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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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• (0935)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

We have three witnesses with us this morning: Professor Henry Milner, from Université de Montréal; Alex Himelfarb, former clerk of the Privy Council; and André Blais, a professor at Université de Montréal.

I'll say a few words about each witness.

[English]

Mr. Milner is a research fellow at the University of Montreal, where he holds the research chair in electoral studies, and is co-publisher of *Inroads Journal*. He has also served as professor of political science at Vanier College in Montreal, at the Université Laval in Quebec City, and at Umeå University in Sweden. He has written extensively on the topics of citizen engagement in democracy and on Quebec nationalism. He is the author of *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work*, and *The Internet Generation: Engaged Citizens or Political Dropouts*.

Mr. Himelfarb, as you all know, started in the Canadian public service in 1981, when he joined the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada. In 1999, he became Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage. In 2002, he was appointed to the dual role of Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet. In June 2006, he was appointed ambassador to Italy and high commissioner in the Republic of Malta, and as a permanent representative to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Programme, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Rome.

[Translation]

Professor Blais is from Université de Montréal. He was on Parliament Hill in February or March to give a presentation on the various electoral systems.

[English]

He is the leader of the Making Electoral Democracy Work project, and the chair of the planning committee of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems program. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a research fellow with the Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship,

[Translation]

the Centre interuniversitaire de recherche en économie quantitative,

[English]

and the Center for Interuniversity Research and Analysis of Organizations. He is also the past president of the Canadian Political Science Association.

[Translation]

Now, without further ado, I'll turn the floor over to you, gentlemen.

We'll start with you, Mr. Milner.

Prof. Henry Milner (Senior Researcher, Chair in Electoral Studies, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to give my presentation in English, but I'd be happy to answer any questions you have in French.

[English]

I'm really happy to be here. I've been working on this dossier in one way or another for much of my adult life, looking both at Canadian efforts to change the system as well as the way the system works in various European countries, Australia, and New Zealand. I've been an observer at elections in many of these countries, especially Germany and Sweden, and I'd like to share some of my experience with you.

I did prepare a brief, a memoire. In the 10 minutes accorded to me, I can only give highlights from that, but I'll certainly be happy to answer more detailed questions afterwards.

I've had the privilege of testifying before committees of this House, the Senate, and the House of Lords in Britain on fixed election dates and other subjects related to elections. I'm happy that you've all found time during this nice summer to discuss what some people think is a rather dull subject—or so I've been told. I'll try to make it as interesting as possible.

My general position—and it's not new—is that moving toward proportional representation would be an improvement for a country like Canada and most countries, but not necessarily all. We'd have to be very careful, however, about the form of proportional representation we choose and learn from the experience of other countries. Based on that, I've come to favour the position we call MMP, the mixed member proportional or the compensatory system, with the technical details that would be most appropriate for Canada, which I hope to discuss in the question and answer period. It's been discussed and considered in several of our provinces. It came up from the Law Commission.

We now have a lot of experience from different countries about how it works. I'd like to talk more about the concrete experience and less about the theoretical advantages or disadvantages—though clearly, I have some strong views.

I think a proportional system is better for two fundamental reasons. First of all, it's proportional, so the outcome is more fair, given people's views. Second, from the point of view of individuals, compared with our existing system, it gives everybody a greater incentive to participate. Your vote counts as much as everybody else's. Right now, about half of our Canadian districts are generally won by the same party. Very often the polls show that one party is way ahead, so that people in those districts have no good reason to think their vote is going to count. We have long-term data on that. It's more complex and so on, but basically you're more likely to get higher participation rates in a proportional system. Those are the two basic, simple, logical reasons why it's better.

The only possibly negative effect of a proportional representation system is that we will have far more minority or coalition governments, but as I argue in my brief, in a system where people expect such governments, rather than seeing them as exceptional, they actually are more positive. In the brief, I try to show that based on the five criteria that have formed part of the mandate of this commission, proportional representation, specifically the MMP form of it, best conforms to all five criteria.

At the end, I'll explain how MMP works in about 30 seconds, if there's still anybody who doesn't understand it, because it seems so very complicated. But the fundamental, concrete reality of MMP that can't be ignored is that Canadians can say they have an acquired right to having one person represent them in the legislature, and all other proportional systems don't do that.

I don't say it's necessary in principle. We have wonderful different kinds of proportional systems working all over Europe, but in a country where people are used to having one person represent them, and where that form of representation has come to be seen as an acquired right, I'd be reluctant to take it away. I would be prepared to do it if there were no possible system that would give us more proportional results without taking away that particular relationship. However, MMP does that. It's the only one that assures everyone, just like the existing system, that there will be one person in the House of Commons who represents them.

• (0940)

I don't know how much time I have, so I'm just going to take—

The Chair: You have about five minutes.

Prof. Henry Milner: Well, that's very nice.

I'll come back to some of the other aspects that I'll now have time to raise, but let me just tell you that if I were talking to someone who didn't know anything about electoral systems except our existing system—in which they know that if they vote for somebody and that person gets more votes than anybody else in the district where they live, that person will be elected—they may think that means that the overall result is proportional to the party support, which it isn't. Very often it is quite distant from that relationship. I think this is televised; I imagine there are many people listening to me who think that.

Let us think of the alternatives. The simplest proportional system, as you know, is to take the whole country, and each party provides a list. If 40% vote for a party, 40% of the seats go to that party. That's the way they do it in the Netherlands. Most countries that use a proportional system use lists, but they're based on regions.

MMP works as follows. As I said, the crucial principle of MMP is that you still have one person in the legislature who represents you. I'll give you a concrete case; I think that's the best way to describe it.

Let's imagine that here we are in Ottawa and let's say that in greater Ottawa there are ten seats in this Parliament. When the election comes, everybody in greater Ottawa has two votes: one for their local representative and one for the party that they prefer. For these 10 seats, the district is divided into six districts—Ottawa West, Ottawa Centre, Ottawa South, Ottawa East, Vanier, and so on.

There are six districts, which would be bigger than the existing districts—perhaps about one-and-a-half times as large, in terms of the number of voters. Those six seats would then be allocated to the person who wins them. Let's say that four of those seats were won by the Liberal candidate, one was won by the Conservative candidate, and one was won by the NDP candidate. We now know where the six seats are.

Now, there are four more, and the four more come from lists submitted by each party. The percentage overall was 40% for the Liberals, 30% for the Conservatives, 20% for the NDP, and 10% for the Greens. The Liberals have won four seats: 40% of ten is four seats, and so the Liberals have the right number of seats. The Conservatives have 30% and have won one seat, and 30% of ten is three, so two from the list go to the Conservatives. The NDP has 20% and it has one seat, so it gets one seat from the list. The Greens, who have no seats but have 10%, also get one seat from the list.

The overall result is proportional. I've made it nice, with rounded numbers. It's never quite so neat, but the basic principle is the same: each party has an exact number of representatives proportional to the support that it has in this district, and everybody has their own MP. Everybody has one person of whom they can say: "I voted for that person. If I have a problem that I need my local representative to deal with, there is that one person who can't say no."

On the other hand, let's say that there may be some local Greens who basically would like to have had somebody to represent them, but there was nobody elected from their party. Now they do have somebody, and instead of going to their local MP, who might be a Liberal or a Conservative or an NDP, they can go to the Green member from greater Ottawa to bring up their particular concerns.

That's how the system works. There are many aspects to it that I'll be happy to talk to you about. We have the experience from New Zealand, from Scotland, from Germany, and from other countries. We can learn from that experience and apply it to Canada, and that's what I suggest we should do.

Thank you.

• (0945)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Milner.

We'll continue with Mr. Himelfarb for 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Himelfarb (Clerk of the Privy Council, 2002-2006, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear on this important issue.

While I don't have the credentials of my colleagues to the right and left of me, I have been a long-time proponent of electoral reform as a key element of democratic renewal. I recognize that design matters, whatever system one opts for, but I propose to talk more in my introductory remarks at least about the general merits of moving to a more proportional system.

While no electoral system is perfect, I believe the comparative evidence is strong that a more proportional system increases democratic participation and knowledge and trust in our political institutions. Since most democracies have now adopted some form of proportional representation, there is no shortage of evidence, although admittedly some of the evidence is ambiguous, such as that on turnout.

The choice between a winner-take-all system such as ours and a proportional system is often characterized as a choice between local accountability and better representativeness. In fact, however, we can and should choose a system that provides both. Of the many commissions in Canada that have examined electoral reform—and there have been many—all have recommended greater proportionality, and all have proposed systems that at the same time maintain local representation.

In a federation such as Canada, it is inconceivable that our electoral system not include local representation. From where I sit, that means some version of either single transferable vote or mixed member proportionality. Indeed, either approach not only ensures that the outcome of elections more closely reflects how people voted, but arguably, also strengthens local representation. In either system, every citizen has more than one representative and is far more likely to find one who shares his or her values and interests. And because every vote matters to the outcome, no riding can be taken for granted because it is safe or be ignored because it is out of reach. Because every vote matters, in that sense, every riding matters. There would be no more undue focus on swing ridings; no more so-called strategic voting where voters feel forced to choose the least bad option because their preferred candidate could never win in our current system; no more staying home because we think our vote cannot make a difference to the outcome.

With either system, no longer would we risk entire regions being shut out of government, as has happened on a number of occasions under our current approach. That means better representation, better and more regionally sensitive government, and stronger national cohesion and unity.

Yes, single party majorities, though not impossible, would be more difficult. But majorities would have greater legitimacy because

they would actually represent a majority of voters, and from every part of the country. Caucuses would be stronger because they would be more diverse. Parliamentary co-operation would be the norm. Who knows, that might even mean less polarized and adversarial politics. And coalition governments can, the evidence shows, provide good stable government without the policy lurches that our current system too often leads to.

The evidence suggests that concerns about the proliferation of small parties in Parliament are exaggerated. And depending on design, it can be quite hard for so-called fringe parties to get in. In any case, one of the main benefits of a more proportional system is that it does indeed capture a greater diversity of views. And most important, in our current context in particular, PR makes it virtually impossible for a party that the majority sees as extreme ever to take majority control of the government.

I know, too, that some worry about versions of PR in which some members of Parliament would be selected by the party rather than the electorate—that is, selected from a party-constructed list. This need not be the case. Indeed, although I don't propose to opt for one system or another, I think it's important that whatever system is adopted, voters rather than parties alone determine the ordering of candidates. In the lexicon, I think that means a preference to open lists, if there are lists. Of course, how candidates are selected in the first place is an issue in our current system. These are questions independent of the electoral system we adopt. How open is the process for selecting candidates? How much is it controlled locally or centrally?

• (0950)

Clearly the choice of an electoral system will not address all the issues we may have. The electoral system is the beginning of democratic reform, and surely is not the end of democratic reform. However, a more proportional system would be a major step towards a stronger, more engaged, and trusted democracy. In a representative democracy, representativeness ought to count, especially in a diverse country like Canada.

Thank you.

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

We'll continue with Professor Blais.

Professor André Blais (Professor, Department of Political Science, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you. As I know I have very little time, I'll try to be very quick and to the point.

In your deliberation about whether to reform the existing electoral system, you will have to address two questions: the first, what will be the likely consequences of a new system, and, second, are these consequences good or bad for the country?

As a scientist, I can address the first question, and this is what I will do in the next few minutes. I have personal views about the consequences, which ones are good and bad, but I believe that my main contribution should be to tell you what empirical research tells us about the consequences of voting systems.

I will tell you about four empirical studies that I have conducted with other colleagues, each dealing with potential consequences of voting systems. My challenge is to present four of my studies, which are all very complex, and rich, and so on, in 10 minutes. That is two minutes per study. I'll be sweet and short.

The studies about the consequences of proportional representation consist in a comparison of what we have observed in places with PR, proportional representation, and in places under non-proportional systems, which are sometimes called majoritarian. The differences that we observe can result from causes other than the voting system, and these studies attempt to take into account these other factors, and to control for them. However, we are never sure that we have taken into account all of the significant factors, and thus we are never absolutely certain about our conclusions. This will be taken into account.

Furthermore, these studies do not tell us about the specific consequences of specific forms of PR. Still, I would argue that the most important decision you have to make is whether to adopt some form of PR or not. It is thus important to look at what the international comparative evidence tells us, so hopefully you will find these studies helpful.

The research I present deals with the first two principles for electoral reform that have been established by the committee: one, effectiveness and legitimacy; and second, engagement.

The first study is about whether turnout tends to be higher under PR. A study published with Agnieszka Dobrzynska in the *European Journal of Political Research* deals with turnout in lower house elections, a total of 324 elections in 91 countries.

The dependent variable, what one can explain, is turnout. We consider about a dozen factors that could effect turnout: GDP per capita, illiteracy, population size, and so on. For the voting system, we compare PR with non-PR elections, and we also look at the degree of disproportionality of the voting system, the difference in vote and seat shares for the parties.

We estimate the independent impact of each factor, controlling for all the others. Our finding for PR turnout, everything else being equal, is that it is three percentage points higher under PR. This study suggests that the adoption of PR might slightly increase turnout.

The second study is about whether there is less strategic voting under PR. The study was conducted with Thomas Gschwend from the University of Mannheim, and it deals with strategic desertion, which is defined as not voting for one's preferred party or leader.

The data is from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, a series of academic election surveys conducted in 25 democracies. All of these studies include questions about how much each respondent likes or dislikes each of the parties and leaders and which party they voted for. In each survey, we determined how many

respondents voted for a party or leader that is not their preferred one. The mean in all of these 25 elections is 22%.

We then compare the proportion of strategic defection in PR and non-PR elections—22% versus 21%—there was no difference. The correlation between defection and the degree of disproportionality is nil. Multivariate analysis confirmed the same result: there is no relationship between PR and strategic defection.

Our conclusion to this study indicates that the adoption of PR is unlikely to reduce strategic voting.

The third study is about whether citizens have more positive evaluations of democracy under PR. This was a study with Peter Loewen, who was a student in Montreal and is now a member at University of Toronto, published in a book by Oxford University Press. The data again is from CSES, a group of academic studies and surveys conducted by academics in 20 different elections across the world.

●(0955)

Again, the dependent variable to explain is basically attitudes about democracy. We have three kinds of attitudes. First is satisfaction with democracy. How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country? The second is perceptions of fairness. How fairly or unfairly was the election conducted? The third is perceptions of responsiveness, with a battery of three questions. How much do MPs know about ordinary people in your country; how much do parties care about ordinary people; and how much difference does it make who is in power?

The independent variables, the explanatory factors, include the degree of disproportionality, the degree of democracy, and human development.

The findings are that more proportional systems are clearly perceived to be fairer; they are perceived to be just a little bit more responsive; and people are not more satisfied overall under PR. This study suggests that if PR is adopted, elections are likely to be perceived to be fairer, but it is unlikely that people will be more satisfied overall.

The fourth study is about whether PR produces governments that better represent citizens' ideological orientations. It is a study by Marc André Bodet, a student at UDM at the time, and now at Laval University.

The variable to be explained is what we call “ideological congruence”, which is basically the absence of distance between citizens and government on a left-right ideological self-placement. The respondents have to locate themselves on a scale of 0 to 10, where zero is far left and 10 is far right. They can locate themselves wherever they want, and then they also locate each of the parties on that same scale. So we have an ideological placement for each of the respondents, and also the median perception of each of the parties, meaning where the parties are on that left-right scale.

We look at the distance between each citizen and the government. Of course, if you want representation, we hope that the distance will be as small as possible. The distance is what we try to explain. The explanatory factors are the degree of disproportionality, plus whether it's a new or old democracy.

The finding is that there is no more or less congruence overall under PR. PR does not produce greater or weaker correspondence between the voter and government ideological orientation. PR does not reduce the mean distance between citizens and government, but it does produce a parliament that better represents the diversity of ideological orientations. Similar results have been reported by a few other studies.

I have five conclusions from these four studies. First, the introduction of PR might slightly increase turnout; second, it would almost certainly enhance the correspondence between the distribution of ideological orientations in the electorate and in the House of Commons; third, it would almost certainly enhance voters' evaluations of the fairness of elections; fourth, it would almost certainly not reduce strategic voting; and fifth, it is very unlikely to make Canadians more satisfied overall.

Thank you.

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Blais, for sharing the findings of those four studies with us.

I'd like to remind committee members that Professor Blais is hosting a talk on electoral systems at McGill University, the evening of October 20.

Is that correct?

Prof. André Blais: It's at 7:30 p.m., and everyone is strongly encouraged to take part.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

Before getting to the questions, I want to let committee members know that, at one o'clock, we'll have a chance to trial a draft electronic survey in camera. For those interested in taking part, we'll be meeting here and the committee secretariat will be assisting us.

I'd like to let the witnesses know that the question period will be split into two rounds, during which each member will have five minutes to ask their questions and hear the witnesses' answers.

We'll get things started with Mr. DeCoursey for five minutes.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, as well, to the three witnesses, whose presentations I quite enjoyed.

Professor Blais, since I missed them the first time, would you mind going over the four or five conclusions of your studies again?

[*English*]

Prof. André Blais: The conclusions at the very end?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Can you repeat the conclusions you just mentioned?

Prof. André Blais: Yes, with great pleasure.

The introduction of PR, first, might slightly increase turnout, and, second, would almost certainly enhance the correspondence between the distribution of ideological orientations in the electorate and in the House of Commons. Third, it would almost certainly enhance voters' evaluation of the fairness of elections. Fourth, it would almost certainly not reduce strategic voting. And fifth, it's very unlikely to make Canadians more satisfied overall.

• (1005)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you very much. The ambiguity around voter turnout is a theme that we've been listening to over the last couple of days, and I know, Mr. Himelfarb, you mentioned that as well, that at best it's an ambiguous link.

You mentioned not proposing to opt for a certain system or another. Could I dig a bit further and ask where you may see the best opportunity to move towards a different system, if we were to do so in Canada, and why, and what some of the complexities and challenges would be in moving there?

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: You're trying to out me—is my understanding correct?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: We've been advised to dig here at this committee, so I'm doing just that.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: The bottom line is that I think that whatever consensus the committee could achieve towards greater proportionality would be better than our current system. I would be truly open to either MMP or a single transferable vote, if that were the consensus of the committee, because I think losing this opportunity to move to a more proportional system would be a sad thing.

That said, there are constitutional limits to how we should approach this. It should be regionally based. It should reflect the proportion of elected officials that our Constitution requires. So there are certain built-in constitutional constraints. I also believe that if we truly want to enhance democracy, we should avoid lists that are entirely structured by parties. This should be about voters more than about parties, so either open lists or no lists would be preferable, but I am convinced that moving to a more proportional system is the key—and yes, of course, design matters.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Absolutely, and we had excellent witness testimony last evening from New Zealand's electoral commissioner.

Drawing on that experience—and Professor Milner, you mentioned the New Zealand experience—how might that system potentially operate in Canada, given our population and geographical differences, and our federal system? I'm thinking of Atlantic Canada's division of seats in an MMP system. Certainly being from New Brunswick, I'd be very concerned about how that would be divided, and what P.E.I. would look like with four enshrined constitutional seats.

I wonder if you can maybe explain what complexities that experience would deliver in Canada.

Prof. Henry Milner: That's a long question, but let me just get to the central aspect, which I think is what sort of regions it's based on.

In Germany, they started with the basic principle that each province, each *land*, would be a region. Therefore, if you had 75 seats in the Bundestag from a particular *land*, there would be 75 representatives in the Bundestag from that district, and half would be from districts and the other half would be from a list of the entire *land*.

The New Zealanders basically accepted this principle and applied it to the whole country, which is smaller than most of the German provinces. The Scots decided that there should be regions, even though Scotland is not very big. So there are, I don't remember how many regions, but each one has 16 members, nine elected from the district, and seven from lists.

So I think there has been a bit of a progression in that. What we would do in Canada, given that we're much bigger and the density of the population can vary significantly, is that we should take the Scottish idea. We should base it on regions, but there's no reason that each region has to have the same number of total seats.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Reid now.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you to our witnesses.

One of the problems we are faced with is a practical matter. We get five minutes, and I feel the same frustration from my end, Mr. Milner, that you felt from yours when you learned you had three minutes left to wrap everything up.

I'm going to be directing my one question to you specifically on the theory that it's better to get a full answer from one person than to try to parcel it out between you.

Professor Milner, in your presentation you specifically make reference to one of the five criteria set out for this committee's report. It's specifically that we are to look for systems that “foster greater civility and collaboration among parties”. That is a quote from your brief, and that is actually part of our mandate.

I'll just point out that the Prime Minister has stated, I think inaccurately, that proportional representation—I think here his target was MMP, given that nobody is actually suggesting pure proportionality for Canada—actually causes division and confrontation. He says that “The problem with proportional representation is that every different model of proportional representation actually increases partisanship, not reduces it.” He goes on to say that “Too many people don't understand the polarization and the micro issues that come through proportional representation.”

Everything you say indicates that you would disagree with that. I wonder if you could elaborate on whether he has it right and, if he has it wrong, what it is that makes PR, and particularly the MMP model, resolve or deal with the problem he is raising.

•(1010)

Prof. Henry Milner: Well, there are really two aspects, and I'm not sure which one the Prime Minister was focusing on.

One is disagreement over issues, or we might even call it polarization. I suspect that, when you have proportional systems with more views entering the Parliament rather than being excluded because they don't get enough votes in any particular district to get elected, then there will be more disagreement.

What I'm focusing on is the second aspect, which is how that disagreement finds its way into discussion and ultimately into some kind of compromise or legislation.

The experience of proportional countries that I've been looking at for many years is basically that you don't have the kind of very confrontational attitudes, or you have far less of it, than you have, for example, in the British House of Commons or the Canadian House of Commons. So yes, there may be more disagreement, but I think the system basically says, “Okay, you express your disagreement, but since there is no majority government that could impose its will any time it feels it can, you're going to have to find some kind of compromise and some way of working out your disagreements.”

I don't know where Mr. Trudeau stands on that, but for me, the experience is very clear.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

Well, seeing that you've given that response in less time than I thought, maybe I'll just ask Mr. Blais the following. You've done research on a number of different systems. What would your sense be?

Prof. André Blais: On exactly the same question...?

Mr. Scott Reid: On the same question, yes.

Prof. André Blais: On polarization first, I guess?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, polarization, confrontation; that's right.

Prof. André Blais: I don't think the evidence is that clear on exactly what the consequence would be. Well, there would be a consequence in that there would be a wider array of viewpoints, and some of them would probably be more extremist than they are now, so there will be more diversity but also perhaps a little bit more polarization at the beginning in the House of Commons.

And then, as Professor Milner has mentioned, of course a coalition government would probably have to be formed and then there would have to be compromise between these positions. Some people think this instills a spirit of compromise among politicians. I'm not that convinced about that.

Certainly, I think people recognize the necessity of compromise, but each of the parties in a coalition government still has its own interests, and they will of course learn to make bargains, and so on. I am not convinced that there would be a lot more spirit of compromise, but there would be more practice of compromise.

The Chair: We are basically at 15 seconds.

Mr. Scott Reid: Maybe I'll wait and ask Mr. Himelfarb at a different time.

The Chair: Yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Milner, we've heard testimony from some witnesses arguing this question of phrasing about whether votes count or not. I think some of our witnesses who are opposed to electoral reform have said that every vote is counted, but I suggest that not every vote counts.

Is that a fair comment under first past the post?

•(1015)

Prof. Henry Milner: Well, I'm not quite sure what you're getting at.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's the impact. Is every vote treated equally? Is the impact of every vote cast in first past the post elections, as we have here in Canada, equal in its weight on the outcome?

Prof. Henry Milner: Again, it all depends on what you mean by the words. What I said, I think, is pretty clear. The more proportional the system is, the more equal every vote is in terms of its ability to get somebody elected. So the less proportional a system is, the less equal each vote is in terms of its effect on getting somebody elected.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right. So that equality of vote question.... I'll put this to you and Mr. Himelfarb. Another witness talked about what happens with regionalization. We've had regionalization in this country recently and all through our history. We've had examples, such as the Reform Party, which was highly regionalized, coming out of the west, and the Bloc Québécois for obvious reasons, regionalized within Quebec. The suggestion has been that to go to a proportional system would diminish that regionalization, which is important in a country like Canada. As big and diverse as we are, in government and opposition, you'd have representation from all regions as much as possible. Is there something that we can hope for and expect under proportional systems?

Prof. Henry Milner: I'd like André as well to address this.

I saw that mentioned in the evidence of earlier meetings here, and it was the first time I'd heard that suggestion. I don't know where it comes from. It certainly never happened in New Zealand or Scotland. I don't quite understand why. It does seem to me that our experience in Canada under the current system is that if we have a region where one party is strong, the system exaggerates that, while a proportional system would give each party exactly what it deserves in each region.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's take this in the reverse example—and I do want to hear from Mr. Blais and Mr. Himelfarb on this.

I can remember a recent Conservative government essentially being shut out of a region of Montreal entirely. They did a workaround. Mr. Harper appointed somebody to the Senate and then to the cabinet, from Montreal, to have some Montreal representation. Under a proportional system, would such an undemocratic workaround even be necessary? Would not the Conservatives likely elect somebody from places like Montreal or Toronto, major cities that should be represented in the government?

Prof. Henry Milner: As I said, I've never understood where that argument was coming from.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

Mr. Blais, did you have a comment on this?

Mr. Himelfarb as well?

Prof. André Blais: I guess so. The existing system under-represents very small regional parties and overrepresents big regional parties. That's why the Bloc at times were overrepresented and at other times under-represented. The existing system is not biased in any way, I think, in general for or against regional parties. PR would not change that.

What would change that, I think, as you mentioned, is that the Liberals, for instance, would much more easily elect some MPs under PR in Alberta. So the differences in representation of different regions within parties would be smaller.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We need to always reverse this away from the perspective of the parties to the perspective of the voter, to the Conservative voter in downtown Toronto, to the Liberal voter on Vancouver Island, to the New Democrat on the east coast. Having their views, their values, represented in both government and opposition is a valued thing, which proportionality allows you.

Mr. Himelfarb.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I'll take a practical perspective. Concretely, when, for example, the national energy policy was passed by a Liberal majority government, there were no Alberta voices in that government—zero.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: There was no voice out of Alberta when an energy question surrounding the question of oil and gas was being debated, discussed, and then passed?

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: In any proportional system you would imagine, that would not have been the case. Whatever you think of the policy, one could well speculate it might have been different, with strong voices from other regions.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: That's not the only region that has been shut out or limited to very few voices that would be enhanced in a proportional system. I'm not talking about regional parties versus national parties; I'm talking about actual voices representing regions at the table.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

The Chair: We'll go to Monsieur Thériault now.

[Translation]

Mr. Thériault, it's now your turn.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): What happened in 1993 is a hot topic. It could also be argued that the outcome was a super-representation given that the 54 MPs had been elected by an average of 55% of the vote. Only three didn't receive a clear majority. Does that reflect some sort of regionalism, or does it have some other political explanation? I believe there is another political explanation.

In the documentation provided to us by the researchers, I read this short excerpt from a text written by Mr. Himelfarb on May 12, 2016:

Whatever system we opt for must be designed for Canada; it must, in particular, respect and reflect our federal structure and regional, social and cultural diversity.

Political diversity should perhaps be added to that list, bearing in mind my previous comment.

What does that mean to you? Which Canada are you talking about? Are you talking about the Canada of 1982 that obliterated the nation of Quebec? Are you instead referring to a Canada where the reality reflects the fact that premiers, federalists and sovereignists alike, did not sign the repatriated Constitution of 1982?

• (1020)

Prof. Henry Milner: Is that question for me?

Mr. Luc Thériault: It's for Mr. Himelfarb.

[English]

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I'm talking about the constitutional Canada, the Canada that requires a certain proportion in every province or region. I also recognize that Canada is a country of common purpose. We have a federal government of diversity and with the French fact, and my Canada includes all of those.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Milner, when Quebec's special committee was studying the province's election legislation, you submitted a brief indicating that the proposed model was distorted because the size of the regions did not allow for the emergence of small parties. Simply saying you're in favour of proportional representation isn't going to make the merits of such a system materialize with the wave of a magic wand.

In fact, the devil is in the details. Have you done any exercises to simulate what that might look like in large regions? You mentioned Prince Edward Island. But Quebec has 75 ridings. Keep in mind the stumbling block Quebec ran into. We went from 125 members to 75. It's important to take into account the close nature of the relationship between voters and members in Quebec, especially in the regions.

What would that look like for a geopolitical region as large as Quebec?

Prof. Henry Milner: I'd rather not discuss Quebec, since the purpose of our meeting today is to discuss Canada. Nevertheless, the same issues come up, and regional size does indeed become an important consideration.

We need to look at the 15- to 20-year period in Quebec when the Bloc Québécois was very powerful, or fairly powerful, on the federal stage. In my view, Quebec's regions would have been better served under another system, even those where the Bloc won all the seats with half the votes or those where the Liberals won all the seats with 60% of the votes. Had the regions not been represented by a single party, they would have been better served. When the Bloc members were in the House of Commons, their positions were more partisan than regional. At least, the partisan aspect was more visible than the regional one.

As I see it, fiercely nationalist regions would have been better represented in the House of Commons if, instead of having seven Bloc Québécois MPs, they had had five plus one Conservative MP

and one Liberal MP. By the same token, the province's fiercely federalist regions would have been better served if, rather than having only Liberal MPs, they had had a few representatives of other political stripes. As far as Quebec is concerned, that would have been better.

My preference is a system that reduces partisanship at the regional level. I'm not talking about the provincial level. I'm referring to large provinces with smaller regions. That plays an important role. Since Quebec is in a different boat, the outcome would be unique to the province.

• (1025)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

It is now Ms. May's turn.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): I want to ask Professor Blais some questions relating to strategic voting. I'll probably go to Mr. Himelfarb next, because you raised this in your presentation as well.

I have a different sense about it, having talked to a lot of my friends in Green Parties around the world, and I'm not doubting your research for a moment. "Wait a minute", my friends from New Zealand say, "it's not like we get rid of strategic voting altogether. We have people trying to calculate if I vote this way on this list, and I vote that way locally, then I'll get...".

Are the distortions caused by strategic voting far less in a proportional system than the great lurches we get in our system, such as no representatives from anything but the Liberal Party for all of Atlantic Canada in this election, from strategic voting? As I said, when I pursue this with my friends in other countries, I say, sure, people are voting strategically, but the impact is altogether different.

Prof. André Blais: You're absolutely right. The impact is different, and you could argue that the distortions are smaller in the sense that in our system, strategic voting is always at the expense of small parties to the benefit of larger parties. Under PR or MMP and so on, sometimes it goes the other way around. For instance, in Germany, if you are supportive of the Social Democrats, and you see that a potential ally, the Greens, might not meet the 5% threshold, you have voters who strategically defect towards the small party to make sure that the Greens have the 5% in order to form a coalition. You are absolutely right.

The main point is that they have at least as much strategic voting under PR, and perhaps even more. But the consequences in terms of bias against small parties are not the same.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I think it may be a health issue. I feel that if you have to hold your nose while you're voting, it can't be good for you. Perhaps these people who are voting strategically in PR systems feel good about what they're doing, as opposed to feeling ill. That may be too much of a hypothesis.

Mr. Himelfarb, can you jump in on this one?

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I was going to go where you went. No question: voters will be tactical. Voters will make tactical decisions. When they have more than one vote or more than one party or a party and a candidate, all of which are possible under the system, they will make some tactical decisions.

When I talked about less strategic voting in my introductory remarks, I meant it in a very specific way, which is less the sense of feeling forced to vote for your least worst option, which means it opens you up to making tactical decisions without holding your nose.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Professor Milner, you're nodding. Did you want to add to that?

Prof. Henry Milner: No, I agree. The kind of study André does, because it's so big and takes all these different contexts and puts them all in the same barrel, by definition misses this aspect. When we look at the effect it might have on Canada, we can be more contextual and say, well, that's likely to happen in the Canadian context.

Prof. André Blais: If I can add, if you are supportive of the Pirate Party in Germany, you know that your party will not get 5%, and you will be induced to vote strategically as well. There is that in all systems. In all systems there will be small parties that will not be represented, whatever the system.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Professor Milner, I want to go to you, because you're so strongly in favour of mixed member proportional, and I understand your rationale. I'm not promoting one or the other.

We've had a lot of presentations on single transferable votes as an option, and the argument is that you still have your local representative, you have a cluster of local representatives, and you can even create healthy competition to provide better service to constituents between and among the representatives. Or people may say, "That's my MP; that's the one I voted for", as opposed to, "That's the one from my town". Have you looked at that aspect of single transferable votes?

Prof. Henry Milner: You know, in a sense, it's a theoretical question. My feeling is that if we were starting from scratch, if Canada was being invented and we were adopting an electoral system with no experience, with everybody sort of coming with a tabula rasa, then that kind of argument could win and could be better, and I'd have no problem with it. In fact, you might even argue for some kind of regional list system.

I just think that when people are used to having one person, not five people competing, but one person representing them, they feel more comfortable. I think they would be reluctant to give it up. In some of the discussions I remember in Ontario and so on, that was a factor. I didn't follow the British Columbia discussion. I know that your province disagreed with all the other provinces that discussed this.

• (1030)

Ms. Elizabeth May: That happens in B.C.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Prof. Henry Milner: Yes, I guess that's right. It's the winds of California, and so on.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll have to go Ms. Sahota now, please.

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

My question is directed towards Dr. Himelfarb.

You argued in an op-ed on May 10, 2016, that ranked ballots can be instituted either in the current system or in a proportional system, but that on their own they don't solve any problems.

Would you mind explaining to the committee how ranked ballots would function in a proportional system?

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: Sure. In either model that we have talked about, you could allow people to rank parties or rank candidates. In the single transferable vote, ranking parties or ranking candidates is usual, so in PR, ranking is often built in.

When you build it in to first past the post or winner takes all system, you actually exaggerate some of the difficulties in the system. If what you're looking for is greater representativeness and a greater ability to capture the diversity of views in Canada, the use of ranked ballots, when attached to first past the post, doesn't do that.

Ranked ballots is a kind of subset. There really are two big choices: a winner-take-all approach and a proportional approach, and either of them can have ranked ballots. The fundamental decision is which of those objectives you are pursuing. Are you pursuing single-party majorities as the norm, or are you pursuing greater representativeness as the goal?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

Yesterday I didn't get an opportunity to ask this question, but I now put it out to all of you. There was a Jenkins commission in the U.K. I wonder whether any of you are familiar with it and with their recommendations of an 80%-plus system, what your thoughts on that would be, and how it could possibly function in Canada.

Prof. André Blais: This is a question about the alternative vote as an option—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

Prof. André Blais: —which I understand is perhaps the preferred option of some people in Ottawa.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We haven't really discussed it at all; it's been rather put aside. I want to explore what the pros or cons to it really are, so that we have it as a part of our dialogue here.

Prof. André Blais: In fact, there are two questions: AV versus first past the post, and then AV versus PR. The question of whether it is proportional.... It's not a proportional system, so I'll just address the first question, which is AV versus first past the post.

It's a single-member district, so it's very similar. The differences are not big. The only difference is, of course, that you rank-order your preferences, and a candidate has to receive a majority of support in their first vote or second vote or third vote. The major difference is that a party or candidate that is the second choice of many people gets more support and is more likely to win.

There have been some simulations. Basically, the system is not too different from first past the post, but a party that is the second choice of many would get more seats. That would be the biggest difference. It's up to you to decide which is the party that is the second choice in a given context, and then you'll see which party is most likely to be favoured at a given point in time.

That's the main difference. It's more legitimate, in the sense that every candidate who is elected gets at least 50% of the vote. In my view, that's more legitimate. It is still not proportional and so on in many different aspects, but it is, in my view, more acceptable.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you know what happened in the U.K.? Oftentimes we talk about the way many western countries are moving towards a proportional representation system, but the U.K.—the Westminster system that we're modelled after—has not chosen to do that yet.

What happened with their commission and the recommendations that were made? Why did they adopt them or why not?

Prof. Henry Milner: You're talking about Britain, are you?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

Prof. Henry Milner: Well, Britain was a case in which, first of all, what they proposed was a kind of mixed bag. It was not proportional but was a bit more proportional than the existing system.

The other problem was that the two main parties were against it. The Liberal Democrats had to try to defend it. It was a sort of agreement to please the Liberal Democrats, but basically the major parties opposed it. There was no real discussion, because it was essentially one-sided. It wasn't a particularly clear system to begin with, because it was based on compromise. The turnout was very low. Nobody was surprised at the result.

One thing about places that didn't do this well, I think, is that we can learn from them. We can learn how to discuss this, how to come up with a proposal that best fits our need and is not just some kind of partisan compromise, and we can get Canadians involved. I think we're on the right track.

•(1035)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Kenney.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): I'm going to defer to Mr. Deltell.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you may go ahead.

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

I'd also like to thank my colleague Mr. Kenney.

Welcome to your Parliament, gentlemen.

The good thing about this week's exercise is that it gives us the opportunity to hear a range of views. We get to hear everyone's opinion. The views expressed by the bevy of distinguished witnesses

here this morning all seem to converge, which is fascinating. It also speaks to the democratic nature of the debate going on here.

You all had very positive things to say about the proportional system, which would help prevent some of the discrepancies that can occur in some regions, and that makes sense.

Now I'd like you to comment on the role MPs play vis-à-vis their constituents.

I have been active in politics for eight years. I was directly elected in a single riding four times. I'd like to thank the people in the provincial riding of Chauveau and those in the federal riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, for that matter. I can say from experience that a relationship develops between an elected representative and their constituents, perhaps not quite a fondness but, rather, a trust.

I can't speak for everyone, but I think all would agree. We represent all of our constituents, even those who didn't vote for us. In fact, that may be even truer for those who didn't vote for us, so that they have a better understanding of our plans the next time around.

I'll never forget the first constituent I met in December 2008, in my constituency office on Racine Street. I'll call him Mr. Smith. He told me he hadn't voted for me—what a great way to start off my career. I told him he wasn't the only one but that we were going to work together, and that's what we did.

That's the beauty of the direct representation our current system offers. I'm not saying it's perfect, far from it. But no system is perfect. No matter what, a representative who is directly elected in a riding represents all the constituents in that riding. Weekends and evenings, we meet people at social and charitable events, and we support them. Regardless of political stripe, we have a close relationship with the people in our riding.

In 2012, the provincial electoral boundaries changed, and I lost two towns in my riding, Shannon and Valcartier, which had not voted for me, by the way. I was extremely saddened, not because I was losing people who hadn't supported me, but because, like it or not, I had formed an attachment to the people after four years. Those discussions—those interactions—play a role in how we think about policy, even though we are bound by party lines and have to stand up for the platforms we were elected on.

I'd like to know where all three of you stand on this.

In a proportional system, when the list is long, how can the elected member maintain that same closeness with their constituents? Let's flip the question. How can a constituent have that same close relationship with their elected representative, when that representative is swallowed up by the whole, as opposed to that constituent having voted directly for a single candidate in a riding?

Prof. Henry Milner: To answer that, I'd have to take a close look at the various experiences in that regard.

The compensatory model I favour offers a major benefit: between 60% and two-thirds of candidates would come directly from the ridings, just like you. What makes that model appealing is that those candidates would have greater legitimacy in terms of representing the entire population in their riding than under the current system. Why? Under the current system, the people who vote for you, for example, have to be Conservatives; otherwise they would be voting for a party they don't support. So the people who vote for you, and not those who work with you, are Conservatives.

In a compensatory system, all the constituents could vote for you if they felt you were the best person for the job, because it wouldn't influence the regional outcome, which would be proportional. In that case, you would go to Ottawa not simply as the person representing the Conservatives in your region, but as someone with the support of many constituents who voted for you despite choosing another party in the second vote. That would be perfectly legitimate because that's how the system would work.

• (1040)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Under the system you're proposing, then, two-thirds of MPs would be elected directly, and the other third would be elected on a compensatory basis. That's really what you call second-class MPs.

Prof. Henry Milner: No. I talked about first-class MPs.

The Chair: Perhaps you can discuss that during Mr. Deltell's next turn.

Prof. Henry Milner: Very well.

We can discuss the third of list-based MPs later.

The Chair: Great.

It is now Mr. Aldag's turn.

[English]

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Thanks for the excellent information you've given us so far today.

None of you has touched on two areas we've been asked to look at, one being mandatory voting. If anyone has thoughts on that, maybe we will start with that if you have comments on it.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I don't think it would mean the end of civilization, but I'm not generally in favour of it. I would prefer a system that makes it valuable to vote rather than compulsory to vote. The notion of making people vote who don't want to could lead to unanticipated consequences. Some studies have shown what's called, for some reason, the "donkey effect", where people just tick off the top choice. The accident of where you sit on a ballot matters. I would rather make voting attractive than compulsory.

Prof. Henry Milner: My research currently is about political knowledge, but my last book was about what I call civic literacy. Australia, where you have compulsory voting, showed that there was some relationship between that and more informed voters. In other words, since you're required to vote, you go out and get more information.

So far, as far as I know, the research hasn't found that. Therefore, I'm not particularly in favour of simply getting more people to vote without at the same time getting people more informed about politics. If our turnout went way down and we ended up with a

possibility of less than 50% turning out, I would look for more radical solutions such as compulsory voting. Fortunately, I think we have other alternatives at this point.

Prof. André Blais: I also lean towards non-mandatory voting, but I'm more ambivalent. I'm intrigued by mandatory voting. I'm doing a study with a colleague in Brazil where it's voluntary to vote from 16 to 18, compulsory from 18 to 70, and then voluntary again after 70. I find this very interesting.

I think there are good reasons to tell people they have a duty to vote. There's a good book, *Full Participation* by Sarah Birch, about the virtues of mandatory voting. I'm still on the side that believes we should just try to make it as attractive as possible. I would be in favour of Elections Canada's mounting campaigns to try to convince people to vote, but I'm still a liberal.

Mr. John Aldag: The other thing I'd like to hear about is online voting.

Prof. Henry Milner: This is not an area I've looked at, so I can't talk about research. I'm uncomfortable with it because maybe I'm just an old fogey, but I think too much is happening online for people and not enough is happening in their communities. As long as we can find ways of getting people to actually vote with their neighbours, I would prefer that. I haven't been persuaded that online helps us much.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: In the spirit of old fogeys, I too quite like the idea of elections as a collective experience. I think that's hugely valuable. On the other hand, I would prefer electronic voting—if it increased access and participation—to mandatory voting. To the extent that it might actually increase the voting of young Canadians, I find it somewhat attractive despite my basic fogeyness.

• (1045)

Prof. André Blais: I have young children—not that young but not too old. They are students who spend most of their lives online. For them, voting online would be the natural thing. I'm certainly open to the idea. The concern, as Mr. Mayrand has mentioned, is whether we can really make sure that the system cannot be hacked. I think we should move very cautiously in that direction.

Mr. John Aldag: Do you see a role in increasing engagement by youth as a specific demographic? There could be other populations that may be disenfranchised—the homebound, the poor, the physically or mentally disabled. Is there a possibility that the benefits might outweigh the drawbacks in certain cases?

The Chair: Yes, maybe we'll have to get the answer in another round, but we'll go to Mr. Blaikie now.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): If we did decide to go to some kind of mixed member proportional system, for example, it's seems to me that one of the really important questions would be the composition of the lists and how exactly you institute some kind of open list. So maybe you've got the most closed model where it would be the party leadership that decides who's on the list; or you've maybe got a model where voters can interject because they can kind of vote within that list for candidates.

I just wonder, Professor Milner and Mr. Himelfarb, if you want to talk a little more about what you imagine might be a good model for list choice in Canada.

Prof. Henry Milner: That's the one area where I have not actually come down on a clear position. I know that people who are in favour of reform toward an MMP style tend to favour open lists, and I can understand why. It basically says this. Why should you be required to do what the party wants you to do? Why not do what you want to do?

On the other hand, we should also know that parties in their choice of whom to place on a list tend to be bringing in certain priorities—for example, under-represented groups, women, and so on—and those are not irrelevant. In addition, we should also not—and I want to say this carefully—assume that voters really want to be given so much choice. In some cases it will probably discourage them.

Many voters have limited choice. They know which party they like and they can probably also either vote for the local candidate who is from that party or perhaps they have some reason to support a different local candidate. But to assume that they are capable of choosing within a list of people who may not be very local, who may be in part of their region, but the region could be somewhat larger, and to expect them to make that choice, I'm not sure that's entirely desirable.

I don't have a problem with what we call closed lists. That's what they do in the countries that use MMP. Remember, the maximum list size we're talking about now is five or six, because I don't think we want any regional districts with greater than a dozen or 13 total seats. So the number of names coming from the list will never be more than five or six, and we have to remember that. That's the secondary part of the system.

People who've gone to these countries, like Germany, say the real emphasis is on the local MP. That's the one the emphasis is on. Typically, people who are elected from the list, if there's a vacancy in their local districts, will try to get elected in the local district. That's where the emphasis should be. So I do not insist that voters should be able to choose from the names of a regional list, but this is a relatively secondary discussion on which there are good arguments on both sides.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Go ahead, Mr. Himelfarb.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I'm strongly inclined to open lists, to making sure voters have the opportunity to determine priorities, rather than parties. If one of our objectives is to increase trust and legitimacy in the system, I think it's going to be very important to say to Canadians that this is about voters and not about parties.

By the way, with some of the challenges of whether a party imposes a candidate on a riding or a riding makes the decision, those

decisions have to be made whatever electoral system we have. Those are important decisions, but they are secondary to this issue. What isn't secondary is whether voters get to vote and determine the priority of any list, should it exist, and I think that's hugely important.

It's also important because it says to the candidates that if they don't link to the voter, if they don't make a concerted attempt to win the hearts and minds of voters, they will pay a price. It gets back to a question earlier on, that one of the advantages of PR is that, where candidates have built trust and where candidates have shown they represent all of the constituents, they have an advantage. Even within parties, there's competition in PR; that healthy competition rewards those who care most about their constituents.

• (1050)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: You say in a system where we have open lists, in the sense that voters are able to discriminate between candidates for a particular party in their vote, the law should be silent on how candidates get on that list, or do you think it would be good to prescribe in the law a system so that each party is—

The Chair: A brief answer to that.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: My own bias is that parties ought to be looking at that, but I wouldn't make a proposal on it.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Kenney, the floor is yours.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

I have a question about the decisions Canadians made regarding electoral reform. As you know, four provinces put forward electoral reforms. In three of those provinces—British Columbia, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island—voters flatly rejected those changes.

As mentioned yesterday, in 1959 and in 1968, Irish governments proposed changes to the electoral system that would have benefited the parties in power, but the electorate rejected those changes in referendums.

Yesterday, experts from New Zealand told us they held two referendums before adopting their current system. A third was held to give voters an opportunity to reconsider their decision.

A witness also told us yesterday that was a constitutional convention, according to the Jennings test. Peter Russell said we shouldn't talk about constitutional conventions or such abstract notions because of the obligation to ensure democratic legitimacy by giving voters the opportunity to judge their electoral system. That's not up to politicians but, rather, voters.

My question is for all three witnesses.

What is your take on Professor Russell's view and on this convention that exists in Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: Nobody wants to answer that.

[Translation]

Mr. André Blais: Your question clearly surprises me. I wasn't expecting a question like that.

Seriously, though, I would say it's a normative issue. As a researcher, I don't have an answer to that question. The issue is whether it is up to citizens to decide on the voting system at the end of the day. As a researcher, I don't have an answer to that normative question. But, as a citizen, I do have an opinion. It is indeed up to citizens. They should have the final say on an alternative voting system. That said, I'm paying close attention to what's happening in New Brunswick, which is holding a preference-based referendum with five options.

Prof. Henry Milner: That's in Prince Edward Island.

• (1055)

Mr. André Blais: My apologies, I meant Prince Edward Island.

That's one approach I would encourage the committee to consider. Instead of selecting one option, it could select five and propose a preference-based referendum. As a citizen, not as a researcher, that's something I would be in favour of.

[English]

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I'm not surprised at the question either and haven't decided how I'm going to answer that. I was asked the same question, Mr. Chair, at a conference and I answered a referendum if necessary, but not necessarily a referendum, and the entire crowd groaned at me, but it is more or less my position. Clearly there are reasons for all of us to want public legitimacy and credibility for whatever decision is made. I think the composition and openness of this committee goes a long way toward doing that. The opportunities for people to participate and contribute would go a long way toward doing that. Whether that's enough or not will depend a lot on what kind of consensus the committee's able to develop. I think that matters and that over time one might change one's mind.

Having said that, I understand the democratic impulse of asking constituents. On the question of asking constituents what they would prefer, a system they know well or a system they don't really know anything about and don't get, I'm not sure what the value of the result would be. In New Zealand, for example, where they did hold a referendum, they invested hugely in public education and information. They took it really seriously, because without that, I don't know what you have. I know there are ideas floating about holding a referendum after people have experienced the new system. I must say that has some attractive appeal to me because they are voting then between systems they know something about. I understand the impulse.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you to all three witnesses for being here today and giving us their input.

[English]

We touched a little bit on the youth vote, which is something near and dear to me that I've asked other witnesses about previously. We

had a large youth turnout in the last federal election, which we're delighted about, and it's something that we want to continue. We want to engage the youth not only in terms of voter participation, but also in terms of thinking about a career in public service. So I'd like to get a sense from the three of you what your thoughts are on how we can maintain what we have established or made headway on in getting youth involved in the political process, but also how to increase that. There are some issues that you talked about—online voting perhaps with the youth vote, and in terms of a mandatory voting—but I'd like to get your perspective on what I asked. I then have a second question for another stakeholder group.

Prof. Henry Milner: Another area of my research is voting at age 16, on which political scientists have done a pretty good analysis because we have cases of countries, or regions within countries or municipalities, where the voting age has been reduced to 16. What we basically found is that young people, on the whole, if they begin voting at 16, other things being equal, generally are more likely to vote than if they began voting at 18 simply because they're more likely to be in their own family, still living with the rest of their family where their parents are more likely to be voting and they'll join them, or in a community of people who are participating in one way or another. Once they get to be 18—and by their first election, they could be 19 or 20—they are likely to have left their parents' home. They might be in a different city and will certainly be thinking about other things—relationships and so on—and in fact tend to vote less. That is pretty pretty clear in all of the cases we've looked at.

The question is to what extent does that creates a habit that will continue through life. There is some disagreement on how much of an effect it has.

Then other question is, if they vote at 16, are they likely to be less knowledgeable than if they started at 18? Are they actually not voting? Basically, the fact is they're no more knowledgeable necessarily, but they're not less knowledgeable either.

So my basic feeling, to answer your question directly, is that this would be something we should think about seriously, combining it with more serious efforts of political civic education at the ages of 14, 15, 16 particularly. Unfortunately—I shouldn't say unfortunately, as it's in the nature of our federal system—education is a provincial matter and I would like to see provinces take the initiative on something like this, combining greater effort to civic education with voting at 16, and then moving toward doing that federally. That's where I would put the emphasis in answering your question.

• (1100)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Mr. Himelfarb.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: Yes, I too like the idea of an earlier voting age as a way of promoting youth participation. And I am open, as I said, despite my fogeyness, to online voting if that would make a big difference not only for youth but for others whom we should be targeting.

So I think those are two things.

I would be very curious—I don't know the data on this—as to whether André Blais has any data on whether PR actually increases the turnout for young voters, because my understanding is that young voters actually prefer greater proportionality. But in the end, it's a reminder that electoral reform itself isn't enough for democracy and that a whole lot of what we have to do will be besides electoral reform, including targeting, educating, and civil literacy, and, of course, the substantive elements of our policy options.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Blais.

Prof. André Blais: I hate to admit it but I fully agree with my colleagues. This is very rare in my life, but it's unfortunately the case this time.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

Do I have some time?

The Chair: About 35 seconds.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Would a PR system increase the participation of women in office?

Prof. Henry Milner: The statistics certainly show that. There's no question that women get elected much more significantly in PR systems than in non-PR systems. That's unquestionable. You could ask, where is the causality? Is it because these countries are more open to women's involvement that they choose proportional elections, so that the causality tends not to go from the electoral system but from the political culture? But the relationship is very strong.

The Chair: We'll start our second round with Mr. DeCoursey.

[Translation]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Blais, I'd like you to elaborate on the conclusions and findings of your studies.

[English]

One of your conclusions—and please correct me, if necessary, because I was scribbling as quickly as I could—is that PR potentially enhances perception of fairness, or does enhance perception of fairness, but that it is unlikely to increase voter satisfaction. What were you measuring in each of those particular conclusions, which seem a bit incompatible? Was it the result in Parliament and what Parliament looks like versus the functioning of government? Just some clarity around those two conclusions would be helpful for me.

Prof. André Blais: The exact questions that were asked in those surveys were the following, almost exactly.

The question about satisfaction with democracy is this. How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country? And the choices of answer are the following: very satisfied; fairly satisfied; fairly dissatisfied; or very dissatisfied.

The fairness question was something like this—and this was after the election. How fairly or unfairly was the election conducted? I think the answers were these: very unfairly; somewhat unfairly; somewhat fairly; or very fairly.

These two questions are correlated, but imperfectly, and we observed differences only with respect to perceptions of fairness

between PR and non-PR—only with respect to perceptions of fairness, and not with respect to overall satisfaction with democracy.

There is a correlation, but it's not overly strong. The only difference that is really clear is the difference with perceptions of fairness. In terms of satisfaction, there doesn't seem to be any significant difference.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: If we were drawing conclusions from those conclusions, what lesson would you leave us with to keep top of mind in the Canadian experience?

Prof. André Blais: All of these results are not absolutely certain. This is the best evidence we have, and it's still not.... More work could be done. But unsurprisingly, I guess, when you ask specifically about perceptions of fairness, then PR clearly performs better. But when you ask for a very general evaluation of how democracy works, then it doesn't make a difference. PR helps in affecting specific perceptions of fairness, but if you think about overall evaluations of how democracy works, it's not enough. There are many other things that are taken into account, and in the end it doesn't have a significant effect, it seems.

●(1105)

[Translation]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Professor Milner and Mr. Himelfarb talked about the system they prefer, telling us about some of the studies and research conducted.

As a researcher, or a Canadian citizen, which system would be your preference?

[English]

Prof. André Blais: I will not directly answer the question, but I might, after we have been grilled many times. We'll see. I will be giving a class on electoral reform this fall for 35 students, and we'll discuss all the studies that have been done. In the last five weeks, the students will deliberate, discuss, and propose the best reform for Canada. I tend to support that proposal, so that's my view at this point.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I have one last question for each witness. Given the competing values that we should consider as elected representatives in putting together a report to government on potential alternative electoral systems, what is the highest priority or the top value we should keep in mind?

I'll ask each of the three of you to briefly reply.

Prof. Henry Milner: I think it's fairness. I don't think it's an accident that André's report clearly shows that people consider which electoral system is fair, the proportional systems win out. It's not an accident. Does it necessarily make you more satisfied with the workings of democracy? No, not necessarily, because you may be paying more attention and there are things that you are more critical of, which you might not have been doing in our kind of system, because there's a government that is running things, and so on. That, to me, is less important than the crucial sense of whether you think the system works fairly.

By the way, I should add that André is on record, so if you want to know where André stood in the past, you can look at the Quebec discussion in which he participated, but we're going to re-create his virginity on this question.

The Chair: I can see right now everyone going to Google to see what that position was, but we'll have to move on now to Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Speaking of things that individuals have written in the past, Professor Milner, I have a paper you wrote in 2004, and I want to go through some of the details you were discussing in that paper with regard to some aspects of multi-member proportional that have not thus far been discussed in this committee, either at this meeting or previous meetings.

I want to dwell upon two subjects you raised. I'll start with the first, and we'll see whether we have enough time for the second.

You describe a situation in Scotland in which the greater strength of the SNP in the individual electorates or ridings resulted in their having virtually no list members. Other parties had many list members and very few elected in the ridings.

This seems to have been a problem at that time, enough that you identified it. Is it still the case that this is a problem? Has it resolved itself? Is it inherent in the system, or was it just an accident of the first election that took place under MMP in Scotland?

Prof. Henry Milner: The SNP, as you probably know, was able to take power after that. Clearly, in order to do that they had to win a good part of the individual districts as well. This was, I guess, a way to break through the system originally. Depending on how you feel about Scottish independence, you may say it was a good thing or a bad thing, but putting that aside, I think the system worked as it should.

For a party to represent an important tendency that has been under-represented by the existing system, to enter because the new system represents the parties much more proportionally is a good thing. They are then in a position to present their ideas, reflecting their strength within the population. There were clearly other things happening at the same time, but that certainly helps to explain why they were able to do better in the subsequent elections.

• (1110)

Mr. Scott Reid: You talked about this being a “two classes of MPs” issue: some are from the list, and some are from electorates. This seemed to be a problem back then. I'm asking whether it is a problem.

Prof. Henry Milner: In a temporary sense, you could say that when one party gets mainly one kind of seat and the other party gets mainly another kind of seat, if they're big parties that could be

somewhat problematic, but the problem tends over time to resolve itself. It's the very small parties, such as the Greens in Germany, for example, that rely on the list seats in order to maintain a proportional presence in Parliament. When it comes to big parties, it's a temporary situation.

I was writing in 2004. I think if I went back to Scotland today I wouldn't raise that as an issue.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, that actually does answer the question. It appears to be an accident of that election rather than a feature of the system.

The other question I want to ask relates to something that happened in New Zealand. A number of people elected under Winston Peters' New Zealand First party proceeded to bail out of that party and go to other parties. Mr. Peters, who held the balance of power, then demanded that an anti-party-hopping bill or anti-ratting bill or anti-floor-crossing bill be passed. It was, and it then had disastrous results in which another party unexpectedly was effectively destroyed because it couldn't split into two factions.

How did that situation resolve itself? What is the status quo in New Zealand? Is anti-party-hopping done anywhere else, or is it simply ruled out in most MMP jurisdictions, to the extent that you have any knowledge?

Prof. Henry Milner: I'm trying to remember the details. Maybe André knows.

I know that in recent elections in New Zealand, this hasn't come up as a real problem. so they did resolve it. It was a very particular case. New Zealand First is a very special kind of party that, really, you pretty much cannot compare with a party anywhere else, because it was a personal party; it was the party of Winston Peters, who was a particular character, and he's gone from the scene now. Maybe that explains the situation, but it meant that they had to deal with a particular case.

I don't know exactly how it was resolved, but it seems to have been resolved.

The Chair: You only have 10 seconds, so we'll go to Mr. Cullen, if that's okay.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The process that we're engaged in right now is the first stage of what this committee is endeavouring to do. The next stage involves cross-Canada consultation with Canadians.

Some witnesses have suggested that when we get to that stage, that the committee, that Parliament, should start to present more concrete proposals to Canadians that they can then comment on, rather than just the broad topic of electoral reform writ large—every issue under the sun.

For the benefit and the efficacy of that public engagement, would you have any recommendations that the committee start to formulate ideas that Canadians can then comment upon, or are you more in favour of the idea of our remaining in the 50,000-foot level, all issues on the table at the time?

Mr. Blais.

Prof. André Blais: I am clearly in favour of more concrete proposals.

I think that if the committee could come up with, let's say, five concrete proposals, that would help a lot. That would not be the end of it. There is always the possibility of other options coming out later, but focusing the attention on concrete proposals, I think would help a lot.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I wonder if any of our other panellists have comments as well.

Mr. Himelfarb.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: Yes, I think narrowing down the proposals is really important, for example, taking some things off the table like national lists, which would never work for Canada. It's really important to narrow it down to things that are likely to be implemented in Canada. I would do that.

Ideally, though it's going to be hard to do, it's about having a set of principles—and not just the government's principles, but a consensus set of principles—against which you assess each of these proposals and ask how well you are meeting them, and then which of the principles are most important to people.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I want to get back to a question that I think was put to you, Mr. Milner, about participation of women and that there are different political cultures.

We were talking with the Electoral Commission of Australia last night. There we actually have a working example in which the lower House and the upper House are elected by different systems. One is the alternative vote, which sits in the winner-take-all category and elects less than 25% women. The other House runs on proportionality and elects approximately 40% women. It's the same political culture, the same country.

• (1115)

Prof. Henry Milner: I would agree with that, and I guess I should have added this. I think that in the cases where there has been change toward more proportional systems, we've seen an increase in them.

I should have checked my New Zealand statistics, for example, because that's a country that is similar to Canada. It's much smaller, but otherwise the country was proposing going from single member districts to a proportional system. As far as I know, the proportion of women who have been elected—and maybe André has more data—I think has gone up. It's maybe not gone up as fast and as high as people—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Perhaps.

Prof. Henry Milner: I think it's gone up significantly.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Well, we can only do better, as I think Canada ranks 62nd in the world.

In the other winner-take-all models—France, U.K., the United States—the United States is quite poor, but we all sit around the sixties or high fifties. When you look through the list of the top 20 to 25 countries in the world, all of them, with one or two exceptions, use proportional systems.

One witness argued that it was just coincidence and there is no causality, no connection between proportional systems and electing women. From an empirical scientific basis, I find that argument extraordinarily weak.

Prof. Henry Milner: Look, whenever you have lists, you do better.

If we use an MMP system, where lists would be only 35% to 40%, you won't do as well as you do in Sweden where you basically have regional list systems topped up nationally, which basically means you get 45% women.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It depends on how much you value proportionality and representation.

Prof. Henry Milner: Yes, on how much you value proportionality, but there is no question that proportional systems elect more women.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I want to talk about outcomes for the voters because, we want to see what kind of policies come out of this as well. We don't have this example in Canada of a proportionally run election because we haven't had them, yet some of our greatest policy outcomes for Canadians have come from minority parliaments. That is somewhat equivalent, in that under proportional systems—which all the evidence says we're much more likely to get, as you and others said, Mr. Himelfarb—or more minority, coalition, or those types of governments, that power is shared.

Is this not something that should be highlighted for the committee in terms of outcomes, in terms of what voters can expect, which is this form of government? These governments, at least in our past, have produced things like medicare, the flag, bilingualism, and other things that we value.

Is this a fair connection to make, Mr. Himelfarb, or am I stretching it?

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: It's interesting that comparative research on the substantive outcomes of electoral reforms do show that not only are policies more progressive as a result, in the sense of pursuing collective advance, and being more in the public interest, because, in fact, you have to find common ground with other parties so that the public interest prevails, but they're also more enduring.

It's interesting, just as a sidelight, that despite concerns to the contrary, countries with more proportionality also have more sound fiscal situations.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sound—

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: Fiscal situations.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: There are a lot of substantial benefits.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll go to Mr. Thériault.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Milner, earlier I talked about Quebec's geopolitical situation, being very familiar with it. I said that the devil was in the details and that agreement on the need for a compensatory mixed member proportional voting system simply wasn't enough to settle the issue.

Asking questions about the process strikes me as fundamentally necessary. I'm glad to see that, unlike some of the witnesses we've heard from, Mr. Blais believes a referendum has to be held.

When our mandate got under way, those in favour of a referendum were painted as people who wanted to stand in the way of change, but I think that was a mistake.

The process matters. In Quebec, we had a draft bill, a very concrete proposal. We travelled all over the province, and that gave us an opportunity to see the real problems in every region of the province. It didn't lead to a transformation because the government of the day wasn't interested in letting the public decide the issue.

Some witnesses claim that people aren't familiar with the issue, that it doesn't interest them. Therefore, they argue that, as agents of a representative democracy, we have all the legitimacy needed to push ahead. The executive branch says last fall's federal election was the last to be conducted under the current voting system. The minister says that the system has to change but that holding a referendum is out of the question. In a nutshell, we are off to a bad start when it comes to doing things the right way.

We have just a few weeks to consult the entire population of a country as vast as Canada. Wouldn't it be much less reckless and more realistic to, instead, come up with a draft legislative proposal, open it up to consultation, and then ask Canadians to decide in a referendum during the next election? That would prevent this current exercise from ending in failure, would it not?

•(1120)

Prof. Henry Milner: I managed to avoid that question the last time it was asked. Unfortunately, I don't seem to be as lucky this time.

Some countries have changed their voting system without holding a referendum. France did it twice. To my mind, this has less to do with what I think and much more to do with what the public expects.

If a compensatory model were proposed with the underlying principle that voters in a given region would have their own member, personally, I would find that acceptable. If the public decided a referendum was needed for such a change to have public legitimacy, I would support that as well. I wouldn't say, from the outset, that a referendum was, by definition, necessary. If a logical proposal based on the principle of individual representation were put forward, I think it would be legitimate to go ahead without a referendum.

Mr. André Blais: Obviously, I'm more than happy to disagree with my tennis partner over here.

It's my belief that a referendum is necessary. But, if a referendum were held, I would want to see a commitment by all the parties to

accept the outcome. If a change were made, if the Conservatives won the next election, all the parties would have to accept the change.

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

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Fine.

Thank you very much, gentlemen.

The Chair: Thank you.

It's now over to Ms. May.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: I want to pursue something that we haven't gotten to so far today. It's in your testimony, Professor Milner, and it's related to one of the aspects of MMP that Professor Tanguay mentioned when he spoke to us a couple of days ago. He said there were two features of MMP from the Ontario Citizens' Assembly that attracted negative commentary. One we've already talked about a lot, the question of lists controlled by political parties.

The other had to do with expanding the size of the legislature to accommodate the MPs in redistributing for proportionality. In your paper, you suggest that unless we add MPs—and this is your only reference to this question—the size of the average single-member district will increase by roughly 40%.

Are we to infer from that that you think we shouldn't look at increasing the size of the House of Commons to adopt MMP? Do you have a sense of whether it would be acceptable to add to the number of MPs in the House?

Prof. Henry Milner: I don't have a problem with that, but I suspect many Canadians would. If we said the cost of changing the electoral system would be having more politicians it would too easily lend itself to a caricature. I think this is too important an issue to invite that kind of situation. I would say that it would be best to propose a mechanism that would allow the House to stay fundamentally the same, with maybe a few more seats but not significant growth. Remember, it is growing already. As our population grows, so do the number of seats. I don't think it would be acceptable to expand too much.

•(1125)

Ms. Elizabeth May: I understand that concern. I was opposed to adding 30 new MPs, and I voted against the legislation. We didn't have a referendum on adding 30 new MPs, but I imagine that, if we had a referendum on adding 30 new MPs, it would have been shot down. Many citizens might object strongly to having the budget go up.

Professor Blais, one quick thing: when do your students decide? Don't keep us on the edge of our seats. Our report is due on December 1.

Prof. André Blais: It will be just after that.

Ms. Elizabeth May: After?

Prof. André Blais: I think it's around December 5.

Ms. Elizabeth May: You couldn't speed them up? We have a report to write.

I have a question from Twitter for you, Professor Blais. It's from Laurel Russwurm. Earlier, she asked how we felt about dropping the voting age to 16, but now she's got a new one. She requests that I ask you, Professor Blais, whether it would be adequate to hold a referendum after an election or two, when the new system has been used, as Professor Himelfarb suggested. That's her question.

Prof. André Blais: This is a normative judgment as a citizen. I think it would be preferable to no referendum at all, but I think that before making a substantial change there should be a referendum to make sure that Canadians agree with the principles of trying a new system. I think it would be a second-best approach.

Ms. Elizabeth May: On the same general topic, but perhaps at a higher level of abstraction, I want to ask Dr. Himelfarb about a shared op-ed in *The Globe and Mail* by Mel Cappe, a Clerk of the Privy Council who followed him, and Janice Gross Stein. Are you familiar with it?

The argument they put forward was that as a representative democracy it's really a rather large change to decide that we want to move to a more direct democracy where lots of issues are put forward in referendums. I wondered if you had any thoughts on that? They were writing not just on this topic, but were were responding to Brexit.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I read the article, and actually retweeted it. I think there's a lot of merit in that view. In a representative democracy, the legislators are expected to represent their constituents and do some hard work. This is not constitutional, and so it's not required. It then becomes a political and normative judgment.

Their article was important in suggesting how complex issues can be easily hijacked in systems that appear more democratic but in the end are actually not. Asking people to leave or remain when there's so much misinformation is highly problematic. The investment in public education ought to be pretty rigorous.

I'm very comfortable with their general conclusion that direct democracy doesn't necessarily mean greater democracy. There is a place for referendums, but equating referendums with the quality of democracy is probably a mistake.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'd like to follow up on that.

Doctor, you've been quoted as saying that whether a referendum is deemed essential or not, what's most essential is what comes before that referendum. Of course, this is a part of what could possibly come before.

We have another leg of this committee's work that will involve engaging people across the country. One of the values that we were talking about that we hold dear is fairness. One of the mandates of this committee is also to engage those who have been disengaged for some time. Inclusivity and accessibility are what we are trying to achieve.

Do you have any ideas—and this can go out to all of you—about how we can enhance the work of this committee and really reach out to those people?

Regardless of what we do, we want to make sure we have complete engagement in the voter turnout. Also, as my colleague was saying, we have representatives who represent this country. I come from a minority group and I'm also a woman, but some of these things could start becoming one-offs. I heard a statistic on the news yesterday after watching the Democratic Party convention in the United States that something like 80 countries have elected women as the leaders of their country, but those were all one-offs. Only under five of those countries have ever done it again.

How can we improve the system so that we're not just having a couple of years here and there where we have great representation, but make it something that we hold as a value going forward? Engagement is definitely important for this committee. How do we improve on that?

• (1130)

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I think that's a multi-barrelled question. To some extent, you're asking something that goes beyond electoral reform, about how we keep disengaged communities more engaged, about how we bring them into the system. I think electoral reform is part of it, but I think it's much bigger than that.

It has to be a deliberate, committed strategy to reach those who are most disengaged. There are a number of ways to do it. I thought it was interesting that one of the committee members asked a question from Twitter. I think that's a great thing. I would probably be doing that a whole lot more. I would probably be linking to the large community in the social media through this committee. I'd probably be doing it intensely through various local organizations when you go into your next stage. I thought it was really interesting and reassuring how much time the government and the opposition parties spent in getting this process right. That's pretty reassuring. The debates are understandable, but the notion that people were listening to each other was pretty reassuring.

The extent to which this committee is deliberate in its outreach will be reassuring. The extent to which it's open and transparent is reassuring.

In the last decades, we have lost institutions that people trust to provide information that's not partisan. It's interesting that in New Zealand when they were talking about electoral reform, they created an institution for public education that could be trusted, that was non-partisan, that provided information. To have that kind of institutional capacity would also be useful, given how much distrust there is now in our democratic institutions.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's excellent. Yesterday we heard from a witness that education should just be done by political parties and the media, and not government. I was shocked to hear that type of testimony. I agree with you. I believe we should be getting out and engaging people and educating them. You have some unique ideas.

Does anybody else want to add to that?

Dr. Milner, I know you have done some work in this area.

Prof. Henry Milner: We've had different ways of doing it. In British Columbia we had a large citizens' commission. In Quebec we had a mixed commission of politicians and citizens. There is no right way. As was said, the crucial point is that efforts must be made to present objective, non-partisan, easily accessible material in every way possible and to allow for and invite input, using the latest technologies for that. It's never going to be perfect; we're not going to have a completely informed population. Many people have other priorities than the way we do elections. To the extent that the resources are used effectively, as I said before, I think this committee is on the right track.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Kenney.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Following on the same line of questioning and on the theme of legitimacy, I wondered if the witnesses would comment on whether they think a citizens' assembly would be a preferable form of non-political, non-partisan consultation with the electorate to study these complex issues. I ask in part because the norm, certainly in Canada in the case of Ontario and British Columbia, was to have citizens' assemblies to remove from the process those of us who have an obvious stake in the electoral system. Would the witnesses support a recommendation from this committee that a citizens' assembly be constituted to review options on electoral reform?

Prof. André Blais: Can I address this question?

This is a very interesting question because I've closely examined the citizen assemblies in British Columbia, in Ontario, and in the Netherlands, and we have a book, *When Citizens Decide*, about this. I was so impressed by the quality of discussion and debate in these three instances—the Netherlands, British Columbia, and Ontario—and I think this is a very good example, with one problem. The problem is that politicians were not involved, so all these citizens were discussing the issues and all the parties were absent from the discussions, so they had to develop ideas without taking due account of the real, concrete constraints that politicians face.

I would advocate a model that is closer to the Irish model. The Irish just had a citizens' assembly in which there was a lottery, and most of the participants were ordinary citizens, but with a fraction of members of Parliament in the citizens' assembly. This is, I think, a very, very interesting idea.

• (1135)

Hon. Jason Kenney: In Ireland, you said that TDs are involved in the assembly. The members of the Dail are involved in the assembly in Ireland. Is that correct?

Prof. André Blais: You interviewed two of them yesterday, but there was a third person, David Farrell, who was basically the chair of that commission. As I recall it, I think it was three-fourths

ordinary citizen members, and one-fourth members of Parliament, and also members from the various parties. They had constitutional assemblies on about six or seven different topics, and they came up with proposals on each of these topics.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Some members of the current government, including the Prime Minister, have expressed a preference for the alternative vote system, which some argue actually magnifies or increases the problem of false majorities. For centrist parties, it can do so. If one looked at polling data from the 2015 election and allocated second choices based on an AV system, the current governing party would have ended up with a disproportionately even larger percentage of seats.

I wonder if any of the panellists would care to comment on whether they see a problem of false majorities in a strict, single-member seat AV system.

Prof. Henry Milner: I've never understood the advantage of preferential systems per se. It seems to me that we know the disadvantages, which are that these systems make it difficult for parties that are not within the mainstream—even harder than it is under our system—to get elected, so you have less diversity. Where it's been brought in, it's usually been done pretty much to either keep out so-called extremists or to allow two parties who are close together, but can't agree, to keep out a third party, let's say. In the case of Australia, you had the National Party and the Liberal Party getting together to keep out Labor. In other words, the actual principled advantage of a preferential ballot to my mind.... I mean, you can say in theory that the local candidate who is elected is less disliked than he or she might be under our system, where you could have 40% in favour and 60% despising that person. But that's really unusual, and certainly it doesn't seem to me that you'd want to build your electoral system based on that kind of idea. To me, it's essentially a red herring that has been brought in, and I'm not quite sure why. If we had extremist parties that were threatening to become very significant and undermine.... When I say "extremist", I mean parties that don't believe in democracy.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: I'm going to go to present a couple of comments from Twitter. The first one is from Sebastian Muermann, who says, "Going forward, process of elimination for what is NOT going to work in Canada will be a good tool for [our group and] will allow us to move forward". Indeed, we've heard that we may need to find a smaller number of items to take to Canadians instead of this huge shopping list. Another person, Ken S., has posted on Twitter, "#redherring", and noted there are some that we shouldn't be looking at.

In my mind, I'm not quite ready to start throwing out options. I'm still a bit higher up. I came across a quote from Professor Milner, from an article in late January, that indicated that we need to be identifying principles to move forward, that this ought to be paramount. From Mr. DeCoursey we had started to talk about values, and we heard that fairness is one of those values. In response to Mr. Cullen's questioning, Mr. Himelfarb said that we need to have principles.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on what these principles should be. Ultimately, who should help us define them? Canadians are going to have to buy into this, the principles that will guide us moving forward, which from there will help inform this handful of systems that we take forward and the ones that we throw out.

I put to each of the panellists: what principles would you give to us, and how else do we get those from Canadians? We've heard that we need to have a system that's designed in Canada to meet our unique needs, and to me, the principles are a key part of that.

I'll throw it out to each of you: what are those principles? Who else should be identifying those principles? Your thoughts would be appreciated.

• (1140)

Prof. Henry Milner: My feeling is that abstractions are good in seminars for graduate students. To really have a discussion even around principles, I think you need to present concrete proposals and then invite interventions in which people are asked to express an opinion on either side, drawing upon principles. But asking for the principles as such is an abstraction, and I would say that most people don't think that way. If they do, it's because it's imposed on them by the situation. It's not the way they naturally operate.

Yes, I think the principles are important, but I do think that what I mentioned is the best way to get at them: to say here's the system, and here are the alternative systems that, based on our discussions, best reflect our views and those of the people who've presented their positions to us. Now we take it to the people in our districts and we ask them. When they choose, when they express a preference for one or the other system, we ask them to explain their preference in terms of these values—not the other way around.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I agree with that, although I think it's important to have principles. Linking them to actual proposals is going to be the key, because what really matters is the tension among principles. To take an example, there are two principles that I think we would all nod about. One of them is accountability to the electorate and the other is representativeness. We are a representative democracy. Now, the question is: are you committed to both and the tensions between them, and what systems best capture both? If you start looking at some of these principles, you'll find that some of them are in tension with each other, and then the question becomes, what systems reconcile those tensions best?

Prof. André Blais: My response would be that I oppose going from principles to choices and only then coming up with concrete questions. In my class, I've basically designed about 20 questions about the potential consequences of electoral systems. By the way, you're all invited anytime to come to my classes on Thursday morning. Just email me and I'll invite you and you'll see how students think about it.

You need to discuss the impact on the number of parties, on government duration, on links between MPs and citizens, on the representation of women, all of these specific questions, and then at the end you have to discuss values. But let's talk about the concrete consequences of electoral systems. That would be my argument.

I remind you as well that you're all invited to this public forum that was organized on October 20. There will be four political scientists, each one arguing for one system, who will present all the evidence in favour of these four different systems.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Blaikie now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

I'd like to pick up on the matter of the process. As I see it, there are two considerations. First, we have to look at how we go about reaching a decision on a concrete proposal at the end of the process. Mr. Kenney talked about that. Second, Mr. Cullen touched on how we come up with a concrete proposal that is regarded as legitimate.

The consensus, I believe, was that it would be preferable to present Canadians with concrete ideas and questions when the committee engages in public consultations across the country.

The makeup of our committee makes it rather unique. In that sense, do you think that, at the end of this whole process, we should put forward the system we believe the government should adopt and lay out its attributes?

• (1145)

Prof. Henry Milner: If you're able to do that, it would certainly be the best solution, even though it might not make everyone happy. To my mind, it would be much better to propose something concrete, if that's possible. That would keep things moving along. All the details wouldn't need to be ironed out, just the broad strokes and some of the core elements. I imagine some decision-makers will want to keep the current system. The discussion would keep moving forward, and Canadians would really have their say.

I imagine that would make things easier for journalists, in terms of writing articles or presenting the issues at stake to TV viewers. That would benefit Canadians. I think it's important to help those who are going to debate the merits of the issue by giving them as much clear and concrete information as possible. I encourage you to go that route.

Mr. André Blais: The website of P.E.I.'s chief electoral officer is a great example. It presents the five options, along with a brief, informative and concise description of each of the five proposals being considered. That would be a good starting point.

[English]

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I agree with what both my colleagues have said. Ideally, you have a process that's open, credible, and engaged enough that you don't need a referendum—which would be my goal—and that you actually end up with a proposal. However difficult that is, it would represent at least some degree of consensus, because I expect that reaching unanimity is difficult.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...possible for this committee to come up with the nuts and bolts, at least, of a basic proposal for change.

From a process point of view, do you think it's legitimate, then, just to have cabinet come down with its own ideas: “You guys didn't come up with a proposal, so here's cabinet's proposal, and this is what we're going ahead with”?

If those are the alternative branches of the process tree, if you will, are they anywhere near equal in terms of having a legitimate outcome?

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: If there is no committee consensus, then I think you have a credibility challenge, and then I would find some mechanism to deal with that credibility challenge before I made a final decision.

Prof. André Blais: Well, why not amend the P.E.I. approach—five options, a plebiscite, preferential voting, and there was a decision at the end made by citizens in a referendum?

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: If I might, Mr. Chairman, it goes back to what I said: not necessarily a referendum, but a referendum if necessary.

Prof. Henry Milner: I must say that is where I disagree with André. P.E.I. has far fewer people than the City of Ottawa. If the City of Ottawa were going to change its electoral system, I could imagine that kind of discussion, whereby several options would be put on the table and so on. Even then, I think most people would not get caught up in it.

I don't think, for Canada as a whole, that the idea of coming up with four or five different systems in which the differences are quite technical and asking Canadians to choose.... I think you're just going to lose most people. I don't see the value of that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Deltell.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to pick up on the question Mr. Blais asked us earlier, but in a bit of a roundabout way. I'm glad to give my answer.

Before that, though, I want to come back to the discussion I started with Mr. Milner earlier.

Mr. Milner, we were saying that, under a proportional system, some MPs would be directly elected by voters and others would be

elected differently but still have a seat in the House. That would result in a two-tier system, one with two speeds or two grades, if you will.

Where is the legitimacy in having two classes of MPs in the House?

• (1150)

Prof. Henry Milner: Our former colleague, Louis Massicotte, who is now at Université Laval, worked with Quebec's committee. He's well-versed in Germany's system, having visited a number of times. He consulted with members of Germany's parliament and found that the system worked very well.

The responsibilities are divvied up. Voters can seek out the member for their own constituency or one of the list candidates from the party they support. Candidates prefer to be elected in a constituency, but if they aren't, they can be elected by being on the list. What they do, then, is try to make themselves known to people by working for them, so that, if one of the constituencies has an opening the next time around, they can run.

Mr. Massicotte didn't find any contradictory elements or problems with having the two types of MPs.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Milner.

Professor Massicotte focused on Germany, where the same system has been in place for some 70 years. That means Germans have enjoyed that democratic tradition for some 70 years. Clearly, prior to that, the situation was anything but democratic. But that's not really the case in Canada.

We'll have a chance to come back to that.

Prof. Henry Milner: Any change requires some adjustment, but there's no reason to think we wouldn't be able to adjust.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I know, but with all due respect, I would point out that neither you nor Mr. Massicotte has ever been elected as a representative for a riding, worked on a daily basis directly with the people in that riding, or served as a liaison between the municipal authority and the federal government. A duly elected member for a riding, someone who serves as a direct liaison between their constituents, their institutions, and the federal government, has a lot more authority than a member elected in a region from some list. My experience speaks for itself.

Prof. Henry Milner: When a municipality is henceforth considered a region, it's possible to represent a constituency that is part of that municipality, but not the entire municipality. If you're part of a team of elected representatives, I think the municipality would be much better served.

Of course, there are always trade-offs. But I can't see any reason why a compensatory system would hinder representation.

We could continue that discussion.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: No, you expressed your view, and I gave you the time to do so. The practitioner in me expressed his view as well. I feel I have some moral authority in this area given that I was duly elected four times by voters. So I know what it means to work directly with the people.

Often, I have people from other ridings coming to see me, or I refer them to colleagues because they have certain things in common. Fundamentally, we, the 338 members of the House of Commons, are the representatives of our ridings and, above all, the people in those ridings.

Mr. Blais, you said earlier that you would like all the parties to support a referendum and to come to an agreement if it led to change. In fact, you mentioned my party by name, the Conservative Party.

Mr. Blais, I can assure you and all Canadians following us right now of one thing. If, by chance, a referendum is held—something we strongly support—and the outcome is in favour of change, we will accept it. Our democracy does not work on a sliding scale. We can't be in favour of a decision and hold a referendum or, like some, claim it's not worth holding a referendum because the proposal won't be accepted. That's what I call democracy on a sliding scale.

In a democracy, we must consult the people and trust the will of the people. Who are we to say we won't bother holding a referendum because the public won't be on our side? That's a rather high-handed attitude.

In the short time we have left, Mr. Blais, I'd like you to speak to us about alternative, or preferential, voting.

The Chair: We don't really have the time to get into a topic so—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Are you for or against it?

Mr. André Blais: It depends on what you're comparing it with. I think voters would be better off with preferential voting than the current system because it gives them the opportunity to articulate more than one preference. It would also mean that elected candidates had the support of the majority of voters, so the advantages are twofold.

•(1155)

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

Ms. Romanado, it's now over to you.

[*English*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I've been accused sometimes of being very direct, so I'll apologize in advance.

We've been listening to testimony now over the course of the last few weeks, and I think we can all agree that there is no perfect electoral system. We all have heard this multiple times.

We have been given a mandate with specific guiding principles, including effectiveness and legitimacy, engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity, and local representation. These are the guiding principles that this committee has been tasked with. We've been tasked to identify tactics that will address all of these guiding principles, as well as an alternative voting system. I don't think an alternative voting system will address all of these issues. In a perfect world, it would. It does not.

We've heard today that there may be a 3% increase in turnout should we move to a PR system. We've heard that it would not significantly change voter satisfaction. We've heard pros and cons for various voting systems, and today we heard a lot about the positive aspects of PR.

I'd like to flip it on its head and ask if you could give us some of the challenges, some of the negative aspects, of PR, given these guiding principles, which I believe were sent to you. If you could elaborate a little on these, it would be helpful.

We're trying to identify what won't work for Canada, and I'd like to hear both sides of that story.

Thank you.

Prof. Henry Milner: I'm the one—well, I shouldn't say I'm the one, but Alex as well—who said that we have a system that's better than the other systems. No system is perfect, but given the realities, I think we do have a proposal that would be better, and if we applied it to Canadians conditions, we could do something very interesting.

Let me just make the following argument. In other words, just look at the world as it is. Try to find working parliamentary systems outside of Canada that are a pure single member plurality systems. You practically won't find any. Britain, where we got all of our institutions from, and Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the City of London, all have systems of proportional representation.

Canada really is the country that has made the least definite efforts to bring its electoral system up to date.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Professor Milner, I'm going to stop you because I have a very limited amount of time.

I know that the first past the post system has its negatives. What negative aspects of PR would happen if we were to adopt this here in Canada?

Prof. Henry Milner: Let me just finish what I had to say.

We have experience from some countries and could say that in some, you have coalitions that tend to be repeated, with the same parties tending to be in government. You have grand coalitions, which some people think is a good idea, like in Finland where the parties generally work together. In Germany, it often happens. You could say, well, that's unfortunate because we really need a strong opposition and so on.

There are a whole number of things we can look at in countries with proportional representation and ask whether these things are what we want. My answer would be that if we don't want them, we can probably build into the system certain ways of their not likely happening.

I want to add one other point, since this is going to be my last chance. Looking to the experts who were consulted on this, some 169 electoral experts in different countries—I have the numbers in front of me—basically 75% to 80% of them prefer a proportional system, and of that number, more than half prefer MMP. These are the experts.

Now you may say that we're biased and so on, but that is the factor to keep in mind. Countries, given the choice, have taken proportional systems, and experts, given the choice, have preferred proportional systems, and within that have preferred MMP.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Himelfarb, quickly.

Mr. Alex Himelfarb: I think it's a fair question.

I must confess that I'm with Henry on this. I think greater proportionality is so much better that it would be more than sad if we didn't move in that direction.

That's not to say that you're incorrect that any choice involves trade-offs. It depends a bit on how you design the system. One of the challenges that we will have to deal with is the size of ridings, for example, or the size of districts, especially with respect to dispersed population areas. I think we're going to have to be creative in the design of this to accommodate the diversity of the country, including urban and rural differences.

For what it's worth, I know that Jean-Pierre Kingsley has speculated about some possibilities. I also know that Fair Vote Canada is working on models that ensure greater proportionality but respect the differences between urban and rural areas.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We ended at noon, right on the dot, so thank you, colleagues and witnesses, for your co-operation.

We haven't finished the meeting. You're rock stars, obviously.

Before we close the meeting and the gavel comes down to permit photos, I would just remind members, those who are interested and who will be here—and I assume that's pretty much everyone—that at 1 o'clock we'll be here to—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Lafrance): Bring your iPads.

The Chair: Bring your iPads if you can. We're going to go through a trial run of the electronic questionnaire.

Yes, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, this is kind of a point of order.

I just want to ask the—

Hon. Jason Kenney: It's kind of a point?

Mr. Scott Reid: A generous chair would see it as a point of order and I know how generous you are.

During the course of our conversation I cited one paper by Professor Milner, and Professor Blais cited several papers. I just wonder if we could ask them—

The Chair: Of course, yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: —to submit these to our analysts so that we can add them to our information.

The Chair: Yes, if you could submit those, it would be greatly appreciated.

Without further ado, we'll put an end to the meeting and will see some of you back at 1 p.m.

Thank you.

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