the same day as the vote, since the schools were closed on that day. It took place at the same time as the vote at the returning office and a special review commission. A young person could come to the polling station, vote and use the opportunity to put their name on the list at the right location, in case they had moved a while ago. Afterwards, they could also vote in their home constituency.

Let's use the example of a young person from the Gaspé Peninsula who is studying in Montreal. They came to their college in Montreal and voted outside their constituency. They were given a blank ballot, on which they wrote the name of the Gaspé candidate. That ballot was then delivered and counted that same evening.

Some 54,000 young people took advantage of that opportunity. Of course, the authorities had to advertise that option, as it was the first time it was made available to students. This Quebec experiment is extremely interesting. You will be able to analyze it because the votes will be added up soon.

Regarding the actual identification process, I must say that I am not an expert on that. I cannot say whether the identity card should be kept or not. However, I can say that any measures likely to restrict the ability to vote should be considered with the utmost care, and decisions should be based on reports of actual fraud cases.

• (2030)

[English]

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Fraser, one of the things that has come out in our hearings from the Chief Electoral Officer and others is that the time has come to get parties out of the process of appointing or helping in the recruitment of election day workers. One of the biggest problems caused by the fact that parties are involved is that Elections Canada cannot fully get involved in the recruiting until partway through an election campaign. It gets in the way of really high-quality recruitment and advanced training.

What would you think of a program that would start well ahead of the of writ dropping, because we have fixed election dates now, that focused on teenagers and began to involve them in a civics education program about elections at the same time as recruiting them to be E-day workers? Do you think those two would be beneficial, at least on the civic education side, even though Elections Canada would not be able to do that as a result of this bill?

Mr. Calvin Fraser: One of the recommendations we put forward was to have a long advanced training program and to have workers there who are well trained. I think what's at the core of your question and at the core of a lot of non-voting is the concept of perceived fairness. When the vote is central to our democracy, there must be perceived fairness in addition to actual fairness in every aspect of that process.

My colleague to the left of me here mentioned a few minutes ago the democratic health of the country. Nothing saddens me more than to have a student come to me and say, "Why should I care? They're all the same." So clearly there is a role for parties, but equally clearly, there is not perceived fairness in their homes. It seems to me this is absolutely the wrong time to discourage participation and to structure anything that contributes to that perceived unfairness.

Mr. Craig Scott: I'll give the last minute to my colleague.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, it's less than a minute, but we'll

Mr. David Christopherson: That's fine.

What I wanted to do was have an opportunity to give a shout out to the McMaster students union, MSU, in Hamilton. They're undergrads. Spencer Graham, the vice-president of education and David Campbell, the MSU president—I know him well—went to the trouble of sending me a letter. The reason I want to mention them this time is to thank them for that.

I also want to ask if each of you are encouraging other organizations. We're down to the wire. We have a few days, a few weeks, if we're really going to make the government back up or at least change things. And the credibility you have at your organizations...they made the statement in the MSU letter that promoting youth voting is the surest way to ensure the future of our democracy. How true. I just hope all of you are continuing the outreach personally and through your organizations. If you have any time to comment on what you're doing, that would be great.

Thank you so much for being here. You're making a difference.

The Chair: Since Mr. Christopherson has left you no time, hopefully you can get that answer in under Mr. Simms.

That's not to take your time from you, Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: The pressure is on me.

You can address that if you wish, but I'm going to quickly lead off with....

Ms. McCormick, you mentioned something earlier about the fact that a lot of the debate here has been the fact that for a lot of people one of the biggest reasons they don't vote is they don't have the information as to where, when, how to vote, which is being put out there by the government. That's not really the case, in your opinion, at all. There's a far more subjective matter here about disengagement of the youth vote in this country. In the letter you wrote, "With youth voter turnout in the 2011 federal election at just 38% our organization has done substantial work in collaboration with Elections Canada...".

What are some of the things you told Elections Canada as a way of bringing that 38%, at the very least, to above half?

Ms. Jessica McCormick: I would say it's not just me that is saying it's not a lack of information issue; it's actually in the reports from Elections Canada that say only 7% of the people who didn't vote cited a lack of information.

In terms of what we had been doing with Elections Canada, prior to the tabling of this bill, to encourage youth voter turnout, we had been working with them to develop a strategy to implement polling stations on campuses and identifying larger campuses to run a pilot project. We'd also been involved in multiple consultations with Elections Canada that involved other civil society organizations and youth organizations to discuss some of the reasons that youth don't often vote and how Elections Canada can develop a more robust outreach and education strategy to tackle some of those issues.

Among them, and there were many, one was trying to encourage members of Parliament to play a role and really speak to youth, in terms of the issues they bring forward during elections, and political parties to do that as well. Those are just some of the things we had worked on.

• (2035)

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Demers, would you like to comment on that as well?

[Translation]

Ms. Élise Demers: Not to sound like a broken record, but I really believe that if a young person is interested in politics and feels they have a duty to vote, they will find the necessary information. Elections Canada could assess its youth outreach strategies. The agency could look at using campuses, for instance, to get that information out to young people. Campuses are places where young people abound. I think such a measure could vastly improve communication with young people at election time.

I think we need to be cautious about the figures showing that young people cited access to information as the biggest obstacle. As I told you, motivation ranks a bit higher than access to information when it comes a young person's reasons for voting or not.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, both of you.

Mr. Fraser, I turn to you.

Mr. Fraser, I'm a big fan of the student vote program. I think it's fantastic. I've been elected now since 2004 and certainly in the last election it was really good, not just because I won, but because I think it actually engaged citizens. I can even admit that my son campaigned for another party, but that's beside the point.

It says in your submission, "Teacher satisfaction was very high, with 95% of participating teachers saying they would very likely participate in the program in the future." Something else I found very important was, "Over 60% of parents reported an increase in their own political interest and knowledge as a result of their child's participation in the program."

The way the program works is we're not talking about just student elections; these are actual parties with the actual candidates who run in the federal elections running parallel. Because of the kids' involvement, the parents were also inspired to be involved as well. So there's a heightened inspiration to be involved in this and now it's gone.

Would you care to comment?

Mr. Calvin Fraser: It will be gone if this bill passes. We're certainly hopeful that it won't be gone. Those statistics are gathered by Student Vote Canada when the activities take place. They follow things up with a survey.

We also discuss it with our teachers at various activities. The support is extremely high. Indeed, one of the comments we would get is what you just said. The students go home and bring it into the homes. So the students are talking with their parents. It becomes a much broader discussion than in just a classroom. It's a very powerful process all the way around.

Mr. Scott Simms: To our other guests, you also touched on the public awareness campaign through Elections Canada which would obviously be eliminated. Elections Canada also provides that third party independent status. By doing this, it certainly gives it more legitimacy than just leaving it up to the individual parties. Obviously, the parties with the biggest budgets get to inspire more people. Therefore, it kind of creates an unfair place to be for the smaller parties indeed.

Would you care to comment on that?

Ms. Jessica McCormick: I think that I've already said that I believe Elections Canada has a significant role to play outside of just the political parties taking on that for some of the reasons you've outlined. Beyond that, I think that youth and student voters oftentimes don't identify with a particular political party, but I think would value the information and the reasons it's important to engage in democracy even if they aren't a member of a party.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's trending downward, isn't it? Would both of you agree on that? Students involved in youth political groups has declined steadily over the past 20 years. Would you agree?

• (2040)

Ms. Jessica McCormick: I don't know any specific percentages, but given my involvement in my students union at my university, I do know that the societies that existed that were ratified under our students union, there were fewer members of those groups.

[Translation]

Ms. Élise Demers: Student involvement is shifting away from political parties in favour of civil society organizations. We're seeing that phenomenon all over the world. Although that doesn't mean it won't ever be possible to find a balance between both types of involvement, it is a reality.

I'd like to point out, if I may, that provincial elections agencies are following a different trend these days. They are focusing more on educating citizens and communicating with the general public. Elections Manitoba is one such agency that ran a project of that nature during the last election. It has a Web site, <http://citizennext.ca>, aimed at encouraging parents to bring their children with them when they vote. I encourage you to check it out. It's quite something because it targets that interaction between young people and their parents that my colleague was talking about. Because the child sees the voting experience first-hand, it sparks the discussion at home and their parents talk to them about voting.

When families or friends talk about politics, it encourages voter turnout. When you study people who do go out and vote, you realize that they discuss politics with their families and friends. And taking action to capitalize on that is immensely valuable. I think we should really take a closer look at doing more in that connection.

[English]

The Chair: You're well past your time, Mr. Simms. I was letting a good answer go on.

We're going now to a round of four minutes, starting with Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you, to the witnesses.

Mr. Fraser, would you agree that citizenship has duties and responsibilities?

Mr. Calvin Fraser: Absolutely.

Mr. Ted Opitz: So how do you answer when a student comes to you and asks, "Why should I care?"

Mr. Calvin Fraser: As a federation we answer in a number of ways.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I'm not asking about a federation. I'm asking you as an individual. How do you answer?

Mr. Calvin Fraser: I think that's a red herring for this particular bill, but I certainly explain to students how deeply I care and why I think it matters to their future.

Mr. Ted Opitz: So you spur dialogue by doing that in discussion.

Mr. Calvin Fraser: Absolutely.

Mr. Ted Opitz: It would be interesting to note that in “Discover Canada”, the citizenship guide for new citizens, there is a fairly extensive section on citizenship, its duties, and duties to vote, and the various ways to vote are there.

Also, Ms. McCormick, for 30 years Elections Canada has been educating the public, including students, on how to vote. So how do you explain that trending down since they have been doing this for three decades?

Ms. Jessica McCormick: I would say the problem I have mentioned in a couple of answers is not simply that there's a lack of information, but a lack of reflection in the candidates and in the parties on the issues of youth. I think some other members have cited that as well.

When you don't see a candidate who stands for election, somebody for you to choose that is talking about the issues that matter to you, or political parties more generally that are talking to issues that matter to youth, not just during elections but in between, then there's not that vested interest in engaging in democracy.

Mr. Ted Opitz: All across the board, on all sides, we all do try to reach out in between elections—those of us who are incumbents—to reach out and talk to people. But my time is limited so I'm going to move on.

You did say 100,000 students were vouched for, but across the country it was approximately 120,000, so I'm having a hard time understanding why only 20,000 other Canadians, non-students, were vouched for.

We're having a little trouble with your numbers.

Ms. Jessica McCormick: I actually didn't say that. I said more than 100,000 people were vouched for. I didn't specify that it was students.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay, fair enough.

You have a constituency because you're the national chair. What is your role in this dialogue spurring discussion, educating your constituency as to how to vote, and what ID they may require? I'm sure you didn't come here today without ID. You would have to have approved ID just to get into this building.

What leadership responsibilities do you perform as the national chair?

Ms. Jessica McCormick: We are a membership-driven organization. At our two national assemblies each year students bring forward their priorities as engaged citizens, whether it pertains to party politics or other issues that matter to students. Then I carry out those priorities in my day-to-day responsibilities, one of which is making it easier for students to vote.

Over more than the past year, since the last federal election, I have been engaged with Elections Canada in a number of consultations and meetings to talk about strategies to increase youth voter turnout among status polling stations on campuses.

• (2045)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Great. So you've been involved. Thank you.

My time is short so, Mr. Chair, I'm going to give my last minute to Mr. O'Toole.

The Chair: You can give him the 30 seconds you have left.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Quickly, then, Ms. McCormick, you express some concerns about e-bills not being acceptable. I'm pointing now to annex C of the Neufeld report, really the list of 39 IDs. It has three specific IDs, apart from all the others—the student ID, correspondence from a school, the student residence attestation.

This document is actually controlled by Elections Canada. They add to it. Have you made submissions about e-bills being added? It's actually Elections Canada that expands this list going forward. Have you made that submission that e-bills would be important to add to this?

Ms. Jessica McCormick: Yes. In our consultations we have talked about those 39 pieces of identification that are options, made suggestions for other ones that should be available, and talked about increasing the education so people know which is possible.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: So could it grow over time?

Ms. Jessica McCormick: Certainly, it could grow.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you.

We'll move on to Madam Latendresse for four minutes, or a little bit more it seems.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: That's very nice. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your comments today.

There is a specific issue I'd like to address, and that is the way my colleagues opposite and the Conservatives in general use low voter turnout among youth to justify their efforts to muzzle Elections Canada. They claim that the only reason young people don't vote is that they don't know where or how to do it. Basically, they are saying that Elections Canada can communicate solely about that, even though nothing is stopping them from really focusing on the issue to ensure that everyone has the information and that Elections Canada can continue to offer all of the same programs it does now.

Ms. McCormick, you said your organization works directly with Elections Canada precisely to set up programs that encourage voter turnout among young people. Did I understand that correctly?

[English]

Ms. Jessica McCormick: Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Ms. Demers, do you work with Quebec's chief electoral officer in a similar fashion?

Ms. Élise Demers: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Do agencies like Elections Canada and Élections Québec, as well as youth groups such as yours, have a deeper, more practical understanding of the factors influencing voter turnout among youth?

Ms. Élise Demers: Our visions are quite complementary. Research on voter turnout underlies much of what our organization does. We read research done by people like André Blais and François Gélinau in Quebec. Mr. Gélinau is a researcher who does a lot of work on the subject.

We also take into account what's being done internationally when it comes to planning activities that reflect what the research shows. It's important that our efforts complement those of Elections Canada, other relevant agencies and the members here this evening.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Thank you kindly.

I am going to pick up on what you just said about international efforts in my question to Mr. Fraser.

In your presentation, you talked about the importance of a non-partisan review of the reforms being made to the Elections Canada Act. I found that quite interesting and would like you to elaborate, if you would.

[English]

Mr. Calvin Fraser: Our perspective on non-partisan analysis of course is centred on the classroom and centred on the discussion that takes place with students. We work very hard to keep conversations, dialogue, as the honourable member has mentioned, non-partisan while we explore very thoroughly the issues.

We are very gratified to have the support and work of Elections Canada in providing material for that, because in fact it is free from bias and it is material that we can take into classrooms without fear. They've been very good at helping us find material for classrooms and very good at working with us to devise new approaches to actually bringing information to students and to helping students find the information on voting and the value of voting.

One of the projects they helped us with this year was a project by a grade 5 class entitled, "Why I Vote", which goes right back to a previous question.

Another was a project here in Ottawa with students who prepared all kinds of items, including videotapes, a debate between parliamentarians, and a critique, and they used Elections Canada materials in a non-partisan way.

• (2050)

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Thank you very much, Mr. Fraser.

[English]

The Chair: You can have a quick question.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: In light of what witnesses have told the committee up to, and including, today, I would like to give a notice of motion. It reads as follows:

[English]

That the Committee, in conjunction with the current study of Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, request that the Library of Parliament create a summary of the evidence presented to the Committee on this Bill, and that this summary not include any recommendations to the Committee on how to proceed with the legislation, and that this summary be presented to the Committee on or before Tuesday, April 29, 2014, and that this summary of the evidence be subsequently presented as a report by this Committee to the House of Commons

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go back to Mr. Reid, please, for four minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: In the first round of questioning, my colleague Mr. Richards made reference to obstacles to voting, and Ms. McCormick, you were wondering what his source was. I had the chance, so I asked him. It was Elections Canada's 2011 general election national youth survey report, which can be found on their website.

The study, which looked at a random sample of 1,372 youth, found some interesting things, and I'll just share them with our witnesses.

First of all:

The study found that motivational and access barriers were equally important in terms of their impact on voting.

I continue to quote:

The most commonly cited reasons for not voting related to personal circumstances - being too busy with work, school or family, or travelling at the time - and insufficient knowledge about the parties, candidates and issues.

Some of those obstacles, I would suggest to you, have to do with people being unaware of such options as advanced polls, voting at the returning office, and voting by mail, all of which are items that Elections Canada does not publicize as well as it could. It seems to me that the changes we've made to section 18 of the act that actually enumerate some of these responsibilities would go a long way towards achieving that.

I note as well in the report, and I think this is significant:

The most important access barrier for youth was lack of knowledge about the electoral process, including not knowing about different ways to vote and not knowing how or when to vote, followed by difficulty getting to the polling station, difficulty providing identification or proof of address, and not receiving a voter information card.

It seems to me there are a number of problems that relate to Elections Canada not doing a very good job of informing people of their rights, and this brings me to the question I actually have.

We know that one of the documents that Elections Canada permits as a form of information confirming that you are who you say you are and that you live where you say you live is an attestation of residence, which could be issued by a residence association for someone who is in residence on campus.

As a partial solution to this problem—I don't suggest it's a silver bullet—what do you think of the idea of Elections Canada being mandated or obliged to send a draft of an attestation of residence? They could design a form so you could put your name on it and go down and get it certified by the appropriate authority. They could make sure that those get distributed to people living in residences. Perhaps they could be made available as well at university centres and so on for those who live off campus.

I'm interested in what you think of that as a possible way of ameliorating one of these problems.

Ms. Jessica McCormick: Well, I certainly don't see anything wrong with exploring other options for proving where you live. That would help only those students who live on campus, and of course, I am talking more generally about students who can live anywhere. But I think that rather than looking at things that we can add or change at this point, we do have a fairly good system in place in vouching that I have used myself and that my friends have used and

other students have used. I think it works quite well to do exactly what you've stated.

Students right now can get proof from housing if they wish to vote, but many students who use vouching are often the ones who live off campus and are faced with many of the problems that I outlined in my remarks.

● (2055)

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, we'll stop you there. Thank you.

I thank our witnesses for coming tonight. Thank you for your great help in presenting evidence to this committee, and we excuse you. Thank you.

Members, we are finished for this evening. We will see you all in the morning.

This meeting is adjourned.

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