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Special Committee on Electoral Reform

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, August 23, 2016

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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (1400)

[*English*]

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

We will now start meeting 16 of our study on electoral reform. We have three witnesses with us this afternoon. We have Professor Matthew Harrington, Professor Thomas Axworthy, and Professor Pippa Norris, who is joining us by video conference.

I would like to take a couple of minutes to briefly introduce our witnesses.

Professor Matthew Harrington is president of the common law program committee of Université de Montréal's law faculty. He teaches U.S. constitutional law and property and trust law, and has published works on the economic origins of law, among other topics. Professor Harrington recently co-hosted a conference at the Université de Montréal, funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, about the relationship between the Supreme Court of Canada and common law.

Professor Thomas Axworthy is a renowned public servant, political strategist, writer, and professor. He is best known for his role as senior policy adviser and principal secretary to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau from 1981 to 1984, during which time he played a key role in repatriating the Constitution and introducing the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He has made a lifetime's work of notable contributions to Canadian society, and continues to facilitate international action and co-operation as a member, and more recently as Secretary-General, of the InterAction Council. In 2009 Professor Axworthy chaired the advisory task force on democracy promotion for the Minister of State for Democratic Reform of the day. He was also chair and executive director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Queen's University. In 2012 Professor Axworthy was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for his contributions to Canadian public policy.

Professor Pippa Norris is the McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, an Australian Research Council laureate fellow, and a professor of government and international relations at the University of Sydney in Australia. Dr. Norris is also the director of the electoral integrity project that is based at the University of Sydney and supported by the Australian Research Council and other foundations. Dr. Norris is one of the world's most cited political scientists. Her research focuses on public opinion and elections, democratic

institutions and cultures, political communications in countries around the world, and gender politics. She was recently awarded the Brown medal for democracy. Other accolades include the Karl Deutsch award, the Johan Skytte award, and the Kathleen Fitzpatrick Australian Laureate Fellowship. Dr. Norris's most recent books are *Contentious Elections*, *Why Elections Fail*, and *Checkbook Elections? Political Finance in Comparative Perspective*.

We shall start with.... Pardon me?

I think Mr. Reid was just expressing awe and how much he's impressed by our panel.

If it's okay, we'll start with Dr. Norris, please, for 10 minutes.

Professor Pippa Norris (Professor of Government Relations and Laureate Fellow, University of Sydney, McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics, Harvard, Director of the Electoral Integrity Project, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Chair.

I really appreciate the opportunity to talk again with the Canadian Parliament about this really important topic.

There are really three issues that I think are worth highlighting.

Number one, what are the key options on the table? Those are partly about electoral systems but also a lot of details. Should there be a referendum, for example, to introduce any sort of reform? Should there be different types of mandatory voting, and so on? Number two, why reform the current system? Of course, the classic issue is that if it ain't broken.... So what's the problem we're trying to address in which a different change might actually work? Number three, what might be the consequences if we adopt one system or another? What would it do?

If we just take the first issue, in terms of the electoral system, as your committee has debated in the past, essentially there are the core four main options on the table. One is to obviously maintain the status quo of first-past-the-post majoritarian plurality systems, which have certain virtues, which are very familiar, and which are used in a number of countries, obviously including the United Kingdom as a result of the failure to reform, as well as the United States. I know that the preferential vote issue has been under question, the ranked choice, such as in the Australian House of Representatives.

The most popular option, which has been going on with many reforms in many countries, is the New Zealand option of the mixed member proportional, where it's like the German system, with one vote for the PR system and one vote for the single member. It's a mix of both majoritarian and proportional representation. Often what's critical are a lot of the details, such as how many seats are allocated to one or the other, or whether they're actually counterbalancing or are separate votes.

Last is pure PR, proportional representation, which is not really on the table, although clearly that's used in many, many countries around the world, producing a pure proportionality of votes to seats.

The question then is this: how are these really being thought through? What's worth emphasizing is that the devil is often in the detail in all of these designs, and therefore you really do need to look not just at the broad electoral law and systems but at basic procedures and things that I know are being debated, such as whether, if we're going to introduce any sort of reform, there needs to be a public mandate for it. Going through a referendum process is one issue that the committee is considering.

Should there be, for example, compulsory voting to address questions such as low or declining turnout? Other issues can also be there for electoral procedures, and I know with the fair votes act in Canada, there have been questions about those as well, to make sure there's both inclusive balloting, whereby everybody who has a voting right can exercise that and is not discriminated against, but at the same time there's secure balloting, so that there's no question of impersonation or double-voting. These are the kinds of options that I know you've been considering.

Why reform the current electoral system? This is the basic issue. Clearly the Prime Minister committed Canada to think about this and for Parliament to put this on the agenda with the commitment that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under first past the post. Again, I don't think the process has necessarily thought through what the problems might be. Certainly that was the case in some of the early debates.

I looked, for example, at the democratic institutions minister and at the points of eight different issues that were mentioned. Some of them, you can clearly see, are critical issues, and some of them might be less so, but if we take the things that are being mentioned—for example, legitimacy, efficacy, diversity, simplicity, user-friendliness —you can't get all of these values in any one particular option. They are all trade-off values. Think about issues like first past the post being actually very simple for the voters to make their choice. They basically have to mark one candidate, one party, on the ballot, and then the parliamentary system takes care of the rest. If you have a double choice, such as the mixed member system, that gives people more options, but they also have to become familiar with, for example, a wide range of candidates or different issues on the ballot. They have to think about their strategic choices as well. For example, if they support a minor party, does it make sense to vote for that party in both parts of the ballot? Maybe under first past the post, strategically they vote for a major party under the single-member district, but under proportional representation they might vote for a minor party. Essentially you have different choices, and no one system will meet all the points that the democratic institutions minister has set out.

● (1405)

If you want to emphasize the issues of fairness, for example, to minor parties, then a more proportional system is clearly going to get you there. That is much more likely to bring in more minor parties with a lower vote threshold in order to win seats. On the other hand, if you want to go for local accountability, then you'll go for first past the post, because the single-member district is where voters can vote for the candidate, not just for the party list.

There are complex issues, then, with the values, and issues about what the consequences might be and what the problems are at the heart of elections held in Canada.

Lastly, to come to the issue that I'm sure is really the most challenging to establish, what can we say about the consequences? It's very difficult to go from one system to another. You can certainly look at other countries, as I know you have—you've looked at Ireland, you've looked at Australia, and you've looked at Britain— and you can examine the ways in which their electoral systems work, but again, it's often a bundle of choices. The way that the Australian system works, for example, with its mandatory voting and with its different systems for the Senate and for the House, won't necessarily translate into how those same things would work in Canada.

What we can do is make some projections on how each of these different options, the basic electoral systems, might work, first in terms of seats and then in terms of things like gender equality or diversity, and then in things such as proportionality.

Just in terms of seats, what are the basic projections? Well, we can take the last election results under the current system in 2015 and we can make a simple projection. If it was under a system of any of the other alternatives we mentioned, what might be the consequences? Or quite simply, if we look under preferential voting, which is, for example, the system that we use in Australia for the House of Representatives, this would reduce at present the number of seats that are allocated to the Liberals. They would go down substantially just on the same share of the vote from, for example, 54% to 30% of the seats. The other parties would also change quite a lot. We can see again that other parties would potentially benefit from this, but some parties would stay much the same.

If we go right through to a mixed member system, the consequences for seats would depend on how you have a balance. You might have half and half or you might say only a proportion of the parliamentary seats would go through the proportional system, while the rest would go through first past the post. Under that system you'll probably see a greater share of seats for the minor parties, which would be able to get in through the proportional vote even if they can't currently get in through the single-member districts, but that also depends on their geographic dispersion. If you're clustered, as in Quebec, then obviously you can still get in through the first-past-the-post system of single-member districts, but if your vote is dispersed across different ridings and different regions, then the minor parties are likely to do better under any proportional or mixed member system. Obviously that's a key thing to consider.

We have to say that the level of proportionality is another question, and that's about the share of votes to seats. That's often what people think about when they think about a fair system. Again, it's likely that a more proportional system is going to get a greater degree of proportionality, but is this basically a problem in the Canadian system? When I've run the analysis and looked at some statistics at the level of proportionality in the Canadian elections right back from 1945 to date, I don't find that's actually gone up a lot or gone down a lot in recent years. Again, is this a matter of concern? This is up to your judgment.

Finally, what about public opinion? Do they have any preferences for any of these types of electoral systems? Well, public opinion on these sorts of issues is often soft, meaning that it's a technical issue. The public in many countries haven't often thought about these systems, and often it's only if they come to a real referendum that they actually think about those choices. Nevertheless, when we look at some of the public opinion polls in Canada that have been put forward on this issue, the preferences still seem to be to favour the current status quo, not to change. That's not surprising when people are asked in various studies.

Of the other systems, there seems to be a slight preference for the mixed member proportional versus either pure PR or ranked preference voting, but basically public opinion is not well formed on this issue. If you went to a referendum, the ideal thing would probably be to go to a referendum as in New Zealand, where you have, first, the question of whether the public feels there should be reform, and if yes, what type of system should be chosen.

● (1410)

My bottom money is that you'll probably go towards the mixed member system if any of the other choices were being preferred, because that system has the virtues of both single-member districts, which are familiar, and proportional representation, which gives a better chance to minor parties and to women and other forms of diversity. However, it's still probably likely that, as in the U.K. when there was referendum on this issue, overwhelmingly the public is not necessarily in favour of radical reform unless the problems are really put more clearly to the Canadian public.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and there will be many questions for certain.

We'll go now to Professor Axworthy, please, for 10 minutes.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy (Public Policy Chair, Massey College, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you, Chair.

I'll make five points in the presentation and spend a couple of minutes on each of them, though I am happy to provide the speaking notes later to the committee if they want more details. Some of the points have already been made by Pippa Norris, who really is one of the world's great experts on these issues and a woman whose writings I consult when I am asked about them. You are very lucky to have her here, and we'll all learn from her.

Of the five points that I want to make here, the first is that there is no crisis in democratic process or outcomes in Canada.

The second is that although there is no crisis, even superior systems can be improved, as the history of Canadian democratic practice shows, and I want to outline some of those important improvements in the various elements of how one runs elections.

The third point—which I don't have to emphasize, because Professor Norris has already done it—is that there is no perfect electoral system. There are advantages and disadvantages to all of them, and it is really a question of values, of differing perspectives, that will inform your own debate. There's no technical solution to the issue of electoral reform. It is basically a political process of deciding your purposes and values and what you value most. I ask the question that again Professor Norris asked: if our system in fact operates pretty well, what is the reform, and what problem are you trying to solve?

The fourth point I want to emphasize is that a consensus in a committee like this is crucial. It's difficult, but it's attainable. I want to refer to my own experience—the chairman raised it—about the creation of the special joint committee on the constitution in 1980-1981, which had an even more difficult set of issues than you're grappling with but eventually was able to reach a consensus, a difficult one.

The last and perhaps most important of my various points to you is that electoral reform, your issue, is just one piece of the democratic reform agenda. There is still lots of work to do even as you grapple with the issue of electoral reform. Electoral reform itself has such a tremendous impact on the role of the House, the apex of accountability, that I would recommend to you that as you grapple with all of the technical issues and the difficult issues—and Professor Norris has raised them—you must keep in mind the complementary reforms that will be necessary to make our system work under whatever system you choose.

I'll go very quickly, then, on those five points.

There's no crisis in Canadian democratic practice. We have had in this country in recent years a tremendous crisis, in my view, in the role of the Senate, and that was leading to tremendous disrespect for a critical institution in Parliament. The new government, though, has moved with dispatch and I think with boldness in trying to reform the Senate by making it merit-based, independent, and non-partisan. There are difficult and interesting challenges ahead to make that system work in our parliamentary system. However, that was a crisis and it was addressed.

I think there is less of a crisis when we look at electoral systems. When we look at the various assessments internationally, we see that the World Bank, for example, which sponsors a worldwide governance indicator project, indicated that in 2014 Canada had ratings of 96% in accountability, 91% in political stability, 95% in government effectiveness, 98% in regulatory policy, 95% in the rule of law, and 94% in the control of corruption. That's absolutely in the top ten of attainment.

● (1415)

   Professor Norris's own electoral integrity project had Canada again as probably—and she can correct me on this—at the top of the majoritarian practitioners of electoral systems, with a rating of around 75% to 80%, ahead of the United States and so on. Again, it was in that absolute top rank.

   This international assessment about the value of Canadian government practice and electoral practice has led, as we all know, famously to the human development index of the United Nations, where Canada has always been in the top 10 and sometimes has been number one. I think in 2014 we were number nine.

   The strength of our government system and our electoral system has certainly had a positive impact on those achievements in the human development index. That is because—pride of position here —the Westminster system, with its combination of a concentration of power to get things done and an accountability related back to what David Smith, the brilliant scholar from Saskatchewan, calls "the people's House of Commons"—that combination of people sovereignty as represented in the House and the concentration of power for effective government—is really the secret of the Westminster system when it is working correctly. For most of our history, it has been working correctly in Canada.

   I'll go to my second point. Even as I would argue that our Westminster system is superior, everything can be improved. The history of Canadian electoral practice when you look at it in all the dimensions of running elections—voter registration, election management, how wide is your franchise, party financing—shows that in every one of those important pillars of how one runs elections, over the last 300 years Canada has made tremendous changes and innovations. It's been a constant record of reform, leading to the building of those institutions that have led us to get such high responses on these international results that I have talked about. Most of them were initiated in the provinces, with Quebec leading the way on election financing, Manitoba leading the way on votes for women, and New Brunswick on the secret ballot. We can look at all aspects of elections and see a constant series of innovations in them.

   The third point is that there's no perfect electoral system. I won't go into that because we just heard a very learned discussion on it.

   On the committee process, let me just quickly remind you about that joint committee that we talked about. It met for months and had hundreds of submissions, but there were two key elements in that very difficult process.

   The first was timing. The committee asked for, and Mr. Trudeau— the first Trudeau, my Prime Minister Trudeau—gave that committee length of time. He had a strong deadline, but changed that deadline to accommodate the needs of the committee, which asked for more time. The question for this committee is that the timing issue should be flexible in order for you to get it right.

   Second, and equally critical, was that the representatives of every party had a tremendous impact on that committee. If I remember correctly, for example, the Conservatives on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms debate proposed over 20 amendments, of which I

think seven or so were accepted by the government. The NDP proposed 40, of which over 20 were accepted.

   The point is, the government was open and encouraged a consensus, and the committee then, though some had basic disagreement with the whole project, worked hard to make the substance work. Consensus can work.

● (1420)

   Lastly, and I'll just end here, if this committee can achieve consensus and if you're given enough time to do so, or the government gives itself enough time to do this right rather than impose arbitrary deadlines, then as soon as you do that, a whole host of additional agenda items have to be covered. These include election debates, the role of Parliament itself, civic literacy, and many groups, not the least of which is our group at Massey College, which has a two-year program on a democratic agenda, including the idea of party policy foundations. There is much more to do once you help Canada solve this question of electoral reform.

   The Chair: Thank you so much, Professor Axworthy, for bringing many new and original insights to the discussion.

   Professor Harrington, please go ahead, for 10 minutes.

   Professor Matthew P. Harrington (Professor, Faculty of Law, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

   I am honoured to be here today, and I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee.

   I should like to confine my remarks to just two points. The first is constitutional and the second is political.

   The first issue to be considered is the extent to which a change in the current process of electing members of the House implicates the amending provisions of the Canadian Constitution. As the committee is no doubt aware, this issue is whether Parliament can proceed under section 44 or whether it must use the general amending procedure, also known as the 7/50 formula, set out in section 42.

   As perhaps you are also aware, a great deal of ink has been spilled recently by academics in law and politics debating this particular question. The newspapers have been filled with editorials by various scholars contending that the abolition of first past the post may be done by Parliament alone, under section 44, whilst others contend that a new electoral system will require the consent of the provinces, under section 42. The degree of certainty expressed by my colleagues in this literature is rather puzzling to me, for I believe any conclusion is premature at this stage.

It would appear to me that the question of which amending procedure is required must abide the advent of an actual proposal. This is because I believe the Supreme Court's recent jurisprudence on amending the Constitution has created a great deal of ambiguity and confusion, so much so that I think it's now nearly impossible to determine whether a change in the method of electing members of either branch of Parliament is significant enough to require provincial consent. In short, while I'd like to say that changing the method of electing members of the House of Commons might be done under this section or that section of part V of the Constitution, if asked, I would be constrained, like any evasive lawyer, to say that I'd have to get back to you on that.

That's simple, because the Supreme Court has made a muddle of the amending process. The starting point for the analysis is the Supreme Court reference and the Senate reference. In both these cases, the court took up the question of how the composition of institutions may be changed. In both cases the Supreme Court took an extremely limited view of the process of constitutional amendment on the grounds that when amendments work a substantial change to the essential character of an institution, or where such a change would affect the rights of the provinces in a significant way, the amendments must utilize the 7/50 process.

In both cases, the court refused to limit its analysis to a purely textual review of the constitutional provisions, and this is significant. On the contrary, the court held that amendments to the Constitution are not confined merely to textual changes. They include changes to the constitutional architecture, although the court does not define for us exactly what the constitutional architecture is. It is this reliance on constitutional architecture that poses significant problems for navigating the waters of amendment. As of this moment, it seems difficult to predict whether the court might regard changes to the electoral system as merely housekeeping matters, allowing use of section 44, or whether such changes would constitute an alteration to the fundamental nature or role of the House and thus require the 7/50 formula.

My own view is that eliminating the first-past-the-post system might implicate section 42, given the court's treatment of recent attempts to alter the manner of selecting senators and justices. In striking down the attempt to create a system of advisory elections for the Senate, and an accompanying proposal for term limits, the court made it clear that changes that would fundamentally alter the Senate's role as a body designed to provide for sober second thought would be constitutionally suspect. Some have argued that we can ignore the Senate reference on the grounds that there are specific provisions in the Constitution dealing with the appointment of senators, but in the Supreme Court reference, the court struck down an attempt to alter the qualifications of justices.

Bear in mind that in the Supreme Court reference, what was before the court was an act of Parliament. What was before the court was an attempt by Parliament to change one of its own statutes.

● (1425)

The court declared that Parliament's authority to amend the Supreme Court Act was limited because the act has, over time, essentially taken on a constitutional character. One might argue therefore that any attempt to alter the essential character of an institution or any attempt to alter a system of selecting members which then changes its essential character would trigger that 7/50 formula.

The use of constitutional architecture in the Senate reference as well as the concept of essential features in the Supreme Court reference are, I think, so devoid of precision and substance that one cannot say in advance whether a specific proposal will trigger the requirement for the 7/50 general amending provision. Morever, one might wonder whether the court would actually be inclined to treat the Elections Act as it did the Supreme Court Act and declare that first past the post is entrenched in the constitutional architecture. The Supreme Court Act of 1875 established the initial qualifications for judges. One would have thought Parliament would have been able to change that, but the court declared it could not do so. After the long period of time, it has become part of the furniture. One might question whether the Elections Act, and various predecessors, have done exactly that. I don't say; I wonder.

At this point, therefore, I think the committee is regrettably in the position of having to anticipate in advance whether any specific proposal will disturb the court's so far nebulous concept of constitutional architecture or significantly alter what it calls the essential features of the House.

If pressed, I would suggest that there are two ways that the committee might do that, or any proposal might do that.

The first would be any system of voting that alters the relationship with, or the rights or the powers of, the provinces—perhaps a significant reworking of ridings that would dilute representation in some way. Of far greater concern, perhaps, is whether any reform system would substantially affect the relationship between the Prime Minister and the House. It could be argued that a Westminster-style government implies the stability provided by a prime minister able to control the House without frequent resort to coalition.

I regret that I can't be more specific on this point, and I dare say that if anybody comes forward and says, "Oh, go ahead and use section 44," ask them if they're willing to bet the House on that, because until such time as the court defines "essential features" or "constitutional architecture", no one can ever really predict whether any proposal that comes from the House will be regarded as mere housekeeping, thus implicating section 44, or whether it is a substantial change, requiring use of the general amending formula. The point I would simply like to make is there is no way to know at this point.

My political point is rather more straightforward. Regardless of the constitutional question, I would suggest to the committee that some form of direct consultation with the Canadian people is required, and I think everyone agrees with that. The arguments for a referendum have been rehearsed elsewhere, and I think little would be gained by my recapping them here. My own view is that referenda are incompatible with a Westminster-style government. I believe firmly in the sovereignty of Parliament and I think it is regrettable that the Canadian Parliament has, in recent decades, become rather timid in asserting its place in the constitutional system. I think both the House and the Senate ought to be more vigorous in asserting parliamentary prerogative. After all, the essence of the Westminster system is that the people are best represented in their Parliament, and not in the courts and not in the executive.

To some of my colleagues I know that makes me a bit of an anachronism, a dinosaur, in suggesting that the most appropriate way for electoral reform to be accomplished is by a subsequent parliamentary election. At present, I don't believe that it's possible for us to claim that there is a mandate, a democratic mandate, for any particular electoral reform. I would suggest therefore that the most appropriate way to gauge the support of the Canadian people would be for the government to go to the country a second time. At various times in our history, significant issues have been presented to the people in the form of an election. Recall the 1988 Canadian election, which was fought primarily on the question of whether the North American Free Trade Agreement ought to be ratified.

● (1430)

In conclusion, I would suggest that the most appropriate way to engage the consent of the people would be for the government to prepare a proposal that can be the basis of a subsequent election. That might occur by having the government resign right now, a prospect I know is fatuous in the extreme, or simply waiting until the next election.

In short, the most appropriate thing to do is to make the 2019 election about electoral reform.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Harrington. Many thanks to all the witnesses as well.

Before we start with the questions, I would like to take a moment to explain to the witnesses how the question period works. We have two rounds of questions during which each MP can ask one or more questions. The maximum time allowed, however, is five minutes, including the answers. If a witness does not have time to answer, they may do so at another time. They may answer a previous question when it is their turn to speak again. This does not limit debate; it simply creates a logical structure.

We will now start the first round of questions. Ms. Sahota, you have the floor.

● (1435)

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

I really found these presentations very intriguing and some of the best we've had.

All the presentations to some degree discuss educational components.

Dr. Axworthy, you have spent quite a lot of time on civics, heritage, and education. What do you think would be the best approach for this committee to take, whether it's in the time frame we have now or whether it's in the extended time frame that you were suggesting? How do we best approach the people? Regardless of whether this is for a referendum, whether it's for some assemblies, or whether it's for the the purpose of the town halls and consultations that this committee is going to be doing, how do we make sure that the people who are coming forward are educated on this issue? That is, how can they understand the gravity of the issue and how can they understand the importance of the need for them to come forward and participate in this dialogue? How do we go about doing that?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Of course, there are a variety of techniques on consultation right up into what is called deep engagement. I'm sure your committee staff and so on have a whole host of techniques to assist members as they go back to their ridings or as part of this committee process.

One idea I would suggest to you—and I believe it's one my former colleague from Queen's, Jonathan Rose, also raised—as a further technique to the role of parliamentarians themselves in looking at these sets of issues, if the timing deadline is flexible, as I've argued, and perhaps even into the next election, would be to actually create citizens' assemblies or a jury in regions or in provinces where citizens are selected impartially. It is not just for those who have a point of view to come forward, but the citizens are selected impartially. Those citizens are then themselves grappling with the same issues that you're grappling with as legislators.

I've always found in my experience—and this has been experimented with in a variety of provinces—that the use of the independent citizen jury system is a very good complement to the work of parliamentarians, particularly around some of these value issues that I talk about. You have your own processes as a committee, but if you are coming down to two or three alternatives that should be looked upon, I would take a very hard look at complementary or, after this committee process, a citizen jury process.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

How would you see these citizens' assemblies formulated? I ask because we are dealing with such a grand scope. We've seen them done at the provincial level, but how do we do it at the national level so that we have a good cross-section of people? How do we go about it practically?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: The process would be a large one. It was large enough in British Columbia and Ontario. It would have to be organized in every province and region. This would be a very large undertaking. If the time were sufficient and the education process were large—including, for example, televising the hearings so that the kinds of experts and people who you're having the benefit of listening to today would be replicated across the country—I would have independent panels by province and area.

● (1440)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's interesting.

Doctor, you did a report on parliamentary reform. From those recommendations, can you tell me which ones could be implemented by this committee studying electoral reform?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, please.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Is there enough time?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: It was about a 200-page report, and in the major recommendations, I think one of the crucial aspects is the role of committees such as your own. One of our specific recommendations, for example, is that the chairs of committee should be paid the same as a cabinet minister. That is, chairs of committee were so important that in terms of—

The Chair: I'm in favour of that, by the way.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: If you need more time, Mr. Axworthy, just go ahead.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: That was worth a minute, anyway.

As well, committee members should be able to join for the whole term, so that committees build up expertise. Part of it is that committees act as a countervail to the power of the executive. I would take a long look at the committee system.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Reid is next.

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

Mr. Chair, I want to begin by pointing out the plight of our underpaid vice-chairs.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: This is turning into a collective bargaining session.

Mr. Scott Reid: My questions are for Professor Norris.

Professor, you referred with respect and with admiration, I think, to the process by which New Zealand adopted its new electoral reform system, the MMP system, in the 1990s. Others—at least one other witness—have been much less respectful of at least the motives of those who set up the process, although I think people are universal in their respect for the maturity with which New Zealand voters dealt with the system.

I want to go back and ask you a couple of questions about this. New Zealanders are the masters of something that I don't think exists anywhere else in the world, which is the preferential referendum, the

referendum whereby you have more than two options. I want to ask you a bit about this.

In 1992-1993, what happened was that in 1992, the New Zealanders held a referendum with two questions. The first was, "Are you in favour of getting rid of first past the post?", to which 84.7% said yes. The second question was then, "Which system do you favour?" Happily, this produced a majority in favour of one system, with 65% in favour of MMP, because it was not a preferential ballot. It was actually just to list off their preferences, and there could have been a big shemozzle in which 20% might have gone for each of the alternatives, or at least no majority for any alternative. That was done. Then a year later, more or less, a second referendum was held on MMP versus first past the post.

Subsequent to that, they've had a second preferential referendum, which was structured differently, over their flag. This occurred in two stages, in November of last year and in March of 2016. In this case, what whey did was structure it somewhat differently. You ranked the four preferred options that had first been chosen by a select committee in order, and then in the second ballot, you took the winning candidate and voted versus the status quo.

I'm just wondering, looking at those different variations, if you have any thoughts as to what is the best way of approaching a preferential referendum.

Prof. Pippa Norris: I think that's a very good question, thinking about the process. I think that we can contrast New Zealand and the U.K. We know about Brexit, but we also know about the vote that they had on the alternative vote system. Those referendums, I think, were a problem in lots of different ways as a process, never mind the outcome. In particular, in terms of electoral reform, when people were asked if they wanted AV or not as a simple yes/no, then this wasn't the option that most parties, politicians, or the public wanted. In fact, the Liberal Democrats wanted a different system, and so did some of the Scot Nats, and so on. The choice itself was a problem, and of course it got turned down as a result, and people wanted to go to the safer thing.

In New Zealand, by contrast, as you say, having that two-step process really lets the public as a whole ask, "Do we want to keep the status quo or not?", and then there's a question about each of the different choices. It's really a question of public education, because people aren't aware of what it means to have preferential voting, how STV works in Ireland, or how alternative votes work in other countries. It does take a long time to inform the public with really good mutually balanced educational programs about what the options might be on the table.

I think the New Zealand model is one that Canada, if you go down the referendum route, should certainly think very hard about. It gives people a choice in two stages. One is the familiar system or something else, and if you want something else, then it gives an opportunity to the parties and interest groups, electoral reform societies, general citizens, and other forms of lobbying groups to think through what the best option might be.

If one looks at New Zealand versus the U.K., New Zealand's far ahead in terms of the process.

●(1445)

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Do I have any time left?

The Chair: About 40 seconds.

Mr. Scott Reid: The two referendum cycles on the different questions, the flag and the electoral system, were structured differently. Do you have any thoughts as to which is the better of the two ways of structuring what effectively is a two-question and a preferential process?

The Chair: Be fairly briefly, please. I know it's a difficult question.

Prof. Pippa Norris: I just thought the system they used for the electoral reform was better than the system they used for the flag, which, of course, got voted down again, cost a lot, and didn't actually get through. The first system worked, with a longer period between the first and the second of the different referendums, allowing more chance for deliberation.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here today. Your presentations have been very informative and interesting.

I have two questions for Ms. Norris.

Your colleague from California, Mr. Lijphart, spoke about the benefits of a form of mixed-member proportional representation as regards party political culture. He pointed out that parties are more conciliatory and more inclined to engage in dialogue and to work together.

I would like to ask you about how this can change the culture among voters. We often hear, as you know, that people sometimes vote strategically in our first past the post system. Often, they do not vote for their first choice or for the candidate who reflects their own interests and conviction; rather, they vote for a political party. Without mentioning allegiances, I know people in Toronto, for example, who wanted to vote for candidate A, but ended up voting for candidate B because they wanted to block candidate C. These candidates could be of any political stripe.

Would proportional representation put an end to this kind of voter behaviour in elections?

[*English*]

Prof. Pippa Norris: Strategic voting can be seen as a problem, but it can also be seen as a virtue for other reasons. Think about, for example, the second ballot system, which is used in France. That's a majoritarian system, and it's designed to create large parties.

In the first ballot, in France, in the presidential elections or the Chamber of Deputies elections, you vote with your heart. You vote for the party that you really love or is closest to your policies and interests. In the second, you're forced to only vote for the top two, so you have to vote strategically if you had supported a minor party

before. De Gaulle introduced that to try to make sure there was a broad consensus in the support for the presidency.

Strategic voting per se is not necessarily something normatively problematic, and it's used very widely in many countries. Clearly, the different systems have different consequences for strategic voting. You can also vote strategically, of course, under a proportional representation system, again depending on where your party is in the rankings. You need to look, for example, at your district and you need to think about how many candidates there are in your district. Strategically that's a matter for calculation by the parties as well as for the voters. If, for example, you're weak in a district, you might only have one candidate in a party list; if you feel you're very strong, you'll put all the candidates forward.

You can't get rid of strategic voting necessarily by having either PR or mixed member systems or first past the post, and therefore it's not necessarily something that is going to be eradicated by reform.

I'm not surprised, by the way, to know that Professor Lijphart supports PR. That's always been his argument, and I very much respect his views.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much.

I would like to return to the situation in New Zealand, to talk not necessarily about the process that led to the changes, but about an inherent consequence of the changes that we have seen there. I know you are also interested in the participation of women in parliamentary and electoral systems.

In 1990, women accounted for just 16% of elected members in New Zealand. In 1996, just six years later, their participation rate had nearly doubled, with just over 29% of elected members being women.

How can this be explained? Is it a change in culture? The voting method was changed, but there might be other factors as well.

●(1450)

[*English*]

Prof. Pippa Norris: It's a change of voting system. We can see the same in Germany and in other countries that have mixed member systems. It's far more difficult for women and other minorities to get elected under first past the post in single-member districts than it is under the party list.

In single-member districts, the people who are recruiting candidates only pick one candidate for their riding or for their constituency, so they might well go for a safe choice, which is often seen as a candidate who might have experience in a particular way or fits the mould of the politician. Under a party list, you have basically a range of different candidates. You want a balance. You might want to balance by class or by language or by gender or by ethnicity, but essentially when you're selecting a party list, you don't want to discriminate against any group, because you might have a loss of popularity, a loss of votes.

The way that the systems work means that essentially—and we've known this since the 1980s—proportional representation has the strongest representation for women overall. Under the mixed member system, women get in through the party list. Under the first past the post, it becomes more difficult at the selection or recruitment stage for women to get selected, and therefore to get elected.

The Chair: *Merci.*

Prof. Pippa Norris: You can also use quotas, obviously.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

You have the floor, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here today. It is very interesting listening to you.

My question is for Mr. Harrington, but I would also like to hear from Mr. Axworthy and Ms. Norris, if you don't mind.

Canada is a federation made up of a number of nations, including a majority and various minorities. The system, including the electoral system, was designed to guarantee rights to the minority nations.

If the electoral system were reformed, what criteria should be met to guarantee the rights of minority nations, of which I am one representative?

[*English*]

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: Are you asking me which system I think would work best?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: No, regardless of the system. If you like, we can take mixed-member proportional representation, for example.

In absolute terms, what must the reform include in order to guarantee minority nations' rights, which was the very spirit of our federation?

[*English*]

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: I would have to beg off the question, since I'm a lawyer, not a political scientist. I think one of the great problems is that we assume that lawyers know everything.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: It's very important to bear in mind the role of lawyers. I can write the statute, I can write the provision, but as to whether this or that system is a better system is really a political science question. I would defer to Professor Norris. Unfortunately, we have a tendency....

When we read all the op-eds, we see all the law professors now are opining on which is the best political system, and I say we know nothing about that kind of thing. I hate to be flippant about it, but I think it's really a question of intensive study of politics and empirical and anecdotal research that lawyers in general, and particularly law professors, really don't do. I almost began by saying that I came here

agnostic about the question. I'm not here to suggest one or another system. I'm sorry about that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I had the idea that lawyers knew everything. At least, that's what they had always told me.

Mr. Axworthy and Ms. Norris, perhaps you can answer the question.

[*English*]

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I guess I would say on the question of minorities that the crucial aspect about democracy and efficacy is really your knowledge as an individual. For particular minorities—and I'm thinking, for example, of recent immigrants to Canada—the education and the knowledge about our system is more problematic because of the fact that they have emigrated. I think a country should be looking at those who have more barriers to participation, in this case around knowledge.

Just as an illustration, a case in point is with regard to learning about our system. We bring in a quarter of a million people a year, and they have to know about our background of federalism in Canada, the Canadian story. Take the *Historica Minutes*, for example, the 75 or 80 one-minute television snappers about the history of the country. Why don't we translate those into a variety of different languages—Chinese, Spanish, and others? Every immigrant who arrives would get the history of Canada in their language and in an easily digestible form, rather than in a long book and a series of reports. We have legal equality in the country, but we have disparities in knowledge and we have disparities in engagement, and that's what we have to work on.

●(1455)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds left, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Okay.

Ms. Norris, would you like to answer my question?

[*English*]

Prof. Pippa Norris: Diversity is really critical, particularly because societies now are increasingly globalized, and émigré populations need to have citizenship rights and voices in representative bodies like Parliament.

A couple of things can be done. Clearly, if you go towards a mixed member or a proportional system, the districts can be based on provinces. In that sense you don't change the familiar boundaries; you just have multi-member districts within them. If you stick with first past the post, still things can be done. Again, think of New Zealand. You can have reserved seats or quotas for particular minorities, such as indigenous groups, who are concentrated in particular areas and who need representation. About 20 or so countries around the world have reserved seats for those types of groups, so we can do some things.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May is next.

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

I'll also admit that I was once a practising lawyer. It's been a while since I've been in practice, so I'm not sure, but we have had a number of constitutional lawyers' briefs. The most recent was Benoit Pelletier's from the University of Ottawa, who did a brilliant and concise review of the BNA Act, the Constitution Act of 1982, all the leading Supreme Court cases. He looked at fundamental principles and then set out a course of "as long as you don't do the following".

I don't know...did you see Professor Pelletier's testimony?

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: Yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay. In terms of his conditions, he said, "If you don't trip any of these trip wires, you have clear sailing for Parliament to amend electoral reform." Your question was, "Why are these people so certain?" , but that seemed to me to be a fairly cautious and well-informed path forward.

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: Yes, I think I'm in the minority on this. I do recognize that a number of my colleagues suggest that this is a section 44 problem.

I will say this. First, no matter what Parliament comes up with, this will be litigated, sadly. Second, the court has not given any guidance. I see the checklist, if you will, or the recipe for success, but the court seems rather capricious in this. In other words, in defining its own structure, the court discussed the fact that if you attempt to alter the essential characteristics of the Supreme Court, then you're going to need provincial consent. Nowhere did it bother to explain to us what the essential characteristics of the Supreme Court were. When you look at the House and the electoral system, I think it's not unreasonable to think that the court would have to take on that question as well.

People will say we've always used first past the post. That's not true in the Westminster system, as we all know. It isn't necessarily entrenched by virtue of the Constitution Act of 1867, but it seems to have become, arguably, entrenched over time. When you look at the idea of changing the qualifications for justices, which is a statute of Parliament, and the court says the usage is such that it is firmly entrenched, and now you're talking about something that at least has been in practice even longer, I'm not sanguine about that point.

●(1500)

Ms. Elizabeth May: In 1867 the U.K. parliamentary tradition included multi-member districts, so if anything is entrenched, it would have to include multi-member districts. I think you're in a minority in thinking there are issues here.

 I wanted to also ask Professor Axworthy a question, and you again, Professor Harrington, and I'm only leaving you out, Dr. Norris, because it's such a Canadian question, but if you have a view, let me know.

Would you see any benefit in the government of the day putting a reference to the Supreme Court? Are there any issues that require engagement at other levels? Is this a constitutional matter, or are we correct in believing, as I believe, that it's up to the Parliament of Canada to decide what the voting system is? If the court refuses to take the reference, then it's a clear sign they don't see an issue. If they do take the reference, then it clarifies things before the system is first engaged. It's an out-of-the-box idea. I wonder if Professor Axworthy or Professor Harrington has a view on that as a cautionary approach.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: You go first.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: I would agree with you. I think this is an area where Parliament ought to assert its sovereignty and not defer to the court.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Yes, I feel exactly the same. When I talked about all the major changes from the secret ballot to an independent election commissioner to independent boundaries commissioners, which are crucial aspects of our system, they were all done through Parliament, and so should this be.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I will then assert the supremacy of Parliament and assure you that we will take control of this issue and resolve it in a forthright fashion.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. DeCourcey, you have the floor and you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Dr. Norris, thank you, and thank you, Dr. Harrington

I want to start with Dr. Axworthy.

I appreciated your comments, which remind us to temper some of the hyperbolic rhetoric that floats around this conversation around crises while also keeping us mindful of the need to work towards improvements. I wonder if you can lay out some of the most important improvements that this committee can work together on.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: The democratic agenda is a large one, but it is of particular, direct importance for a committee that will be making recommendations for changes to the electoral system.

Should you recommend a more proportional system or a mixed member system, by which the likelihood of majority governments becomes less, at a minimum—not impossible, but tending toward the representation side as opposed to the effective or efficiency side of government—then it becomes all the more important for the House Commons to work as an institution, to work in a minority or coalition kind of situation. This means that what members do in a legislature is at least as important as how they get there, and a host of suggestions have been made around the uses of committee systems, the role of members' statements, the breaking up of omnibus legislation, asserting programs around prorogation, the kinds of resources that are necessary for the use of the committee systems, the role of caucus research bureaus, and the need for better staff. I mentioned some of the suggestions that we made in our report about the committee system.

In essence, in terms of Parliament itself, my argument to you and to this committee is that as important as a reform agenda around our electoral system is—and of those six pillars, it's the only one that hasn't changed since 1967—just as important as a critical element would be for the House of Commons to take seriously its role as the people's House of Commons. That means a real revitalization of the role of members of Parliament, particularly through the committee systems, and there is a long list of suggestions.

The democratic agenda is large, and I can talk more about civic literacy and the role of party foundations and education, but the next agenda absolutely should be reform of the House of Commons.

● (1505)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: How would you advise us to deliver this in a digestible way when we consult with Canadians, talking about the larger democratic restructuring or renewal at play and maybe the way the different systems will help precipitate changes to democracy?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I would recommend, again, to end where you began, which is not over-hyping any of these systems.

We know from Pippa Norris's work that the kind of system you have is important and has an impact, but it's not necessarily the predominant factor. There are a host of other issues, such as political culture, the quality of the people running, and so on, and I think this is an area that requires some modesty, both in touting its impacts and also touting its defects.

So yes, our system can be improved. Will it be transformative? No.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'll come back to others in the second round.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move onto Mr. Richards, please, for five minutes.

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

Professor Harrington, I come to you first of all. You had certainly indicated that you think it's vitally important that people be directly and substantially consulted on the question of changing the voting system. You mentioned in your opening remarks, and I think subsequently, a couple of different ways whereby that could occur. You mentioned briefly the idea of referendums, and I think you indicated that you're not generally a fan of referendums, but my sense was that much like other witnesses we've had, you feel this might be an exceptional circumstance, one in which a referendum would be required. I'll let you answer that in a second and confirm that.

You also mentioned the idea of going directly to an election and the government resigning now. I think there are probably a number of members in this room who would probably think that's a bad idea, although I'd personally be okay with it, but for other reasons. In any case, whether they resigned or whether they called the 2019 election on that issue, it sounded to me that you were indicating that would be a way to have this be legitimized. Just to clarify, do you also feel that if that wasn't the case, a referendum would be another way to legitimize it?

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: Yes. Admittedly I take a rather High Church view of Parliament and its role in the system. I think that the most appropriate way for this matter to be resolved is for this to be the subject of an electoral campaign, which, of course, means that it's likely 2019. I know promises or expectations have been raised, but this is an incredibly complex question, as everyone knows, and I don't think anyone should feel an obligation to rush through this process just to fulfill campaign expectations. If I were in charge for the day, I would suggest that the most appropriate way would be to spend this Parliament resolving this question and place the proposal before the voters in a Westminster-style election and deal with it that way so that a new government takes office with the support of the people for whatever proposal has been developed.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'll just stop you there.

I'm assuming I don't have a lot of time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You've got a minute and 45 seconds.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a follow-up question I'd like to ask. You had an interesting article in the *Montreal Gazette* back in January, where you indicated that you felt that if the government was to try to proceed without taking it to the people in one form or the other, this would be a time when the Senate should maybe take a step to act in the democratic interests of Canadians to block the government's bill in order to force them to take it to the people in some way.

I just wanted to get your sense. Why do you think that kind of rare action by the Senate would be justified and legitimate if it was necessary?

● (1510)

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: My hate mail on that is spectacular.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: My fallback is a referendum. I think there has to be some mode by which there is a formal consultation with the people. I was reacting, at the time, to the assertion that there would be neither; there would be neither election nor referendum, in which case, as I have said, that is the Senate's function as well, as I have a High Church view of the Senate. The Senate's role would be to impede the process in order that the people would be consulted, as was done with NAFTA.

Mr. Blake Richards: To be very clear, what you're saying is that in order to have properly and legitimately asked the people for their consent, it would either be an election on the issue or a referendum. That's the way that we could make sure that people have been adequately and properly asked for their consent.

The Chair: Briefly, give a yes or no if you can.

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Romanado is next.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank all three of you for being here on a sunny August afternoon.

Dr. Axworthy and Professor Norris, you both mentioned that there is no perfect electoral system, and we have heard that from other witnesses. You've also mentioned that no system will address every value that we hold dear.

This committee was given a mandate with specific guidelines to help us in that quest to find the perfect solution that we hope we will be able to find on a consensus basis. One of the overarching concerns that we've been hearing from Canadians is their relationship with their local representative, and I know it's the same for MPs who have been elected; they like to know that they have that relationship with their constituents. We heard that in a multi-member proportional situation, there would be some confusion as to who handles what—"Who's my representative?"—and we might lose that link between the Canadian and their representative.

I'd like to get your thoughts on that, given the fact that it is a value that is held so dear by Canadians. What do you would think about the impact of implementing something like an MMP model?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Pippa, do you want to go first?

Prof. Pippa Norris: Would you like me to go first?

Think about the Bundestag. Here we have two MPs who are elected through different methods. One is in the single-member district and one is the person who is elected in the party list. There isn't a lot of ambiguity in the sense that there is still that link between the individual member and the local constituency, the local voters, the local party, and all those other things that are important in any parliamentary representation.

You can have a mixed member system, which has to some extent the best of those two different worlds, but it does mean that members of Parliament would be slightly different in their roles and responsibilities and in how much they do for constituency service, which is an incredibly valuable service that takes up a lot of time and is appreciated in any parliamentary system, versus those who are focused more on committee work or issues or other types of concerns for Parliament. You just divide the roles a bit more than you might do under the current system.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: My answer would be quite similar. I also put a high value on it among the various principles in the mandate of this committee. The local identification to me is terrifically important for a couple of reasons. First, when we look at the frustration of citizens with our system, much of it revolves around the frustrations of how to deal with government itself because of the complexities, the confusions, and the wait times. Members of Parliament serve as ombudsmen, as the final step you can try in resolving these terrible sets of issues in the daily life of Canadians that they face. It's about the only recourse for so many citizens when they're up against waiting times and long periods of difficulty.

In a globalized world, when things get ever larger, to have that personal identification is absolutely crucial. How would we divide that, as Professor Norris just talked about, particularly if we continued to have the mixed member where we had, in my view, still a heavy orientation toward the single-member district? There would then be some as a top-up on the list. The natural division is that part of the top-up of those who are on the larger vote would be concentrating on more national issues, parliamentary issues, and so

on, leaving the members to do the local surgery, which is the bread-and-butter work of members of Parliament and something only they can do.

● (1515)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Professor Norris, given the values that Canadians hold dear, what would your thoughts be in terms of transitioning to a ranked ballot before transitioning to an MMP?

Prof. Pippa Norris: On that last point on representation, you also have think about minor parties. The old idea of parliamentary representation is that you go through your MP, and irrespective of party, you are representing the constituency you're a member of. It does mean that small parties are excluded. If you have a mixed member system, smaller parties are more likely to be there, so you don't necessarily need to go through your MP. You can go through a different channel to get representation.

In terms of rank preferences, essentially that's another choice. It's a more majoritarian system if one goes toward a preferential vote, and that has certain consequences for party representation, but I don't think you should think of it as a sequential step. It's basically a choice that you need to make, and you don't want to say, "Let's have that, and then further down the road...", because you don't want instability. Every electoral system takes time to work out what the consequences are, particularly for voters in knowing how to act within that choice in terms of the ballot and in terms of districts. You don't want to have two choices.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Dubé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Axworthy, I would like to quote an article you wrote during the minority government in 2004, so I will speak in English.

[*English*]

Talking about minority Parliaments, and it was the first one since the 1970s at that point, you wrote:

> Policy actually gets made on the floor of the Commons.

That is important, of course. You also say:

> The whole focus of Ottawa shifts from quiet discussions between deputy ministers to the public, and noisy negotiations between politicians in the cockpit of Parliament.

If I just rewind a bit, you also mentioned that:

> Nothing will erase the democratic deficit faster than the election of a minority Parliament. The House of Commons becomes king. Power slips away from the executive toward the legislature.

I raise these points because when we talk about mixed member proportional, we often talk about the best of both worlds. We can look at examples like Germany, where contrary to popular belief there can be a lot of stability in a proportional system. Coupling that with what you wrote then, can we reach the conclusion that a proportional system would lead to those same kinds of negotiations that we see in a minority Parliament, yet it's more of a stable system where—not to discredit your article, because you mentioned it further, and I don't want to omit anything—parties play a big role and there's that constant sense of election? We'd be removing that, but keeping the good stuff where MPs are taking their roles much more seriously than perhaps they do when it's four years of a majority government?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: We can make any system work. Under a majority government system, much of the work goes on within caucus. I've been recommending here and elsewhere, as I also did at that time, a very expanded system around the committee system.

One result of having more parties or larger numbers of smaller parties is that kind of work then takes place on the floor of the House of Commons. We have internal coalition-building now. It takes place within larger national parties often, in the brokerage function of parties. I'm not dismissing that; it's been a crucial aspect of the history of the country in terms of accommodation. That kind of process could still occur. It would be in a different kind of way. It would have to be motivated by the same values of tolerance and give and take, which we sometimes lose in the hyper-partisan atmosphere of Parliament, but it could certainly occur.

Again, I don't want to paint some terrible world of coalitions. They can also operate. I mentioned the constitutional committee. People often forget that Mr. Trudeau also invited Mr. Broadbent to join his cabinet at that time because we wanted to expand the legitimacy of the constitutional project. That was the kind of spirit there was at that time. That's the kind of spirit we would need to make minority Parliaments work.

Is it doable? Yes, it is.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you.

Ms. Norris, we are still talking about a proportional system, but also about reforms of Parliament.

With respect to the proportional system, we often hear about the powers of the smaller parties. Yet we must not forget the MPs of the party that won the election and who are working to form government. We are talking about the MPs of the party that won the most seats in this system. The MPs of this party also gain more powers. We are not referring only to the small parties trying to form a coalition, but also the members of the largest party that belong to that coalition.

Is that correct? Can you elaborate on that?

[*English*]

Prof. Pippa Norris: The first point is absolutely right. Smaller parties would likely become better represented, such as the Greens in Canada, because they'd get a more proportional share of seats, depending on how that works through.

How does it affect the members? This is a complicated question. For example, if you went towards a proportional system, you have to think about how would members get selected for that district. Often it can be that somebody has been placed into that position by the party leadership, so the members are actually more accountable to the leadership sometimes under a proportional system. For example, in Italy you'll get hand-picked into that ranked position.

We need to think about technical issues. If you're going to have a district which is PR, is it open or is it closed, meaning are the ranked positions selected by the parties and fixed, or can voters change them and individual members try to expand their voters' will?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor, Mr. Deltell.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Parliament of Canada.

Mr. Axworthy, you said earlier that we need to reach a consensus in committee in order to take action. If this consensus is reached, does the government necessarily have to consider it? In short, in your opinion, is the government bound by the work of this committee?

[*English*]

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Consensus in committee is not unanimity necessarily, but it is a broad set of understandings. My view is that if the government did not have consensus—again, I repeat, not unanimity—a broad sense of consensus from most of the members of this committee, I would not proceed until I had that kind of consensus. When one introduces a new system, however good it is, the nature of its introduction will be crucial to its success. A system that was perceived to be forced or rammed down the throats of people would be one that would be behind the eight ball before it even began.

If this committee did not have a consensus, I would keep working at the issue and wait. I repeat, our system doesn't operate badly now, so we could afford to wait till we got it right.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If this committee has consensus, do you think the government shall respect this consensus and go on with the consensus?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Yes, I do.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Do you know that the electoral minister said no, that she's not linked with that?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Well, I'm not the minister. I'm not her adviser—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: It's not your Trudeau.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That's what he said.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I just want to repeat that in my previous experience, when you give a committee a big, crucial job, and it's an essential framework issue, as the Constitution was and as the electoral system is, looking for broad consensus—not unanimity —is something that should place very, very high in your value system.

● (1525)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Don't you think that the best way to achieve that is by a referendum, to let the people decide on this specific and so important and so precious an issue?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I am with Professor Harrington in this regard: Parliaments make big decisions, and parliamentarians are trustees of the public interest. In that trustee function, though we need education about this, I still think the beginning is that a Parliament could make this kind of decision on its own, as long as it respected consensus and process.

Could this be ramrodded through under time allocation and so on? I think that would destroy it at birth. However, should this committee reach a consensus, can that be reflected by all parties, or least a significant number of members of Parliament if it was not an all-party consensus? Yes, it could.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have about a minute left.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay.

Mr. Axworthy, I follow your line of reasoning that Parliament makes big decisions. In our view, though, this is a fundamental decision because it is our most important democratic institution and it is the electoral system in place that decides who governs us. Then there are decisions regarding the budget, foreign policy, defence and so forth. Fundamentally, though, the voting system is more important than any other institution.

Are you sure that the government has the authority to make that decision? Would it not be preferable to have a referendum?

[*English*]

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I would just repeat that of the changes to the pillars of our electoral system—how one creates boundaries, the very franchise itself, and increasingly the franchise to women and young people under 18—in every single case the changes were done by Parliament, and therefore I think this one can be done too. I just referred to one or two, but in my paper I think I list more than 20 of those kinds of changes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag is next.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Thank you.

This afternoon has been an excellent session for me just to reflect on where we're at with the committee. We've had some wonderful testimony again. I really appreciated the questions that were put to us at the beginning about some of the critical things and questions we need to look at. I've been reflecting on that as I've been waiting for my turn at the microphone.

To the questions about why reform, why reform now, and whether we have a crisis in process or outcomes, I've been reflecting that this isn't the first time we've talked about a need for reform in Canada. It was news to me, as I got into this committee, that it's actually been talked about for about 100 years at various times. To me that's fascinating. It points out that there are things.... Maybe we're not at the crisis mode that we saw in New Zealand, where there were really skewed results and people were unhappy, but I've been reflecting on it. I've been out door-knocking, and during the campaign I was out, and a great number of people said to me that they weren't voting just because they've lost faith in the process, that their vote doesn't count.

There are all of these issues. We're seeing declining voter numbers and lack of representation by certain groups and all sorts of things. Is that the kind of crisis point that we need to be at, or is that not good enough to be the catalyst for it? Our government has heard that there are pressures facing us that should take us down this path. Then there are questions again about the options and improving superior systems. We've tweaked and seen changes made to the electoral system in first past the post.

To all three of you, are we stuck with first past the post? Have we not reached a critical point in Canada, or is this the only system that will ever meet the needs of Canadians? I've been reflecting as well that we've seen referenda across provinces to look at electoral change, and they've all failed. Why do we fail? Why have we never moved past what we have? Is first past the post the only solution for Canada?

Professor Norris, perhaps I can start with you. Then I'll come back to our witnesses here.

Prof. Pippa Norris: Some of the problems you mentioned are there in western democracies. It's not really about either a majoritarian system or PR. A crisis of confidence in parliaments and their role and their power is very much affected by globalization and the loss of sovereignty of countries, which means parliaments are not the institutions they were 20, 30, or 40 years ago; therefore, tinkering or changing the electoral system won't necessarily meet those objectives. In New Zealand they tested, for example, political efficacy before and after reform, and it didn't go up. Confidence in institutions didn't go up.

On the other hand, we do know that if you reform the system, the rules of the game, there are some mechanical things, if you like, on which you do have an impact. The number of women in parliament is likely to go up under PR and turnout is likely to go up under PR. There are specific things that can be achieved by changing the rules of the game. For other things, it might in fact make things worse rather than necessarily better.

It's really a question, again, as we said at the beginning, of identifying the central problem you want to address. It's not a crisis necessarily, but are there particular issues you think are really a problem in Canadian politics? In that case, what are the best rules that actually match that particular problem?

However, there's no single best solution to all of the issues that are facing you, just as there aren't in other political systems or democracies either.

● (1530)

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: One of the advantages of first past the post and one of the reasons it was supported in the referendums in British Columbia, Ontario, and so on—and it's not to be discounted —is it's simple and it's easy to understand. We're used to it, and simplicity in your electoral system is an important virtue in a world of confusion and many messages.

Therefore, I go back to the point that several of us have made, which is that if we are to make changes, the education mission—in addition to the points I've tried to make about Parliament as a complementary thrust to change in the nature of electoral system— the education that has to go in on those issues is absolutely enormous. I think that when these suggested reforms fail in referendums, it's largely because of the difficulty of understanding alternative systems and because we are used to an easily understood system, which, by the way, doesn't work badly.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will proceed to the second round. You have the floor, Ms. Sahota.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I'm going to continue from that message of simplicity. I asked a question about it yesterday and I think sometimes people scoff as well at that, saying that it's still simple no matter what system you use. We heard from an Australian witness that they had ballots as long as a mile, but yet it works there for some reason, and it's simple.

I had a gentleman in my town hall on Sunday get up, and somebody asked me on Twitter whether it was hijacked by a certain party and that's why the person was calling for simplicity. It wasn't somebody hijacking or anything; it was simply a man who had come out of sheer interest because he knew nothing about the topic. I would say it was a very small percentage of those people, but it was more people who were there for a certain purpose. I was very appreciative of having this person there. They're fairly new to the country, I believe, probably arriving in the last 10 to 15 years or so. He said that maybe you guys know better up there on the panel, so pick a system that you think is better suited for us, but just make sure we understand it and make sure it's simple because I'm not sure why we're even messing with this.

I looked at him and I thought, "That's interesting. There are quite a lot of people who don't realize what we're doing." Around this committee table we think we're doing very important work, and among my political colleagues everyone understands that this is a

very important issue, as well as some groups that study it and are interested in it, but the general population is asking, "What are you talking about?" When you're trying to get people out to the town hall, they're asking, "What do you mean? What's first past the post?" I even had people who are in politics ask me what that was.

Therefore I ask you, how highly do you value that? Having mentioned that our country is accepting new immigrants to our shores day after day, do we not have a responsibility to also make sure that we're taking them into consideration? One of the fundamental key principles that we're looking at in this committee is inclusivity. Inclusivity also means those people. Inclusivity means making sure people of all educational backgrounds can also understand how to go to the polls and how to vote and how to have access.

What are your thoughts on that, and what system do you think could work in that regard?

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: I agree. I think simplicity...and the other aspect of that is accountability. When I vote, at the end of the night I can look and I can see who won. I think a system that gets overly complicated raises suspicions that the computer is doing these things, but when we have a government that is accountable because it has gathered the largest number of seats and the people have voted in a particular riding. I think that's also a value that ought not to be diminished.

I think it's especially important for new immigrants or for people who don't pay attention to politics as a hobby or as a job to see that it's not only simple, but to be able to see the results and feel connected. They may not always be happy with the results, but they know what they are.

● (1535)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Professor Norris, do you have any input?

Prof. Pippa Norris: I have a quick response. Think about the U. K. right now, which has six electoral systems that it's working with quite happily. You have first past the post for Westminster, you have a party list for Europe, you have additional vote for the mayor of London, and you have AMS in Scotland and Wales, and people know how to vote on these different systems.

The complication is really not so much about casting the ballot; that's an issue, but you can explain that. The complications are really more for the electoral commissioner and Elections Canada in how you can actually calculate the results at the end of the day, but nowadays, with technology we can do that fairly straightforwardly. As we saw in Australia, you don't always get the vote result instantly. They take a bit of time, but they get there.

I think the issue of the complexity of the choices and the system is not a fundamental issue. If the U.K. can manage that....

Also, we often think that things are simple because we're familiar with them, but of course if you change the system, people get experience and learn how to run it. You can also have mock elections before you've actually had the real election so that people can try it out to see how it works.

Simplicity can be managed quite easily.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Professor, you had mentioned something about no system being able to eradicate strategic voting—

The Chair: You have about 15 seconds.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Can you elaborate on that? What kind of strategic voting would you see in other systems? So far we've been seeing that this may be eradicated if we go to PR.

Prof. Pippa Norris: Strategic voting is all about the size of the party and your calculations for whether or not your core party, the one you really support, is going to win or not. You do that under every system. There's a marvellous book by Gary Cox about strategic voting.

It's slightly more common under first past the post because any party that's in third and fourth place is going to get nowhere in terms of getting seats, but you can also have strategic voting if you're a small party in a multi-member district or in a very large district as well. It's all the calculation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Reid is next.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In directing my next set of questions to Professor Norris, to whom I directed my first set of questions, I mean no disrespect to the other witnesses, who are actually particularly interesting. It's just that the subject matter is one in which Professor Norris is the expert.

In responding to my question about comparing the two sets of New Zealand referenda, the flag versus the electoral reform system, you gave me an answer that was unexpected from my point of view. Those are the best answers, of course. You dwelt on the amount of time between the first and second referendum and you emphasized the need in such a situation for adequate time for public education. In so doing, you reflected testimony we heard yesterday with regard to the citizens' assembly process, followed by a referendum in British Columbia and in Ontario when they dealt with electoral reform.

One of the problems we face—and this is critical to the Canadian context right now—is that the Prime Minister made a promise in the last election that we must have a new system in place by the 2019 election, and it takes some time to implement any change to the system.

My party, of course, has been pushing for a referendum, but questions of time are such that it would be literally impossible to have a two-stage referendum, even one that only has a couple of months between stage one and stage two, and still get on with the process of changing the system in time to be in place for the 2019 election.

Is there a way out of that conundrum? Perhaps there is, perhaps there isn't. I'll just pose that question to you.

Prof. Pippa Norris: Deliberation takes time, especially since, as we've mentioned earlier, people don't know about other systems. The best answer is to have more flexibility to abandon the deadline, which was an early promise made, I'd argue, without a lot of thought about what the consequences might be. The committee in some ways is a little behind the curve in terms of setting things up and getting things going. Here we are in 2016, and we're still at the stage of working out the alternatives.

My ideal would be to delay the 2019 deadline and say that there has to be a proper process. This isn't the sort of thing that you can do fast and get it right, and you want to get the outcome right. These are also windows of opportunity. They open up now and then for you to change the system, and they don't change necessarily in 10 or 20 years, so you want to make sure that the decision reflects the Canadian public and what people would like and what Parliament would like.

Delay is better than to try to rush to an artificial deadline.

● (1540)

Mr. Scott Reid: All right. Thank you.

The other thing I wanted to ask you is to turn now to another parallel, the Australian referendum on the republic in 1999. There was a process in 1997 and 1998 in which a constitutional convention was elected and then met to decide whether or not Australia should become a republic. Under the Australian constitution, a referendum is necessary, and the referendum necessarily is on the final product— that is, it's not on the concept of whether there should be a change, but rather on the actual proposal, which I think is a really good idea. The reason I think so is that while the idea of a republic might have been supported by the majority of Australians in principle, the specific model that the government produced ultimately was found to be unsatisfactory by a majority.

This is a version of the same problem we would face with a referendum, or indeed any mechanism, such as an election, to approve any new model: the details of the model would ultimately be decided after the fact by partisan actors, unless you actually have your approval mechanism on a specific piece of legislation that is pre-written, as was the case with the Australian model, and, for that matter, with Britain's Reform Act in the 1830s.

Do you have any thoughts on that particular problem?

Prof. Pippa Norris: You want to get rid of partisan interests to get this sort of consensus. For that reason, I might depart from my colleagues to say that an election that has to be on party grounds in the first place is a problem when you're dealing with constitutional issues. Backbenchers might not necessarily go along with the leader or might share different views, and you simply don't want each party to take whatever's in its own narrow interests and propose that. That's essentially a question of chickens voting for Christmas, the classic issue.

If you can get rid of party, that means a referendum that is open, where people can, as in Brexit, support whichever side they want to support due to values, due to their own interests and their own philosophy about how the electoral system should work—then a referendum, for me, would be better than an election. A referendum, again for the reasons that we've mentioned, that has enough time for deliberation and that has other elements of a deliberative poll, a deliberative assembly, or a constitutional debate outside of the Parliamentary constraints helps get to a consensus that's genuine, and it is the best sort of option.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll go next to Mr. Boulerice.

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

I will have to quote a study in English, so it's going to be easier to make my remarks and questions in English.

However, first, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that we have heard a couple of times that we have to keep our electoral system simple because, for example, immigrants or new immigrants don't know a lot about our system. I would say that most of the time it's quite the opposite, because they have to do their homework and they have to study it before they get the right to vote. A lot of Canadians don't study our electoral system in our schools.

I have here, Madam Norris, a study from a British organization called the Electoral Reform Society, a little report on the 2016 Irish general election about PR and the local link.

Let me quote the beginning of a chapter.

> In Britain it is often the case that opponents of proportional representation cite the constituency link of FPTP as a reason for its support. Having a constituency link is indeed important to the democratic culture of Britain, giving MPs an insight into the lives of ordinary citizens, allowing for the championing of local issues on the national stage and giving people a sense of connection to their MP.
> Yet Ireland's political system demonstrates that PR and a constituency link can go hand in hand.
> As Ireland has 40 constituencies of between three and five seats it is still possible for constituencies to fit local boundaries fairly well, covering a city...or a county....

We know also that in Germany, list MPs are doing constituency work and are meeting with local organizations, and in other countries the parties have quite an interest in having a diversity of list candidates from every region and every major city, for obvious reasons.

Do you think that PR and local representation can go together, as this study is saying?

●(1545)

Prof. Pippa Norris: They can go together, and what matters is the size of the district magnitude. If you have a small district—Spain has three-to-five, Ireland has five—then essentially the individual voter can find, in particular, not just an MP but a couple of MPs, perhaps from different parties, to represent their constituency concerns or to lobby for them or to do any other sort of service work.

If you get a large district, however, that dilutes. Many countries will have districts of, say, 16-20, and there is no constituency service when you get to a very, very large constituency. The classic cases are in Israel, where you have the whole country as one constituency, and in the Netherlands. In those countries, there are very weak links indeed between the members of the Knesset in Israel and individual voters. At that stage it's broken.

It really depends on how you draw your boundaries as to how you actually create an incentive to have constituency service. It's not about an either/or system, PR versus single member.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Some people here are saying that maybe we should have a Canadian system for our really big ridings, which are bigger than most European countries, and that we should still keep a first past the post system because it's impossible to merge them. It would be crazy. In the urban areas or suburbs it's easier, as there is are communities of interest that we can find there. Is it possible to have a mixed proportional representation system combined with some first past the post representation in certain areas?

Prof. Pippa Norris: You don't want to create a new cleavage between urban voters and rural voters. That could create all sorts of problems where some have one set of representation and the others have another set. You can think about the boundaries and be more imaginative about how you would draw the boundaries around different districts, so you can make sure they're somewhat even across the different sizes of the current ridings that you have. I wouldn't recommend having two or three different electoral systems for different areas of the country. That would create all sorts of distortions in representation and many other complications for members as well.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Scott Reid): You have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Ms. Norris, we heard earlier that a proportional system could improve the representation of women in parliaments. Would you also agree that there should be quotas in this regard? Or as my colleague Kennedy Stewart has suggested, would you agree that monetary penalties should be imposed on political parties that do not have enough women candidates?

[*English*]

Prof. Pippa Norris: I'd go along with all three. PR normally increases the number of women automatically through the incentive that we mentioned. Quota systems are also good, although sometimes difficult to implement under first past the post, but they can be done. For example, they've been used in the U.K. Financial penalties to make sure that if you introduce any sort of positive or affirmative action, parties have an incentive to go along with that through, for example, incentives from campaign funding or party funding, which are also very good. Having it in the law, but having an incentive with it, strengthens the work you can do.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Scott Reid): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

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

Our electoral system is based on values such as stability, but there are also problems with distortion. In this committee, we have heard from experts who have told us which system might be most suitable, being based on the same values or other values. We are wondering about that.

Mr. Axworthy and Mr. Harrington, during your presentations and exchanges, you mentioned a few times that the Senate, an important political institution in Canada, has a role to play. Unfortunately, since senators are not elected, there is a legitimacy issue.

In reforming political institutions in order to enhance democracy and ensure greater representation, should we consider reforming the Senate so that senators could be elected on an ad hoc basis?

● (1550)

[*English*]

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: No, I don't. The two houses of Parliament have differing virtues. Partisanship is critical to our party system. It's the cockpit of the House of Commons, and it has democratic legitimacy. I've used David Smith's term about the people's parliament. The role of the Senate is more for deliberation, checking abuses, and improving legislation. I think, for the overall good, one should combine the virtues of each of those institutions and not replicate the good and the bad of the House of Commons in the Senate itself. The Senate had problems, and serious ones, but changing the nature of the appointment process with a non-partisan, merit-based, much more representative Senate, leading....

By the way, these will be huge changes, as they continue with future Prime Ministers who will now take these as a convention and not go back to just appointing partisans to the Senate. We are working out the system. There will be huge changes, as we have independent senators using their expertise on a series of legislation and, hopefully, improving it and referring it back to the Commons. Our House of Commons has democratic legitimacy, and our Senate, through the new system, can have a pointed policy legitimacy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Harrington, would you like to elaborate?

[*English*]

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: I agree completely. I think that the Senate does not necessarily suffer from structural problems. The problems of the Senate can be solved by appointing better senators. The fact that the Senate is not elected is a puzzling objection to me, since the Supreme Court itself is not elected and we defer in a great many, I think, unhealthy ways to the Supreme Court.

The fact that a body is or is not elected does not seem to mean that it doesn't play an important constitutional role. I would agree completely with the idea that an election of senators would create a body in competition with the House and that if one wants to see the fruits of that, one merely has to look south. The United States Senate used to have its members appointed by the legislatures of the states; it truly represented the regional interests of the states. Now we hear all the time about gridlock and you can see that gridlock is rampant. In fact, there's a joke—I used to work in Washington—that the Senate is a place where good bills go to die. It's because the Senate does not defer to the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Ms. Norris, as you know, there are 338 federal MPs and each one represents about 100,000 Canadians. If the voting method is changed to a proportional system with lists, do you think it would be better to increase riding size and maintain the number of MPs or to increase the number of MPs? We already have 338.

[*English*]

Prof. Pippa Norris: Normally under PR, you'd increase the number of MPs per district, which means that the size of the ridings would have to be consolidated. You might have, for example, a district that now would be, say, Montreal versus different parts or particular cities in Toronto. Normally you would have to have multi-member districts to have any sort of PR system. That would be the easiest way to do it, but it would depend on the boundary commission and how they would think through what would be a natural constituency and what would be the conventions of drawing boundaries.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Scott Reid): Thank you.

We'll have to move on to our next questioner, Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm drawn to a terminology that you've used, Professor Norris, in talking about fairness to smaller parties. I will confess that I am the leader of the Green Party of Canada and I'm not actually interested in fairness to parties at all. I think our goal has to be what's in the best interests of voters and citizens, and in fairness to them we're looking at changing our voting system. Again, I appreciate that it's about values, but how do you, in looking at your research, assess the role of parties in dictating voting systems and the fairness to the voters, which I think has to be our top concern?

● (1555)

Prof. Pippa Norris: Fairness to voters is normally understood by everybody as a share of the votes going to a share of the seats. So any system that is majoritarian systematically penalizes the parties that are in third, fourth and fifth place, and always gives a winner's bonus, an exaggerated bonus, to the party in first place, whoever that party is.

The majoritarian system is not designed to have fairness per se in that regard, at the heart of it. It's designed to produce a strong majority, to get decisive decisions with a strong executive. That can be a fundamental problem because over the years, particularly since the 1950s, there's been a dealignment, progressively, in nearly every country in the western world and a proliferation of many more parties because people aren't necessarily seeing themselves in class terms as supporting the parties on the left and right. They have many other interests, like the environment—and also, it has to be said, like populous parties on the right. Party systems are fragmented and first past the post majoritarian systems try to squeeze what the voters actually want to do in terms of their party preferences into a system that doesn't allow that sort of representation. That's really a very strong argument to say that some sort of reform in Canada is very appropriate.

Majoritarian systems work proportionally if you're a two-party system. If you're in the United States and you can only vote Democrat or Republican—by and large the libertarians and the Greens are going to get, at most, 5% of the vote—then you get a roughly proportional share of votes to seats. If you get five parties, if you get 10 parties, if you get 15 parties, as increasingly most countries are having, then even though they get a share of the votes, they don't get full representation, so a large part of the population is not represented through the electoral system. It's the classic argument in favour of some sort of reform. It also will affect, on my projections, the NDP. It won't affect the Bloc Québécois so much, because they're concentrated in particular areas. But the Greens, who are spread across different parts of Canada, will always lose out from the current Canadian system.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Perhaps I can turn to you, Professor Axworthy, on this fundamental question of whether we're better off having a strong majority government or some risk of smaller parties exerting their particular agenda. I ask because you were paying a lot of attention to politics at the time. I'm thinking about the minority Parliament of Lester B. Pearson, in which if it hadn't been for a strong, smaller party, the NDP and Tommy Douglas, we wouldn't have our health care system, we wouldn't have the Canada pension plan, we wouldn't have student loans, we wouldn't have unemployment insurance. All these things were created because of pressure from a smaller group of seats.

In contrast, in the false majority situation of our most recent Parliament, we had policies that worked against any action on climate change, inaction that was not supported by the majority of Canadians, but was executed by, one might say, a "smaller party", in reality, which exerted its influence 100% because of our voting system.

I wonder if you see a risk. How do you tease out the differences between concern for effective government and a majority? How much do we actually not have a risk, but a benefit from those other interests having a seat at the table, as they did in the minority parliament of Lester Pearson?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: It depends on how the executive responds to the minority parties. Are they in fact accommodative, or is every party competitive, or are they antagonistic? When I first came to Ottawa, which was in the Jurassic age, my minister was Walter Gordon, then president of the Privy Council. One of my first jobs for Mr. Gordon was to go to listen to parliamentary debates to see who had good ideas so that the Liberals could steal them. That's what Liberals like to do, but it was indicative of an approach to Parliament to try to learn from it. So, yes, the Pearson government was an enormously creative one, a little disorganized, but enormously creative, and that was because of the mindset in dealing with accommodation among parties. We've lost a lot of that accommodation ethos as I've seen politics develop in the country.

● (1600)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Scott Reid): That actually uses up that time exactly to the second.

Mr. DeCourcey, it is your turn.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You're looking quite spry in that seat.

An hon. member: Give him a raise.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: It depends on my time allocation.

Dr. Axworthy, I would agree with you that Liberals have always endeavoured to adopt good ideas and put them into practice. But I will follow up on my colleague Mr. Ste-Marie, on the question of the size of Parliament and whether parliamentarians should exert their ability to introduce change to the electoral system.

What appetite would there be from Canadians to grow the size of Parliament, in your view? What is a reasonable size of constituency for a member of Parliament, perhaps a member representing a local constituency? What's the reasonable number of electors for that person to be accountable to? Are there other considerations that we should be mindful of?

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: We could have the Sergeant-at-Arms or the Speaker here, or the Board of Internal Economy, but I'm not sure how much more space our House of Commons could take in terms of increased numbers of members, unless we get away from the Canadian tradition, which is that every member has a place in the House of Commons, a seat, and adopt the British system of not having that and coming into a Parliament when one can.

We have increased the numbers recently in the past few years. I think, though, that you get to a point where the numbers become too large for people to grasp, and it's hard then to organize your very system. My view would be that it perhaps could be expanded more, but I don't think radically more. A House of 600 in Canada, for example.... Britain has roughly that with considerably more than our population.

I think you do begin to hit limits, and just adding more members is not a solution. As a member of Parliament, you could tell me the rough size of a riding. Probably anything much beyond 100,000 gets very difficult to service.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Dr. Harrington, flowing from that question, with the size of ridings and other modalities we have to consider with different systems, where should we be careful about moving toward section 42 considerations as opposed to section 44 considerations? What sorts of aspects of potential change should we be mindful of, in your view?

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: I would suggest that Parliament have a great deal of leeway in the organization of ridings. I think the court seems to be rather deferential to that and regards it as a housekeeping issue. With ridings, and with the number of members of Parliament, I think the court seems to have made clear that it regards that as something left to Parliament itself to determine.

I think the court's big problem is the selection question. When you look at the Senate reference and the Supreme Court reference, they're about how the members are chosen. More instructive than the Senate reference is the Supreme Court reference. As I've pointed out, the qualifications we are discussing are after Confederation, and the qualifications that were before the court were those created in 1875. They weren't in the Constitution. Parliament created these qualifications and the court said, "Now you can't change them because they're so long entrenched", and that's the question I have.

When you talk about expanding the franchise and when you talk about ridings and those kind of things, that's within Parliament's purview. Once you start to talk about how I get to be a member of Parliament, it triggers a bit of scrutiny.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: If I have any time at all, Dr. Norris, I note there was no mention in your opening comments of STV as a potential option for us. You mentioned the status quo, alternative vote, pure PR, and MMP. Was that intentional in any way? I ask because you've mentioned it since.

● (1605)

The Chair: Be very brief, please.

Prof. Pippa Norris: There are a thousand different permutations. In fact, there are 193 electoral systems around the world.

The Chair: Oh, my God.

Prof. Pippa Norris: It all depends on the details. STV is one, but I can give you a block quote and I can give you 10 other varieties of voting that we can use beyond STV. STV is a form of PR for me. It's just...small constituencies and a particular way of voting.

The Chair: Thank you.

That number of 193 just discouraged us a bit.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Professor Norris, I have some questions for you in this round. In response to an earlier question, you briefly touched on what I want to ask you about. I think you ran out of time. You were asked about strategic voting under our current system here in Canada. It seemed to me that you were making the point that strategic voting is something that could happen and probably does happen under almost any type of electoral system. Would that be an accurate statement, and can you elaborate a bit more on why that would be?

Prof. Pippa Norris: Strategic voting is voting not with the party that you support, but voting because of the tactics of who you think is going to win in that constituency. Under any system where you have many parties in a single-member district, people are going to look at the polls, they're going to look at the previous elections' votes, and they're going to calculate that maybe they prefer, for example, the Green Party, but that the Labour Party is going to get elected in Britain, for example, so they're going to vote for them.

You get exactly the same calculations under any of the other systems, but the strategic decisions are being made by the voters about where the best support can be. When you're in a large district, you might think that with a small party you get a better chance, so you can vote for them, but you also have strategic decisions being made by parties about who's their best coalition partner, how they can best put forward a certain number of candidates in any district, and how they can maximize their chances in the way they compete across different areas of the country. Strategic voting goes on across all these different systems, and it's not normally seen as a fundamental problem. I'd argue that it's just a different way of expressing your preferences on the chances of who's going to get in at the end of the day.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, thank you.

You mentioned today, as have others on this panel and earlier ones, that there's no perfect electoral system. There's no best electoral system. You recently had a podcast on the Policy Options forum, in which you stated that there is no best electoral system and that it depends on your problems, on your challenges, on your society, and that it is the society's choice. You also went on to state that it is up to Canadians to say what are the issues and what are the challenges in regard to electoral reform. I wonder if you could expand a bit more on what you mean by saying it's society's choice and that it's up to Canadians.

Prof. Pippa Norris: Different countries have different problems that they're facing right now. In the United States, the key issue is party polarization, where parties and politicians won't talk to each other, and there's all sorts of fundamental gridlocks, as we've mentioned, between the Senate, Congress, and the Presidency. Those are the sorts of issues facing the United States, and they might want to think about electoral systems, rules of the game, that might promote a more consensual system.

By contrast some other countries that have proportional representation are facing party fragmentation. They have too many parties; they can't ever get anything done; they can't get the executive to be stable; and they have a continuous changeover of prime ministers, leaders, parties, and governments. So for them, they need to think about moving more towards a majoritarian system.

It really depends on what the challenges are, and the way that I've always thought about it—I know you can't really see this—is as a matrix. In other words, you have certain challenges down the side. It might be, as the minister said, efficacy, diversity, simplicity, user-friendliness, local accountability, security, and consensus government, and you have certain types of rules, particular systems, that will strengthen or weaken each of these values. However, unfortunately not all of the, as it were, checks can be put into any one column because different systems have different values underlining them and will give you different types of consequences.

The Chair: Would it be possible to get a copy of the chart that you were just showing us? It would be great if you could get that to us. We don't have high-definition here, so it's a little hard to read, but if you can get that to our clerk, we would really appreciate it.

Prof. Pippa Norris: I will send it, absolutely.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I guess one of the challenges we've had here in Canada is the changing number of principles. You had mentioned, I think, the eight principles that were outlined and then later on, just a few weeks later, there were five principles. So there seems to be a moving target here, and that's one of challenges, of course, but we do appreciate that you'll provide that.

You talk about challenges and each country having its own unique challenges and having to determine how best to meet those challenges. I would say that one of the challenges that we face here in Canada is obviously the extra large country that is so sparsely populated with a great diversity amongst our different regions. I wonder if maybe you can maybe comment on the different electoral systems and how—

● (1610)

The Chair: I don't know—

Mr. Blake Richards: —they can help us, or what challenges they might present, in terms of alternatives, with that unique set of challenges.

The Chair: I don't think we'll have time to go through all of the electoral systems.

Mr. Blake Richards: Obviously we're not going to go through 193, as was just mentioned, but I think if we can allow Ms. Norris—

The Chair: I'll allow another 30 seconds—

Mr. Blake Richards: —to touch on a couple of the major ones.

The Chair: —to respond to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Obviously mixed member proportional is one that has been talked about a lot. Proportional representation would be another one of interest, if you can touch on those.

The Chair: Be very brief, please.

Prof. Pippa Norris: For me the issue here is really more about the federal solutions rather than the electoral solutions.

Earlier, as we've said, there isn't one solution or one set of institutions that is appropriate for democracy or for the challenges of Canadian democracy, so one needs to think about a variety of reforms, and here one needs to think about federal solutions, federal powers, and federal representation. Those might be more appropriate

rather than thinking about the electoral system as the best solution for all of those issues as well.

The Chair: Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: This almost seems like we lined this up because, Dr. Norris, I too have a grid and have been doing the exact same thing you have been doing in identifying those objectives we have that we want to achieve and how we can achieve them, whether it be through an electoral voting change or federal solutions.

For instance, in terms of encouraging voting and participation, we've heard from witnesses that we can think of things such as mandatory voting, reducing the voting age, talking about civic literacy, or making it attractive for people, but that does not involve changing the voting system itself.

In terms of accessibility and avoiding undue complexity, there are simple ballots. We've talked a bit about maybe giving voting day off to make it easy instead of people having to leave work, trying to find a babysitter, and so on. In terms of increasing women representation, trust me, it was not the voting system that made me decide to run for office, but maybe quotas can be addressed in that regard.

Given the fact that we know that it's not going to be one thing that will fix everything...and, Dr. Axworthy, you talked about the consequences of whatever it is that we decide to do. For instance, what are the complementary reforms that are going to be needed?

If we decide to go with an MMP system, for instance, and we end up increasing the number of people in the House, well, first of all, we don't have the space for 600 members. How is the committee work going to be done? Do those who are on a list get to do the committee work, and those who are elected in the riding have to do the constituency work? That's going to change who decides to run for office in terms of recruiting people, because maybe someone wants to do both.

Those are all the things that are going to be impacted by whatever it is that we decide to do. So I'd like to get your thoughts on that. It's not going to be a one-stop shop in terms of an alternative voting system that will fix everything. I'd like to get your comments.

I'll happily share my grid, too.

Prof. Pippa Norris: Who would you like to respond?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Any one of you.

The Chair: Let's start with Dr. Norris.

Prof. Pippa Norris: The grid is the best way to think about this, that you're trying to achieve different things and that there's no consensus about what the problems are—and don't think, what's the range of solutions that we can have for any of those? Just as you said for turnout, compulsory voting or mandatory voting is one solution. Changing the electoral system is another much more radical solution that can also affect turnout. But there's also convenience voting, getting everything to the voter, rather than expecting the voter to come to the ballot station, and registration processes. There are many solutions around the world for all of these sorts of things.

One thing, again, that the committee is doing very well on and can expand our knowledge about is taking account of international perspectives. There are all of these systems at work in different places and bringing that international knowledge into Canada helps us to see the really practical solutions that could work in another country to solve those particular issues. There's never a single mechanical solution for all of those problems, but there are many, and we can learn from the best practices and share them across different countries.

● (1615)

The Chair: Professor Axworthy, you look like you want to answer this question.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I think this committee has had the great advantage of going in depth on these issues, having people from different perspectives around the world. One of the responsibilities that I would recommend to you as you do your work is to do the kinds of lists and think about the possible changes that could occur, without their necessarily being complementary to the changes you recommend for the electoral system. It would be very useful to really think about implementation sets of issues around any new ideas that you come up with. Implementation on almost any public policy is the aspect that is never thought through. The press release is what's thought through, not the implementation. So it is, I think, on these issues of democratic reform.

Examples were just given of what may be several easier ways to achieve a solution or to mitigate a bad impact. Comparatively, with the experts and the citizens you'll be hearing from, and your colleagues in the House, a compendium of those solid ideas to improve the system should go along on the implementation program of whatever you want to suggest. That would be very important and fairly rare in the policy world of Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Norris, I would like to continue the discussion we started earlier regarding the selection of candidates to appear on the lists. Those opposed to proportional representation often mention that three people in a small, dark room at the party headquarters are the ones who would decide which candidates to put on the lists. You touched on this, but I am interested in hearing more about the various processes.

We know that there are nomination processes like the ones our parties already use. There are of course minor differences, but they are similar. There are also processes like the primaries in the United States to select the candidates who will be on the lists.

Can you tell us a bit more about existing procedures and how these lists can be democratized so that candidates are not chosen by three apparatchiks?

[*English*]

Prof. Pippa Norris: I think that's absolutely right. We get different types of traditions. If you take, for example, Norway, the parties there have always been very democratic, very decentralized,

with an organization in which it's the local party that nominates. They nominate to the regional party, they then select. and they go up towards the national party. It's a grassroots democratic process that creates each district's list, and so on. In some other countries, particularly in some developing democracies, it's much more top-down. The party elite, the leader, the headquarters, and some other groups will personally nominate the individuals who will support them. For me, that's really a problem, because then you don't get internal party democracy, which you're trying to have, as well as having external democracy in the country as a whole.

In addition to the recruitment process, which is often somewhat closed and a private matter for the parties, you can also think about open and closed lists. So, again, with the closed lists and the party position, all that the voter does is vote for the party, and then they get the complete list, and it's not able to move candidates up or candidates down that list. With an open list, voters can express a preference for a particular candidate within a complete list as well, so it gives them a bit more choice at the ballot box.

All of these are details that we need to get right if we're going to reform the electoral system, even for a mixed member system or for a pure PR system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: That is interesting. As I said, there are ways of selecting candidates that are similar to the way things are already done in Canada.

I'd like to continue on the topic of lists, which has already been discussed.

It has been said that the representation of women is higher in countries with proportional representation. I don't know if you have any concrete proof, but I expect that is also the case for other types of diversity, including young MPs.

[*English*]

Prof. Pippa Norris: Yes, it is often the case. What happens is that when you have a list system, there's a natural tendency to select a broad range reflecting society in general, because you don't want to exclude any group, as that would be to your electoral disadvantage as a party. So there's an incentive. But the second reason is that if you're getting a quota system, it's much easier to implement that with a party list. Say you have 20 MPs and you make sure that, say, one in three is a woman, and that's the law that applies to every single party, then that quota system works well with a party list system. It's much more problematic to implement quotas if you only have one district. You can certainly do that through internal party rules, which means that the parties themselves prioritize certain districts. For example, the Labour Party in Britain said that out of the 80 top marginal seats, be half of them had to be for women and half for men. But that can create more internal conflict within the party than simply having a party list that reflects whatever those interests are: rural, urban, working class, middle class, young, old, minorities in terms of immigrants, or populations within the majority. All of those things naturally include a broader representation in the party list system.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

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

The Chair: You have about 40 seconds, enough time for a short question.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Okay.

The Chair: That includes the answer.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Yes, that's true. Thank you.

My last question is for you, Mr. Axworthy.

I'd like to return to a topic discussed this morning, namely, the tension between public negotiations and negotiations in caucus. Do you have any final remarks about that? I am very interested in this.

[*English*]

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: My experience has been that negotiations in private basically are the way to get things done in the most efficient way. It's not that public negotiations can't succeed; they can, but it's one of the complexities or anomalies of our system that cameras and the public face become an aspect of negotiation beyond the substance of the issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deltell, you have the floor and you have five minutes.

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

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

[*English*]

Mr. Harrington, I would like to chat with you. Don't be surprised that we're talking about referendums. As a Conservative, I do respect the fact that you have plain confidence in our system and the fact that you are attached to our system. I do respect that. But don't you think there are issues that we can raise and solve by referendum?

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: I think referenda are blunt instruments for making complex policy decisions. I think they are useful for giving Parliament a sense of where people are on a thing. In other words, it's hard for me to imagine what a referendum.... Obviously one can't put a referendum to a large group of people about, here's a single transferable vote system, here's a multi-member system, here's the first past the post system.... That's not the way a referendum could—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I want to open the door wider than that, not just the specific issue of regulatory reform, but wider. Don't you think there is any issue in political life that should be solved by referendum?

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: Again, I would shy away from referenda except in a situation in which one is looking for just a basic understanding of where people might be on a subject, but not with respect to the designing of policy. In this particular case, I am very much convinced that if we are not going to have this go forward for the 2019 election, then there ought to be a referendum. In other words, I look at a referendum as sort of second best to actually saying, here's our proposal, let's go to the country with an election on our proposal. If that's not what's happening, then yes, I agree that the next-best solution is a referendum.

I do not suggest that the House just say, "This is our proposal and we're going to do it without either a referendum or an intervening election."

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That's very interesting. I recognize that the doors are a little more open than expected. That's great, but if we have an electoral referendum, the issue of the 2019 election will be on the electoral system. How can we ensure that the people will vote 100% on that issue? I mean, there are plenty of issues in general elections. You said that in 1988 the main issue was the free trade agreement. I do agree with you, but it should have been something else.

In 2012 in the provincial election, the premier set the tone for law and order. Three days later, the tone was set by the opposition party, my party, about the ethics issue, so you can't be sure of the issue of an election. Why do you think that we could have the election on that specific issue in 2019?

● (1625)

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: I think you're correct in suggesting that people vote for all kinds of reasons. Again, when I look at, for example, the European Union referendum in Britain, we don't propose to the public the exact process. It is, "Do you want in or do you want out?", and we leave Parliament to work that out over time. I suggest that's a second-best solution to the traditional Westminster way.

Referenda are a relatively new phenomenon.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Relatively. But I'm from Quebec, and you teach in Montreal.

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: I'm talking about over the course of a hundred or two hundred years; it's a relatively new phenomenon.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: On that point of view, I do agree.

I have just a one quick question. Just to be sure, do you think that if a province wants to separate, they should call a referendum, or would it be a call of the government or a call of the National Assembly, for example?

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: That's an entirely different problem, because we're talking about something entirely different, which is the dissolution of the confederation or a partial dissolution of the confederation.

The Chair: I think the time is pretty much up.

Mr. Aldag will finish off.

Mr. John Aldag: It's always the toughest spot, the very last one of the session.

We talked a bit about understanding these processes and, in the case of a referendum, helping people understand. I ask all three of you for your thoughts on who you would see as being the one who would take the primary role for the education of the public in this kind of situation. Are there obvious voices or leaders? Whom do you leave it to to start a public education campaign on something as riveting as electoral reform?

Maybe, Professor Norris, I will start with you. Have you looked at this idea of education and public information in other jurisdictions and how it is done?

Prof. Pippa Norris: You'll obviously want to have a plurality of views, so you don't want to have the authorities, as it were, producing "the" information, but Elections Canada with Marc Mayrand, in my view, would be an appropriate, impartial, independent body that could represent and give out information very effectively. You'd also want the electoral reform societies and each party, because in any deliberation there shouldn't just be one perspective. You want many different voices, and the media should get engaged.

You might also think about some sort of audit process, a democratic audit of Canada as part of this as well, to encourage further discussion beyond the electoral reform issues.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Dr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I would just add to that again on implementation issues around education. It's not only who would do it, but also the amount of time necessary for it to be done. It's a huge educative process, and rushed processes are ones that don't get well understood. Therefore, it's a necessity—and that's why we have to look at the outcomes—that you have a very long lead time to begin to thrash out these issues. That's why we began by talking about a democratic audit or a citizen's jury process along with this committee's work. You need time. You need differing voices organized differently to get this complicated issue across.

Mr. John Aldag: Professor Harrington, do you have anything to add?

Prof. Matthew P. Harrington: No, I think that covers it.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Professor Norris, you had mentioned multiple parties. Would you also foresee things like spending limits being brought into play in the way that we have for elections, or do you make it a complete free-for-fall so that whoever has the deepest pockets has the biggest voice? What kinds of parameters would you need to put around having third parties involved?

Prof. Pippa Norris: You would obviously want some sort of level playing field to make sure there's a balance of views and that it's not one sided. That's a complicated issue. We're getting better at regulating party funding on a fair basis with public funding, but when it comes to allocating it for referendums, it is more complicated. Nevertheless, I think the same types of principles apply: if we have a yea and a nay side, then it's fairly straightforward; if we have more sides, then it's more complicated. But public funding is part of the civic education that we've been talking about, and it would be really useful to do.

● (1630)

Mr. John Aldag: How much time do I have?

The Chair: About a minute.

Mr. John Aldag: Maybe I'll move to something different. I don't know if this is the appropriate time to do it, but in this morning's session I finished my second round of questioning by talking about referenda as well. At that point, Mr. Reid made a statement. I was going to wait for the blues or record of the discussion to come out, but I just want to say that what I heard him say is that the minister, the Prime Minister, and the Liberal Party have said that Canadians are too stupid to understand electoral reform. I really took exception to that. I just want to put on the record that I don't believe this is ever the case, and they would clearly have said that Canadians need to be involved and have a voice in this process.

The Chair: Duly noted.

Are there no more questions for the witnesses?

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

My sincere thanks to the witnesses who appeared before us this afternoon. The discussions have been very interesting and frank, and have offered many perspectives and details. They have been very helpful to us.

Thank you, Dr. Norris, for joining us by videoconference. Professor Axworthy and Professor Harrington, thank you for being here on a beautiful sunny day in the middle of August.

[*English*]

Thank you very much. You've made a great contribution to our study.

The meeting is adjourned.