



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

ERRE • NUMBER 007 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, July 26, 2016



Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (0930)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I would invite everyone to take their seats, please.

[Translation]

Welcome to the seventh meeting of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

In a way, today we are delving into the international aspect of our study as we welcome, by video conference, professors Michael Marsh and Michael Gallagher, both from Trinity College Dublin.

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Chair, I apologize, but before we get into this, I have a point of order. I was hoping I could deal with it before we actually create more of an interruption in the order of business.

The Chair: Sure, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, we're all aware that there's another well-regarded, credentialed academic who's been invited to appear as a witness at these proceedings. I am informed that he has declined that invitation.

Given that the committee, I am certain, would have accommodated his attendance at any time no matter when our personal schedules required, and that would have included an irregular meeting, I'm quite concerned with the fact that he will not be attending. While this committee doesn't have the power to compel the attendance of a member, and nor would we seek to, it's clear that the Honourable Stéphane Dion has deeply held and compelling views on the matter we're currently dealing with, which is electoral reform.

Mr. Chair, my question is this: Has Mr. Dion been impeded in his right to be heard at this committee, and if so, by what or by whom? I would suggest that the matter of his inability to attend and of the fact that he has refused an invitation on an issue he feels so strongly about be referred to the subcommittee for study, as befits an issue of this nature.

Thank you.

● (0935)

The Chair: I guess we would take a discussion on this.

Yes, Mrs. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Just to clarify, Mr. Chair, is that really a point of order?

The Chair: Well, it's a motion, I guess.... No? It's not a point of order?

Is it a motion?

Mr. Scott Reid: No, it's a point of order.

The Chair: I'm told by the clerk, and it makes sense to me, that it's not a point of order. It's not about the functioning of the committee, really, and how it functions during hearings. I would say it's not a point of order.

Mr. Scott Reid: In that case, Mr. Chair, if you rule it out of order, I'll withdraw it as a point of order. At a later time, when it won't mess up our witnesses, I'll reintroduce it as a motion.

The Chair: Sure. Absolutely. Then we can have a debate. I think that's the best way to go about it.

Professors Marsh and Gallagher, this is really a first for our committee in the context of this study. We're looking at the international experience, and we're very pleased that you were able to make time at the end of July. It's summer over there, as it is here. We're really grateful that you're here today to share with us your insights, your experience, and your wisdom on the issue.

Without further ado, I believe Professor Gallagher will be speaking first. Go ahead, please. We have 20 minutes, and then we will have our two rounds of questioning.

Prof. Michael Gallagher (Professor of Comparative Politics, Trinity College Dublin, As an Individual): I understand you have a copy of the PowerPoint already, so I'll go over that, if that makes sense to you, in about 20 minutes.

What we've put together here is a general overview of electoral systems and then some materials, specifically, on proportional representation by the single transferrable vote, which is what we use here in Ireland.

I'll start with general thoughts about electoral systems and proportional representation generally.

PR has positives and negatives, and these are probably quite familiar to the committee. The biggest positive, probably, is a much closer relationship between seat shares and vote shares, which I know has been a subject of much debate in Canada. It also means that the main parties will have members in their parliamentary parties from right across the country; so the largest parties, particularly, would have people from the west, the Prairies, the bigger provinces, and the maritime provinces as well, unlike the present situation.

In addition, fewer votes would be wasted. Fewer votes tend to be wasted on proportional representation; more votes count, more votes contribute towards the election of a member of Parliament. Although this is not quite so clear cut, certainly some people reckon that MPs as a whole will be more representative of the entire population with regard to factors such as gender, ethnic origin, and maybe social class too, although that's more contentious.

Nothing comes without problems, and there are two problems in particular that might be identifiable. One is that constituencies as we call them, ridings, would have to be much larger, both in geographical size and in population because proportional representation necessitates multi-member constituencies, so ridings would be much larger, and they already are huge in some cases. In addition, government formation becomes a much more complicated process because single party government would be very unlikely. It's very hard for any party under a really proportional system to win an overall majority. That's not necessarily a bad thing; there are pros and cons in coalition government, but it would become more complicated.

Going on to the second page, we have a look over the background, or the terms of reference for your committee. We can see that one hope about an electoral system change is that it might lead to things like greater civility and collaboration in politics; it might enhance social cohesion. I think we would flag a warning there that you mustn't expect too much from electoral system change. It would change some things, especially the relationship between seats and votes, as I mentioned before, but it's not going to transform the whole style of politics, either for better or for worse. A lot of things about Canadian politics—and I know Canadians are generally quite proud of their political system—would remain unaltered. To expect an electoral system change to transform the whole nature of politics and make it more civil and so on, I think, is probably unrealistic. Generally we shouldn't try to over-explain things through the electoral system. A lot of people do look at countries, including Ireland, and say that Irish politics works this way, and it's got that electoral system, so it must be cause and effect. Very often it's not.

I'm sure you've got other sessions where you're looking at proportional representation electoral systems generally, but just to give a brief overview, proportional representation is really a principle rather than a method. There are lots of different ways of implementing the principle—Ireland has one specific method, which I'll come to in a moment—but they vary on different factors. One is the amount of choice given to voters as to which individual candidate they want to be represented by. Typically, voters have a choice of party and sometimes that's all they've got—the party picks the MPs once it's known how many MPs the party is going to get—whereas, in other electoral systems, more commonly, in fact, the voters can also choose individual candidates. They're saying not just

that they like that party, but that they like that particular candidate within the party. So in designing any new proportional representation electoral system, that's one choice to be made.

• (0940)

In Europe, proportional representation is virtually universal. Britain and France are the only two countries that don't use proportional representation. But there is huge variation; it's difficult to find any two countries that have exactly the same system. That alone suggests that there is no one perfect, best system because if there were, presumably every country would have chosen it.

Electoral system designers have a lot of choice. One aspect concerns a trade-off between proportionality and other things. Some countries have electoral systems that go for broke on the proportionality dimension. They think it's very important to have as close a correspondence as possible between the votes cast and the seats cast.

South Africa is a good example. There's one big nationwide constituency and a very close relationship between the votes cast and the seats cast. The price paid for that is that there's a lack of any close connection between voters and MPs. Voters don't really have a local MP. All MPs in effect are national MPs. If you maximize that criterion, you lose out on other criteria. That's something to bear in mind when designing or choosing an electoral system. Maybe if you go overboard on one thing, you have to give up a little bit of some other criterion.

The other big choice is the thing I mentioned before, whether voters should be able to choose among candidates of their favourite party. Most voters might have a favourite party. Should they be able to choose among candidates of that party?

Also, is a territorial connection between MPs and constituents important? That's a factor that is important in a lot of countries. I know in Canada it's very important. Yet, in a lot of countries they think they're unusual in that. They think most countries don't do that, but actually, in most countries it is important. It's very important in Ireland, as I'll go on to say. I know it's very important in Canada that MPs represent their riding and their constituents. It's very important in most countries. Most countries do want an electoral system that guarantees the preservation of that link between MPs and constituents.

Looking over Europe as a whole before we get on to the Irish case specifically, the most common type of electoral system in Europe is what's called open list proportional representation. That's where, when voters go to vote, they see lists of candidates put forward by the various parties. They are open lists because the voters can express a preference for an individual candidate. In Denmark, for example, voters might be very loyal and supportive of the social democrats. But when they go to vote, they don't just vote for social democrat. There would be, say, eight social democratic candidates, and the voter actually puts an x by one individual candidate, saying that if the social democrats get three MPs in this constituency, they want that particular person to be one of those MPs. So voters are directly choosing who represents them.

There is variation on the detail around Europe, but in broad terms, that is the most common kind of electoral system. Voters choose a party and then they can choose a candidate within that party. The seats are awarded to the parties in proportion to the total votes they get, and then within each party, the seats go to those individual candidates who get the most votes. Candidates are competing against each other for votes. Social democrat candidates in Denmark are saying to the voters, "Please vote social democrat, and also, by the way, please vote for me". They're not explicitly badmouthing their party colleagues, but at the same time, they do want people to vote for them specifically rather than for another candidate.

I know that some people are concerned that it might make the parties internally divided because different candidates are making different appeals to the voters within the same party, but in practice, it doesn't. In practice, the parties all around Europe do operate very cohesively for the most part. Candidates typically don't form factions within parties. European parties are pretty cohesive, and they vote pretty solidly in Parliament on the main issues.

That's a general overview of Europe.

● (0945)

You might be particularly interested to know what we can tell you about Ireland. One type of partial representation is proportional representation by the single transferable vote. This aims to do a number of things simultaneously. First, it attempts to achieve a reasonable closeness between the share of votes cast and share of seats cast for each party. Second, it tries to give a maximum choice to voters—more choice than open-list systems. It avoids having voters waste their vote by casting it for someone who has no chance. Third, it aims to retain the close territorial connection between voters and MPs, or TDs, as deputies are known in Ireland. It aims to do all of those things.

There is a ballot paper. You might have seen this kind of thing somewhere else. When voters go to vote, they see a ballot paper with all the candidates in the constituency listed. In Ireland they're listed in alphabetical order. That's not necessary, but that's the way it's done in Ireland. Votes are cast for their favourite candidate, their second favourite, their third favourite, and so on. They don't have to vote for any more than the favourite. They might vote for the favourite and then quit and not give a second preference. Or they might go from their favourite right down to the bottom of the ballot paper and cast number 17 for their least favourite.

Voters can vote on the basis of any factor they want. They don't have to vote along party lines. A significant minority of people in Ireland don't vote along party lines. They might give their first preference to a candidate from one party, their second preference to a candidate from a different party. It's entirely up to the voter what motivates their vote, what drives their preference. For the voter, it's all pretty straightforward. You vote one, two, three, four, and so on.

As to the counting process, if we went over a detailed, stage-by-stage, blow-by-blow explanation, it would all sound rather more complicated than it really is. The principle is clear: if very popular candidates have a lot more votes than they actually need to get elected, their votes are not wasted. Their votes are surplus votes, as they're called, and they're transferred to another candidate in

accordance with the second-preference vote as marked on their ballot paper.

The surplus distribution is the most complex part of STV. What's more straightforward is that if a candidate fares very poorly, and gets only a few hundred votes, those votes are not wasted. The candidate is eliminated from the count and the votes are transferred to other candidates in accordance with the second preference marked. If that candidate in turn is later eliminated, the votes are transferred on in accordance to the third preference marked, and so on. The aim is that even if a voter votes for someone who doesn't do very well, this vote is not wasted as it is under the first past the post system. The lower preferences are taken into account and can still influence the outcome.

Counting proceeds until all the seats are filled. The counting is a multi-staged process. It takes much longer than a first past the post count. In Ireland we had an election earlier this year. It was on a Friday, and the counting of the votes didn't start until 9 o'clock on Saturday morning. Most of the seats were filled by midnight on Saturday, but some went into Sunday. There was one constituency in which the outcome was very close and there were a few recounts, so it didn't end until early on Wednesday morning. Counting is not an instantaneous process—it can be several days before the full result emerges.

What is the political impact of this? We can look at that under a number of headings.

● (0950)

Firstly, in terms of the accuracy of representation, it does give fairly accurate representation. It doesn't give extremely high proportionality like the South African system does, but it gives pretty average levels of proportionality by the standards of most European electoral systems. It's much more proportional than non-PR systems such as Canada uses or such as Britain or France use. On that criterion, it performs to the satisfaction of people here.

In terms of government stability, over the years there has not really been a problem there. Most governments these days are coalitions, but they can be just as stable as single-party governments. We've had 29 elections in the history of the state, so something like three years between elections. Having said that, the last election in February did not produce a very stable-looking government. We have a minority government, with only 58 seats out of 158. It took two months to put it together. Its lifespan is rather uncertain. At the moment we wouldn't rate highly on current government stability, but over the entire period this has not been a problem.

One of the strengths of PR-STV, as I mentioned before, for its proponents is that it gives voters a lot of choice. They can really say exactly what they feel. They're not compelled to vote just for, to name the Irish parties, Labour or just for Fianna Fáil or just for the Greens. They can vote number one for Green Party, and if the Green Party candidate is eliminated, then they can give a second preference to Labour, a third preference to Fine Gael and their vote isn't wasted, it still counts. They can choose on the basis of any criterion they want. They can vote on party lines or some people will vote on geographical lines. They want a candidate from this part of the constituency, a candidate whose home base is somewhere near here. For that reason they might give their first preference to a local candidate from one party and their second preference to a candidate from another party.

Do turnout levels engender high participation? Not particularly in Ireland. Turnout is not especially high. It was around 65% for the election earlier this year. But people who study turnout say that it is affected by lots of different factors. The electoral system might have only a minor role. The only other country in Europe to use PR-STV is Malta, and that has a very high turnout, over 90%.

In terms of the cohesion of parties, as I said before, this internal party competition doesn't really damage party cohesion. In this country the solidarity of parliamentary groups is very high. It's very rare for MPs to defy the party whip. For good or for bad, that's the way it is. MPs nearly always vote the party line, they just don't vote different ways. Whatever the local pressures might be, the parliamentary parties are very cohesive.

Next is links with constituents. It's quite interesting that this arises in the Canadian context because this is quite a controversial point in Ireland. Links with constituents are extremely strong in Ireland. Links between TDs-MPs and their constituents are very strong. MPs spend a lot of time dealing with their constituents, representing their constituents, meeting their constituents, taking cases to central civil service bureaucracy on behalf of constituents. Some people criticize that. There are critics in the commentariat; not so much academics but commentators think this is a bad thing. They say this TD-MP's focus on constituency work is not what MPs should be doing. MPs should be in parliament considering legislation, scrutinizing the government, it's wrong that they spend so much time on constituency links. Moreover, these commentators say the cause of MPs spending so much time on constituency work is PR-STV. In some ways, though, that's ironic because in many other countries, as I said earlier, and including Canada, including the U.K., for example, there also MPs spend a lot of time on constituency work. For the most part, as I understand it, it's not seen as a bad thing. In fact, it's seen as quite a good thing. It's seen as an important part of MPs' role. For sure, there doesn't seem to be any reason to be concerned that PR-STV would weaken constituency links, if anything quite the contrary. Academics, as I say, take that view. The main point about PR-STV in this regard is that MPs now have a strong electoral incentive to respond to constituents' demands.

● (0955)

Even if they wanted to ignore their constituents' wishes for representation—which I'm sure all the MPs on the committee wouldn't want to do anyway—under PR-STV they've got a strong electoral incentive not to, because they know if they did ignore

constituency work, then another candidate from their own party might be more active in the constituency and might take their seat at the next election. MPs therefore know that they're under threat, not just from other parties but also from within their own party. They might lose their seat to another candidate from their own party.

At the end of our presentation, we just put together a few thoughts on how PR-STV might work in Canada. At the moment you've got 338 MPs, so if Canada had PR-STV there might be around 70 to 90 multi-seat ridings, each returning anything from maybe three to seven MPs, or it could be more. Just looking at a few particular provinces, we see that Newfoundland and Labrador currently has seven single-seat ridings that might become one three-seat riding and one four-seat riding, for example. Prince Edward Island currently has four single-seat ridings that would become one four-seat riding. New Brunswick currently has 10 single-seat ridings that could become two five-seat ridings. It could be that really large geographical areas like Labrador, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon would remain as single-seat ridings. I see that Labrador is a single-seat riding. Labrador is about three times as big as the entire island of Ireland, so to us it's unbelievable that this would be just one—

The Chair: Professor Gallagher, your presentation has been exceptionally good and greatly appreciated. It's an extremely interesting topic, and I'd like to give members of the committee a chance to find out more through questions to you and Professor Marsh, if that's okay.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Okay, I was almost finished. I was just going to say the very final point, that the drawing of riding boundaries is less contentious with multi-member constituencies because there are simply fewer boundaries to draw, as the Prince Edward Island example shows.

Finally, I'll just say thank you for listening to me. *Merci beaucoup.*

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation. It's succinct but rich in detail.

We'll do two five-minute rounds, as we normally do. I think that seems to be working well.

We'll start with Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Good morning, Professor Gallagher and Professor Marsh. Thank you so much for being here with us today.

I'm quite intrigued by your presentation. It was very succinct and detailed. It's I think a little bit hard for us as parliamentarians because we're used to a particular system—the only system we've known—to really open our minds to a new system and to figure out how it would work. This is really a great exercise for us to see how it's working in other countries.

How big are your electoral districts? This example that you have with all the ranking ballots, how big would a district like that be with all these members? How many members would you have in Ireland picked from each ballot?

•(1000)

Prof. Michael Marsh (Emeritus Professor, Trinity College Dublin, As an Individual): The typical number of votes you need to be elected is somewhere around 8,000 to 10,000, so a constituency would probably have about 60,000 electors, I think. They're actually set on the parameters of population. The constitution says it should be a certain ratio of MPs to population, so that's about the size of them. For each MP, there are relatively few voters. That's not necessarily a feature of the system; it's just how it works here.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay, but there are no exact boundaries for those members, correct? The district is quite big, and you just select the five or whatever number of members from that district.

Professor Gallagher, you were talking a bit about how, in our Canadian system, you recognize that it's quite important for constituents to be able to identify their member because a lot of our work is constituency work. I represent a riding that has a very high immigrant population, as does most of Canada, really. I've gotten a lot of critique, compliments about how our system works and how approachable members of Parliament are in comparison to other countries where you don't even see your member of Parliament and you can't discuss things, policy issues or personal matters that you want to take to the central government. I think that's a part of our system that we wouldn't really want to lose, so how would constituents identify who their member is? Would we end up with a system where one member maybe would be getting all the constituency work and all the other members would end up doing the policy work they want to do on Parliament Hill?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: In practice what happens is that very often the MPs more or less compete for constituency work. If they get any hint of a problem, such as a water main burst or inadequate schools in some area, every TD from the constituency wants to get involved and wants to be seen as the person who fixed it.

Constituents don't face a problem of MPs shirking and saying "nothing to do with me". Quite the contrary; every MP wants the constituency work, because they all feel that this is a way to build personal support. Irish constituents certainly don't feel that their TDs neglect them. As I said before, commentators say they shouldn't be doing this, which is a sign, really, of how much they do.

So PR-STV certainly doesn't lead to constituents not having any TD to take a problem to.

Mr. Michael Marsh: However, in practice, where a party had two members, let's say, from a constituency, both in the campaigning and in the areas where they win support you would normally see that each candidate would win a lot more support around the area in which they lived than they would in other parts of the constituency. To some degree, proportional representation works in the constituency, because different areas get their own MP.

Of course, an MP isn't just an MP for a part of the constituency. An MP is an MP for the whole constituency. But typically there's one much closer to you than the others are.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Would there be no requirement for them to spread their resources out amongst the districts? What if they all have their offices in that main big city, and are not spreading themselves out? I think that would be a concern.

Mr. Michael Marsh: It would be like putting all the shops on one side of town. There would be a big space for someone to set up a shop on the other side of town.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Reid, five minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

I'm looking at the sample ballot you sent to us. First, is that a real ballot, or was it designed for illustration purposes?

•(1005)

Mr. Michael Gallagher: That's a real ballot from the Wicklow constituency.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. So in Wicklow, this would be the exhaustive number of people running, I assume.

You may not know the answer to a Wicklow-specific question, so rather than asking how many members get elected from Wicklow, I'll ask about the range within Ireland. What are the smallest and largest seats that are either permitted by your law or have been adopted in practice?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: These days the minimum is three, as set by the constitution, and the maximum these days is five, though in the past we've had constituencies up to nine seats.

Mr. Scott Reid: So three is legally the minimum. You can't go below that. In theory, could you drift upwards? You've obviously drifted downwards to a maximum of five, for some reason, so maybe I should ask that question. What made you go down from nine, as your maximum end, to five? Obviously you become less proportional as you get smaller numbers.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: That's right, you do. That seems to have been a factor in that in the past, government parties' redistricting and redrawing of boundaries was done by the government of the day, in effect. Back in the 1940s the government of the day brought in a new system under which five seats was the largest constituency size. That seems to have been accepted as the norm, even though these days redistricting is done by an independent commission, and it's always given terms of reference under which five seats is the largest used.

Mr. Scott Reid: In Canada when we redistrict, and I've been around here long enough to have gone through two redistrictings, or what we call redistributions, the adjustment is made entirely by shifting boundaries in a search for populations that are as close to the median population for the province as possible. In Ireland would you find yourself in a situation where you would want to preserve the constituency boundaries in order to preserve whatever community of interest exists, and do that by adjusting the number of TDs up or down for that district, as opposed to adjusting the boundaries of the district?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: No, it's the latter, because the constitution specifies that the ratio of population to TDs must be the same, as far as is practicable, across the country. It is more or less the same in every constituency, which necessitates redrawing the boundaries after every census.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right. I had made the assumption that there was an effort to preserve existing boundaries as much as possible. I must be getting confused about that.

Mr. Michael Marsh: There is, inasmuch as efforts are made to base constituencies on counties, because counties are quite important to people. But it's usually necessary to tinker around at the edges of counties. It always causes upset when people find themselves put in a different county. But by and large, the constituencies outside the Dublin area have boundaries that are not dissimilar to the county boundaries.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. I can relate to that problem, having dealt with my district that includes three counties. It is a constant source of upset for people when they learn they will be excluded from the district in which the rest of the county is included.

Is there a preference built into the system for causing the more rural, more lightly populated areas to have a smaller number of TDs in order to keep the districts within a reasonable geographic size, and then do the opposite when it comes to the urban districts? That tends to have been the discussion in Canada, when we've debated this kind of system, that we would have larger numbers of members per district in the urban areas and fewer in the rural areas. Is it the same thing there, or is there a different logic?

The Chair: Very briefly, please.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: No, not really. In a word, there isn't. That would create a potential unfairness. The parties that were stronger in the cities would kind of lose out because they might not get their fair share of seats in the smaller rural constituencies, whereas the big parties would do better in the rural ones and only get their fair share in the urban ones.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Cullen now.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much to you both for presenting today. I find this very interesting on a number of different levels.

One thing that was discussed—and I'm not sure how we get at this in terms of voter satisfaction—is that we're designing this system not for parties but for the constituents we serve, the citizens that we serve. How is it that you measure voter satisfaction?

Then I'll get on to some other questions about how governments form and the process of government-making after an election.

•(1010)

Mr. Michael Marsh: On voter satisfaction I think we've had two referendums to replace the current system with other systems. In both cases those referendums were lost. The voters said they wanted to keep the current system. There have been various opinion polls and research exercises carried out in which you question people about various reforms that might be made. Particularly in 2011, when we had a polling economic crisis and for the most part voters thought everything about the political system needed change and reform, the one thing they certainly did not want to change was the electoral system. I think that—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Those referenda were taken after the fact. The system had been in place and the Irish—

Mr. Michael Marsh: The system had been in place for 30 or 40 years, yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Before I get to coalition governments and how governments form, there's some concern raised about that if there's a system in which it's difficult to have an outright majority. The size of constituencies, as you've heard, is a concern. The riding I represent in British Columbia is four times the size of the entire country of Ireland. My people come from Longford and I looked it up and my riding is 330 times the size of Longford. The notion we're looking at is to create even larger constituencies in the rural communities. You're designated by the constitution in Ireland. We're not limited that way here in Canada, I don't believe. The notion of having even larger rural constituencies, as you can imagine, gives some pause. There's been a notion to have a hybrid in which we had an STV or some sort of proportionality within the more dense urban populations, yet leave the rural constituencies as they are. Has anyone mused about that in Ireland, or are you simply constrained by your constitutional requirements to keep it as is?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: We are constrained by the constitutional requirements. In fact, there was a referendum back in the 1960s on allowing for a higher level of representation in rural areas, thinly populated areas, than in urban ones. But that was politically motivated because, for the reason I mentioned before, the parties who do best in the rural areas know they would then be over-represented in the rural areas but still get their fair share in the urban areas, whereas the parties strongest in the urban areas would probably lose out in the rural areas.

I must say, from a European perspective, it seems to us that your ridings in Canada are already so huge that if you can cope with them as they are you could probably cope with them three or five times bigger.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you for that encouragement. It's something to look forward to.

Turning to the question about stability, this is important—not certainty about outcome, but predictability that a government can form and then be stable. What's been the experience in Ireland—I don't think any party in quite some time has been able to have an outright majority of seats—in terms of that predictability of forming something that is stable and able to govern? This would be obviously a concern to Canadians if we adopt a new system.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Majorities were never all that common, I suppose, but we've had plenty of majority governments, and then we've had plenty of governments that have had almost a majority, but not quite, but it didn't seem to matter because the opposition was sufficiently fragmented that the government could pick off a few more. Even in recent years, the main party has been extraordinarily close to a majority, so it was fairly easy to bring in another party, and we've got an extraordinarily stable government through that. The exception was the last election, where no party came remotely close to a majority. Of course had we had an electoral system that manufactured a majority for a party I don't know if that would have been satisfactory—a party only getting 26% of the vote having a majority of seats. I don't think it's a great idea.

•(1015)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Thériault.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you very much for your presentation, gentlemen.

Political life in Canada is pretty complex. I myself am a separatist MP, but I am a member of the Canadian Parliament. In some Quebec ridings, we need three or four days to reach all the constituents. I am wondering how this kind of a system could also take into consideration the political reality. A voting process is not just a quantitative system; it must also take into account political components and issues.

For instance, how do you explain Ireland's current difficulties with establishing a government? Is that just a vote-related coincidence, or is the situation rather desired by the people?

In Canada's current system, the electorate can throw a government out. That's referred to as the alternance phenomenon. It's not written anywhere, but it is done. In other words, the government is thrown out naturally after eight years. In that case, the vote implies a change of government.

As things currently stand in Ireland, what is the people's will in terms of changing the government?

[English]

Mr. Michael Gallagher: The voters certainly do sometimes reject the government. The best example was the 2011 election, when the outgoing government dropped from 40% of the votes to 17% of the votes. The voters made their feelings very clear on that occasion. Now it is true that, with coalition governments, sometimes a government might not be thrown out in its entirety. Sometimes one bit of the government changes and another party stays in government but with a new partner. So it's not quite as clear cut as in Canada or the United Kingdom, for example, that one party is in and the other party is out. However, in practice Irish government, Irish politics, has seen a degree of alternation because we have two large parties traditionally that have alternated in government. Certainly it's true that, with proportional representation, coalition government almost certainly is the norm, and that does make a big difference—maybe for better, or maybe for worse—but it does change the rules of the game.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault: What is the value of electoral platforms in a context where that system dictates the implementation of a coalition government?

[English]

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes, it changes things a bit. Parties in their manifestos say what they would like to do, but after the election, if there is a coalition government, that's just their initial bargaining position. No party can expect to get everything of what it promised. In a way, that's part of the idea of proportional representation, that if a party gets only 20% of the votes, they can't really expect to implement their entire policy. They're going to have to make compromises with other parties and they put together something that every party in the government is compatible with.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault: However, that's not the people's will. Party apparatchiks conduct those negotiations. The people are not involved

in platform components and elements that will or won't be integrated by a coalition government.

[English]

Mr. Michael Marsh: One could argue exactly the same in a first past the post system, inasmuch as one party got a majority and implemented its program, but it might only have 30% of the vote, or 35% of the vote, or 38% of the vote. Is that the will of the people if it's implemented what 62% of the people don't want? I think the last Indian government was elected with an overall majority with less than one in three of all votes cast. Is that the will of the majority?

• (1020)

The Chair: That's an interesting point.

We'll go now to Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you and good afternoon in Ireland.

I hope some day I'll be seeing you on more than video; this has been very helpful.

Professor Gallagher, I've been reading a chapter from a book you wrote, *Ireland: The Discreet Charm of PR-STV*. I've always wondered how it is that STV can be proportional, given, as you say, that there's no proportionality that is privileged by the way the seats are organized; there's no separate set of seats to represent the imbalance that's created by voting at the constituency level. I was very taken with the table that was in this chapter and the results of the 2002 general election. The parties had remarkable consistency between the number of seats they had and the proportion of the votes they got even though there's nothing that requires that.

In the work you've done, how do you explain the consistency? The 2002 election results are in your chapter for purposes of example, but I take it that it's fairly typical in results that you get a fair coherence between the percentage of the vote for the party and the percentage of seats that are won. How do you explain that in STV?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Within each constituency there's a reasonable degree of proportionality, especially in the larger ones, such as the five-seat constituencies. In three-seat ones, in particular, you might not get such proportional results, but what nearly always happens is that, simply on the law of averages, if a party loses out in one place they'll win out on another occasion. Our third party, for example, the Labour Party, might win 10% of the votes on average in most constituencies and sometimes that's enough for a seat, sometimes it's not enough for a seat. On the law of averages, they end up with something like 10% of the seats, generally. It would be very unlikely, statistically, that they would systematically lose out nearly everywhere. In practice, it does deliver quite proportional results, as you say.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'll go on to another question I have about how this has affected the nature of national parties. It seems that the two largest parties in Ireland have remained the two largest parties over time quite consistently and remain dominant. We had a witness yesterday who was concerned that if we got rid of first past the post, the stability of large parties might be undermined. Not to take too long in asking my question, but I noted that you also mention in this chapter that the Irish Constitution makes no mention of parties—neither does the Canadian Constitution—and electoral law did not recognize them or put them on the ballot until 1963. In Canada it wasn't until about a decade later.

How have you found STV affects the stability of the larger dominant parties?

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think it's worked in different ways. In the early years what happened is when people voted for a party, they'd vote for, really, all the candidates of that party; they'd vote very much on party lines and wouldn't vote for the other big party.

Nowadays, it's much more mixed, so I think what we see in the results—and the electoral system facilitates that being translated into seats—is that people think rather less of those parties than they used to and even though they might vote for a candidate from one of those parties, they don't, to anything like the same degree, support all the candidates of those parties. They may be a little more candidate-centred than they used to be. If that's what the voter wants, then democracy said that's what the voter should get.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Did you want to add to that, Professor Gallagher?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: I'd just add the caveat I mentioned before, which was that we shouldn't use the electoral system to explain too much. As my colleague says, parties' fortunes wax and wane, and that probably doesn't have very much to do with the electoral system. It would have happened under any electoral system.

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think we're seeing the waning of large parties right across Europe, and the Irish ones are no different. We've seen it in Britain with first past the post.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I want to ask one last question. It's really helpful to have your sample ballot. It's interesting that you have the photograph of the candidate, the party logo next to the candidate, and you list the candidates alphabetically.

Would it be fair to say that single transferable vote systems are very easy for the voter to use, but perhaps more complicated for the electoral officials to count? In terms of what's simple and what's complicated, it's simple for the voter.

•(1025)

Mr. Michael Gallagher: I think that's absolutely right. Yes, for the voter it really is very straightforward to vote. The counting process, like a lot of counting processes, actually, with a lot of electoral systems, can sound complicated if you go through a stage-by-stage account, but for the voter, it's very straightforward.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Can I just add one caveat to that? In Malta, for instance, which uses the same system, the ballot is structured by party. That, I think, probably makes it even easier for the voters, because sometimes it can be quite hard to find all the candidates of your party on a long list.

Second, when it comes to counting, the system that's used in Scotland, for instance, in local elections, is electronic, so it's instant.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Aldag for five minutes.

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

Our committee has been given several principles to work from. This isn't the full list, but we're looking at a few things: How do we increase the engagement of our citizens? How do we design a system that is accessible and inclusive? How do we maintain integrity? Two specific areas we've been asked to look at are online voting and mandatory voting.

I'd like to start with online voting and any thoughts or comments on research you've done or discussions you've had within the Irish context. Perhaps I could get your thoughts on that, just to start.

Mr. Michael Marsh: In simple terms, we don't have online voting. Postal voting is very difficult here, and I think online voting is a long way away.

Mr. John Aldag: From a research perspective, have either of you dabbled in that, or has it not been something you've spent time on?

Mr. Michael Marsh: There is research on postal voting. In some jurisdictions, I think Sweden, most people vote long before the election takes place. The hope was that postal voting would make it easier to vote, and therefore would raise turnout. Most of the research with which I am familiar says that what happens is that those people who would vote anyway find it easier to vote, and those people who wouldn't vote anyway don't vote just because they can vote by post. It facilitates the regular voter, not someone who's turned off from the system.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay. Thanks.

Do you have any thoughts on the question of mandatory voting?

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think mandatory voting probably addresses the symptom rather than the cause. If there's a lack of interest in politics, which manifests itself in people refusing to vote, forcing them to vote doesn't necessarily make them interested in politics. The phenomenon in Australia known as the “donkey” vote, in which people just fill in the ballot alphabetically because they don't know enough or they don't care enough to fill it in any other way, is very much a product of mandatory voting.

Mr. John Aldag: Great. Thank you.

The first slide of your PowerPoint presentation stated that possibly MPs could be more socio-demographically representative of the population as a whole. As we're looking at trying to reflect our ever-diversifying population, looking at such things as more women in politics, do you have any comments on that point? It's not a ringing endorsement saying that this will result in a greater socio-demographically representative group of MPs. Do you have any thoughts on the strengths or weaknesses of your system, and how it could enhance representation of the population?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Generally speaking, countries with PR systems do have more women in Parliament than countries that don't. Being confident that this is cause and effect is a different matter. Maybe it's just that the countries are different, that their whole political culture is different.

Ireland, I must say, has always done very poorly on this criterion. At the last election, we introduced candidate gender quotas. That did have the effect of increasing the proportion of women to 22%, which is the highest for Ireland, but Ireland is not a great exemplar on this point. Again, I think it's one of those things that is not really determined centrally by the electoral system.

To go back to something I said before about open-list and closed-list PR systems, with a closed-list system the party in effect picks the MPs. The party can put a lot of women at the top of the list, or people from ethnic minorities, and in that way really engineer the composition of its parliamentary group. It can be used for that purpose, but at the cost of freezing the voter out of the decision-making process.

• (1030)

Mr. John Aldag: Here is a quick technical question. I've been reading about all these various systems, and in a lot of them when a certain threshold is reached, then the surplus votes go into a new pile and get redistributed. My assumption is that the first one gets locked in, and then come the ones that still need to be counted. I'm trying to figure out how that would work in our system, where we have a number of polls. How do you determine which are the first batch of votes, the votes that are locked in, and which ones get redistributed?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: There are lots of ways of doing that. In Australia it's done differently than it is in Ireland, and even within Ireland, when we elect the upper house, the Seanad, it's done in a different way. Essentially, it's seen as a random process in which the votes transferred are a cross-section of all of them with regard to their next preference. They're randomly selected, however, with regard to lower preferences.

That's the real nitty-gritty of PR-STV, which I probably shouldn't even be trying to explain, because it makes it all sound much more difficult than it really is.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Kenney now.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and my thanks to both of you for taking the time to join us from Dublin.

Professor Gallagher, I understand you've written about referendums in Ireland. I understand there have been at least a couple of dozen, typically on proposed constitutional amendments. Is that more or less accurate?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes, we've had more than 30 referendums. Every change to the constitution needs a referendum in Ireland.

Hon. Jason Kenney: As I understand it, the current constitution was approved by a referendum. Was it in 1932?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It was 1937.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Is the election law enshrined in the constitution, or is it a normal statute adopted by the Dáil Éireann?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: PR by single transferable vote is in the constitution. The minimum number of MPs for a constituency is three, and that's in the constitution. Many of the other details, however, are laid out in law.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Am I correct that there have been a couple of referendums in Ireland on proposed constitutional amendments to modify the electoral system? I believe that in 1958 and 1968 there were failed referendums to move to a first past the post system, a Westminster system. Is that correct?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: That's right, yes. The first one was lost only very narrowly, but the second one lost pretty heavily.

Hon. Jason Kenney: So in the fifties and sixties there was some movement. Where did this come from? Did the idea of moving back to the Westminster system come from the Dáil or from the general public?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It came, I'm afraid, almost entirely from political motivation. The biggest party in the country, Fianna Fáil, which had done pretty well and usually won a majority, saw its future as being a bit less rosy than its past had been and thought that in order to guarantee winning a majority in future elections, they would do better under a system of first past the post. It was an almost entirely politically motivated referendum on both sides.

Hon. Jason Kenney: In those two referendums in 1958 and 1968, the public voted to retain the single transferable vote system. Is that correct?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: That's right.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Broadly speaking, what has been the Irish experience with referendums? Canada has a limited experience. We've had only a couple, and they were of a plebiscitary nature, an advisory nature, technically speaking. Has the Irish experience generally been a positive one?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: I would say so. People are accustomed to referendums these days. We have four or five every decade, and it seems right and proper that big issues should be put to a referendum. We have a special commission set up to inform the public about the arguments on each side, and this commission gets a mixed reception as to how well it's doing its job.

Perhaps I should ask my colleague to comment on that, since he's studied referendum voting.

Mr. Michael Marsh: I'd probably disagree with my colleague that it's been a positive experience. I think most of the research we have on referendums—and there are some exceptions—suggests that people were unclear about what they were voting for and unclear about the consequences. I think the most recent British referendum was a classic case of that.

• (1035)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Just to be clear, if Ireland were to consider changing its electoral system today, it would require a constitutional amendment authorized by a majority of voters in a referendum.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Yes.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Exactly.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Not only is that a constitutional requirement, but am I correct in inferring that there would be public expectation that it would be the case?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes, I would say so.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much to both of you for being here with us today. It was very helpful for me to see the ballot, as my colleague said, and to get a better understanding of how things work.

To go back to what my colleague Ruby was talking a little bit about, do multi-member seats create a certain level of regional tension and volatility within parties? As I'm sure you're aware, often if constituents are not happy with one answer, they might go to another representative to see if they can get a better response. Could you elaborate a little on that and how it would work?

Mr. Michael Marsh: We see that here, and people will often contact more than one TD, one MP, to try to resolve their problems, and since a lot of that now takes place by email rather than by tramping along to a local constituency office, it's fairly easy to blind-copy all the TDs in the constituency into your request. I think TDs know that this request may have gone to another one, so they'd better deal with it.

There is competition both within and between parties to be seen as a good member of Parliament.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Would this not also decrease efficiencies in terms of duplication of efforts? For instance, if a constituent was not happy with respect to a case file and contacted multiple TDs, and multiple TDs started putting resources towards solving the issue, and, God forbid, there might be actually two different outcomes for the file, could you explain how this could be efficient?

Mr. Michael Marsh: I suppose it would be efficient if one person produced a satisfactory conclusion and the other one didn't. From the point of view of the voter, it's efficient if you get the best outcome. Maybe if all MPs were as efficient as the best one, then the voter wouldn't have needed to go to all of them.

Many, of course, still just go to their local person, the one they might have known, the one they vote for, the one in their area, but certainly there is duplication of effort.

I would say that judged against the general inefficiencies in our political, economic, and social system, those are pretty minor.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

In terms of coalition governments, Ireland is used to having minority governments that have to work closely together, and MP-shopping or TD-shopping for votes in each district adds to the tension. I'm trying to figure out how this could work in Canada, in terms of the transition from working on a majority government versus minority government versus coalition government. How would this impact the stability of Canada and our political system? It is a huge culture change to go fundamentally from a majority

government or minority government to having coalition governments all the time.

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think that's true, and it's only since the 1990s that we've had coalitions involving Fianna Fáil, our largest party. It used to say it didn't do coalitions, but at a certain point, it started to do coalitions, and then they were perfectly normal. We've had a lot of governments that weren't coalition, but everybody expects them to be now.

I have to say that in most of the world, coalition governments are normal, and in those areas of the world where they weren't normal, they're becoming more normal. Britain is a good case in point. I think it doesn't have a coalition government at the moment, but only by the skin of its teeth does it not have a coalition government.

As parties get further away from winning somewhere around 40-plus per cent of the vote, they don't win majorities anymore, and it's probably right that they don't get overall majorities, because not a lot of people support them.

Therefore in Canada, if people move away from the two largest parties, you ought to have coalition government. It would seem to me that rather than being concerned about it, you should be quite pleased.

● (1040)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

I just want to make sure I understand. From 1922 until about the 1990s, your largest party wasn't really looking to work on coalition governments and so on, so it took quite a few years to get there.

Mr. Michael Marsh: That's right.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes, that's right, and they made an electoral virtue of it. They said they were a single-party government and if the others got in, there would be a coalition, and that would be bad. However, in 1989 they did so poorly that they could only stay in government by forming a coalition, so they had to adopt that approach, and now they're as open to coalition as anyone else.

Coalition governments typically have more votes behind them, more public votes, in that a government can't just have 40% of the votes. You need something like a majority of votes behind the parties that are in the government. There is a bit of a learning process, so if Canada shifted to that system, the first few coalitions might be a bit awkward as people learned the new rules, but the evidence is that most countries in the world have coalition governments and they can be just as stable as single-party governments.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): One of the questions that interests me, or that I'm trying to wrap my head around, is the question of the surplus votes for candidates who have already met the threshold for being elected and how those are distributed.

Am I right that.... It may be that the second choices of people who voted for candidate *X*, who has met that threshold, are all very different, and it just so happens that whoever was counted first up to that threshold, their second choice won't be passed on, and then it's only the second choices of the ballots that happen to be counted after candidate *X* has met that threshold that then get moved to other candidates. Is that an accurate understanding of how that works?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Not quite. If the quota is 10,000 and one candidate gets 12,000 first preferences, what happens is that all of those 12,000 votes are looked at, and if 50% of them have a second preference for candidate *X*, then half of the surplus—that's 1,000 votes—would go to candidate *X*. It's not only the last 2,000 that are seen as a surplus; every single vote is looked at.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Okay, and hence why it can take so long to complete the counting process.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Exactly.

Mr. Michael Marsh: It can and is done electronically in other jurisdictions, so it doesn't have to take very long. When it's done electronically, it can typically be done in a rather more sophisticated way than when it's done by hand.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: On the question of electronic counting, I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on one of my questions around that.

We often talk about how quickly things get counted. It seems to me that one of the advantages of counting paper ballots has to do with the legitimacy of the outcome. By that I don't mean only problems with the software that you use to count, but I mean having people there from the various parties who sign off on the outcome. One of the things that you have in that kind of physical process is that at the end of it you actually have people from different parties who have said they've looked at the ballots together and accept the count. It's my belief that this contributes to the legitimacy of a changing government because those who are on their way out have been part of that process and acknowledge what that count was. It helps with any transition that might occur following an election.

I'm wondering if you can speak to that aspect of counting, the legitimacy of personal—

Mr. Michael Marsh: Transparency is very important. One of the wonderful things about the by-hand counting in this country is that it's the one day of the year when everybody is interested in politics. They turn on their televisions because there is a live game show going on all day, if not two days, to find out who will win and who will lose. It's prime-time major television for 24 to 36 hours. Counting them electronically doesn't necessarily mean you can't validate the ballots by eyesight. As I understand the way it's done in Scotland, the ballot papers are scanned, and the scanned ballot papers can then be counted. If you think the result is dodgy, they can be counted by hand because you still have a ballot paper.

We had a brief experience with electronic voting machines, which were later abandoned because there was no paper ballot. There was no final place you could go to to make sure that what the voter thought they'd done they had actually done. I think that mixture—and I think New Zealand does the same—of the paper ballot and electronic counting is quite a good one if you want your count done quickly. There are reasons, maybe, to have the count done slowly.

●(1045)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm wondering if your colleague would like to weigh in on that issue.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes, our experience with electronic voting was a very ill-fated one. It's seen as one of the great policy blunders in Ireland that these out-of-date machines were bought. They had out-of-date software and there was no paper validation, and electronic voting is always coupled with the word “fiasco” now. That really set back any possibility of any electronic involvement, so we are firmly wedded to paper ballots. When the votes are counted, it's open to the public, as is probably the case in Canada. Everyone can look over the railings to see the individual ballot papers go through, and it does really reassure people that the whole thing is being done in a very honest and legitimate way.

The Chair: Monsieur Deltell is next.

[*Translation*]

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

Gentlemen, it is a great honour for us to be hearing from you in our committee. Welcoming high quality individuals like you helps us delve deeper into this important issue and benefit from your international experience. We can do that from here, in Ottawa, with you in Dublin, at little cost, and that is very good news for public administrators.

The quality of your testimony is important to us as members of Parliament. We are disappointed to learn that, unfortunately, a renowned academic will not be able to participate in this morning's debate on this critical issue. We would have liked to have Stéphane Dion with us, but he will unfortunately be unable to attend.

The Chair: I believe that Mr. Dion is in Sri Lanka right now.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Is this the only day our committee is meeting?

The Chair: I understand, but he could not have been here this morning anyway. I just wanted to clarify.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay.

They are in Dublin and could not be in Ottawa, but they are participating anyway. To my knowledge, this is not the only day our committee will be meeting.

[*English*]

Therefore, gentlemen, let's talk about the issue you're here today to discuss. I want to talk to you about proportional representation by single transferrable vote, or PR-STV. It is quite special for me to explain that.

I want to talk to you because this is the experience of Ireland and we wish to understand your experience in Ireland with it.

There are two issues, and the first is participation. I think we want to have the most people participating, most people voting, most people attending to the ballot, but in your documents I've learned that only 65% of people vote in that system. How come?

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think more people used to vote. Fewer people vote now. That's not because of the system, but because politics used to mobilize people and doesn't anymore. The same system in Malta gets something like 95% of voters to the ballot. They go because they think it makes a difference. Supporters of party A think that party B will destroy the country, whichever it is, so they go out and vote because it matters. Who got into government used to matter to Irish people, but it matters less now. I think they feel it doesn't make as much difference as it did, so fewer go out to vote. That has nothing to do with the electoral system at all; it's all to do with the nature of the parties and how different they are from one another and the way in which they mobilize votes.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If I understand correctly, you're saying that whatever the system, it will not change the participation of the people. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Michael Marsh: Yes.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you.

The other point with this PR-STV system is about the party line. I think it's quite important, because when we talk to people about the political system, they say that what they don't like about MPs is that when they are elected, they follow the party line instead of listening to the people. In your presentation, you said that in the electoral system the solidarity of the parliamentary bloc is very high, but on the other hand, you talk about the fact the constituents would like to see their MP defending their own interests.

At times in the four-year mandate—not on all issues, but once or twice—we will have some difficulties because personal or local issues do not conform well with party lines. Sometimes we have to make choices. No one is elected with 100% agreement on what they propose to do. It's impossible; we are human.

How do you reconcile the fact that there is a lot of solidarity in the party line—with parliamentarians in a political bloc—with the fact that MPs should represent the will of their own constituents?

● (1050)

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Certainly it is true that MPs nearly always do vote the party line. MPs respond to constituents' wishes in terms of making constituency representations, obtaining more resources for the constituency, taking up individual grievances of their constituents, but they don't take their votes in Parliament from constituents' wishes.

The previous government we had between 2011-2016 was in a time of great economic difficulty. There were increases in taxes and cuts in public spending. MPs knew perfectly well that their constituents didn't like those things, but the government felt it was necessary to do that to get the economy back on track, and the MPs went along with it. Many MPs would have said, "Well, if I do what my constituents want, I'll always be voting for lower taxes and higher spending", and for that reason they do stick with the party line. Constituents don't really expect their MPs to follow their views on policy stances; they expect their MPs, really, to be pretty loyal to the party line in government.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

To wrap up the question period, I give the floor to Mr. DeCoursey.

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

[English]

Thank you both, professors, for being here and presenting this morning.

One of the principles that we've been asked to consider is how to engage Canadians more in the electoral process. We had three eminent scholars in yesterday who spoke about various citizen-led processes. Other research identified enhanced voter preference as a value that a lot of Canadians see as important in their electoral system. I wonder if vote preference is a value that you see as fundamental to the Irish system.

Mr. Michael Marsh: The nature of the single transferable vote is that the citizens' preference for an individual candidate is paramount and they're not forced to vote for a party. When they're asked if they would vote for that candidate even if the candidate stood for a different party, quite often they say they would. It's the candidate that attracts them. It is the nature of the single transferable vote that it can allow this.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: To me, that would indicate the importance of the link between the elector and the elected and how that resonates in Ireland. It also seems that the electoral system is one of a number of factors that lead to an engaged electorate in Ireland. Is that more accurate than to say that the electoral system has no relevance in the way people engage in elections?

Mr. Michael Marsh: One can see it as a factor combining and interacting with a number of other factors. It's quite possible that if we had a different electoral system, if we had first past the post, turnout would be even lower. In my opinion, the electoral system is not responsible for a huge amount of turnout one way or another.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Do you have any evidence to demonstrate how much preference or choice voters exercise when they go to the ballot? Do they fill out the whole ballot? Do they rank one, two, three? Is there any impetus for candidates to suggest to voters to vote just for them and leave the rest blank?

● (1055)

Mr. Michael Marsh: About one voter in 10 fills the whole ballot in. It's a relatively small number. The typical number of preferences is about four. People usually vote for candidates of two parties. That's the average.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: For individual candidates, there's no incentive to say, "Vote number one for me and then stop", because a lower preference can only count if they don't need it anymore. Usually candidates would have some preference about where their voters give their lower preference.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I read with interest your take on how Atlantic Canada could be divided up under a PR-STV system. As a representative from Atlantic Canada, I was interested to know if there was any science or research that went into that, or if it was just based on looking at the map and drawing a line.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It's a beautiful part of the world. Prince Edward Island would be a natural unit, and New Brunswick, which I believe is your own part of the world, divides neatly into ten ridings. That would fall neatly into two five-seat ridings.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I would love to entertain you in New Brunswick to see where we might draw that line should we go this route.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: We're delighted to be here, but we'd be even more delighted had you flown us over to Canada to do this.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Perhaps next time.

Mr. Michael Marsh: We would have been so much better.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thanks very much for your humour.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'd like to start with a Twitter question that's been posed. It's a question I'm interested in as well.

Nathaniel from the University of Saskatchewan asked how proportional the results are in Ireland under the PR-STV system. Are there still wasted votes? How does this work compared with single-vote PR, where there's no transferable vote?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: There are still wasted votes. In a five-seat constituency, for example, all the votes for the runner-up in effect are wasted, but that's roughly one in every six votes in a five-seat constituency, whereas in a single-seat constituency, as under first past the post, half the votes could be wasted. It might even be more than half if the winner has fewer than 50% of the votes. The number of wasted votes under any kind of PR is much lower than it is under first past the post.

In answer to the first part of the question about how proportional the results are, they're fairly proportional. They're as proportional as the European norm. They're not super-proportional as in South Africa, but they are much more proportional than they were in your current election or, say, a British election.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We talked somewhat about the strengths of your system, and that's why we're quite interested in it, but what do you find are the weaknesses and what has been the debate in Ireland? Has there been any recent discourse about changes that your population would like to see in the electoral system?

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think there's very little evidence that the population wants to see any changes, but there are a lot of commentators in the media who would like to see changes. There are commentators in the media who think all the ills of politics in Ireland can be put at the foot of the electoral system and that this dreadful interest in constituents that TDs have shown could be got rid of with a first past the post system, not knowing that MPs in Britain are very interested in their constituents.

A voice: And Canada.

Mr. Michael Marsh: They feel that there must be a quick fix somewhere, and the electoral system is a quick fix, but the voters themselves would resist strongly any change, particularly if it was a change to remove them somewhat from their MPs.

If you had a list system of proportional representation, a fixed list that the voters couldn't alter, that would be very different from what we have at the moment. However, there's absolutely no chance at all

that a majority of voters in a referendum would agree to that, because they'd be losing power and influence over the composition of parliament, and that's what they want.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Any comments, Mr. Gallagher?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: No, I think that deals pretty thoroughly with that aspect. It's basically not a political issue in this country.

• (1100)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you find that having the multiple choices... I can't remember the number on your sample ballot here, but there are quite a lot. You said the average is only about four rankings. Is that because people are not able to well inform themselves about all of the candidates and all of the options that are presented to them?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: People just don't have strong feelings about many of the candidates.

The maximum number of candidates for a constituency at the last election was, I think, 24; that's the longest ballot paper. There was another with only five candidates chasing for three seats. Generally speaking, voters just wouldn't know a lot about all the candidates. They would be reasonably well informed about the ones who mattered to them, the ones from their favourite party, the ones from around their part of the constituency or anyone else with a high profile, but they wouldn't see any need to take the time and trouble to find out about all 24 and learn about them. Some voters do—about one in 10, as my colleague says—but for most voters that's not necessary.

Mr. Michael Marsh: When you sit down to fill in these ballots, it's usually easy enough to fill in the first few and it's easy enough to do the ones at the bottom. You know who you really don't like, so if there are 24, you might know who you want to rank 20 to 24 and who you want to rank one to four. It's the ones in the middle who are difficult.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Is there any process of elimination previous to putting these people on the ballot? What's the system of getting on to the ballot? It appears that there are quite a lot of options from every party.

The Chair: Briefly, please.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: That's entirely up to the parties. The parties run as many candidates as they want, and independents can stand as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: There's a thorough candidate selection process within each party.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: In a typical parliament, how many independent MPs or TDs would actually be elected?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: In a typical one, there'd be maybe five to 10. In the current parliament we've got more than ever, 21 or so, which is a record, and it's very unusual in a European context. There are a lot of independents in Ireland at the moment.

Mr. Scott Reid: I should have asked this question, too. What's the total number of TDs in Parliament?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: There are 158.

Mr. Scott Reid: Oh, my goodness! That's 15%, more or less, right now, and as an average about 7%.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes, it's gone down to just one or so independents in some past elections, but at the moment we're in a very good time for independents, partly because parties are losing popularity, as we mentioned earlier.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Independents are in the current government. We have a number of independent ministers at the moment.

Mr. Scott Reid: Oh, really? I would not have guessed that. One normally draws in a prominent member of a party in order to bring along all the extra seats that come with that person. That's part of coalition-building, as we conceptualize it elsewhere, so that is a very interesting fact.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Independents have formed groupings. They are not parties, but they're groupings. One grouping is part of the current coalition.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Do they caucus together? I don't know if you use that term there, but do they get together to meet privately to figure out what they'll do in the next few votes and that kind of thing?

Mr. Michael Marsh: Except that there is no requirement to vote in a particular way, because that would make them a party, and they're opposed to that.

This is Alice in Wonderland stuff, when parties are not parties and groupings of independents are not parties. They are groupings, but they are not parties.

A voice: That's like our Senate.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. We have almost the exact parallel universe over here in our upper house, as a matter of fact. It's Alice in Wonderland versus Alice through the looking-glass, I guess. At any rate, that is interesting information.

One of the great fears I have had about being involved in electoral reform issues for over a decade is that many of the proposed systems have the effect of increasing the power of the parties over the individual members, which ultimately means that the connection between the members and those they represent is weakened. It sounds to me as though whatever flaws your system may have in Ireland, it does have the apparent advantage, at a number of levels, of actually doing the opposite. Whether that's considered a feature or a bug, I don't know, but it appears to have been the case.

• (1105)

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes. In fact, some independents are people who used to be in parties. Maybe they fell out of the party or the party threw them out or they tried to get picked as a party candidate and weren't successful, so instead of that they stood as an independent. "Independent" is a kind of neutral term. No one dislikes the idea of an independent. Independents tend to thrive at a time when parties are unpopular, and that's one reason the independent graph is steadily upward in recent years.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

I wanted to ask about one other thing. The candidates in this list are ranked alphabetically. I know in one Australian jurisdiction, Tasmania, where they also use a system very similar to yours, they

have developed a system for randomizing the placement of candidates on the theory that this removes what's called a "donkey vote", which is people voting for those at the top of the list or the bottom in alphabetical order. Is that an issue at all in Ireland?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Well, it is a fact that to be elected in Ireland it does help if you have a name early in the alphabet. It's a striking phenomenon that academics have noticed. If your name begins with "A", "B", "C", or "D", that helps you. If it begins with "Z", actually, that's okay too. If it begins with "M" or "O", that's not so good; you're lost in the middle. It's something that people have noticed, but it still goes on. Personally, I think randomizing the order of names would be a good idea, but it's not mandatory.

Mr. Michael Marsh: The Supreme Court, I think, looked into this and said it wasn't for them to look into the mind of the voter. You could certainly randomize it, but that might make it even more difficult for voters to find the candidates they were looking for.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Cullen now.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thanks. I'm also getting some questions on Twitter that I would really want to put to you.

I'm not sure how familiar either of you is with the Australian system and some of the results they've had. I'll ask one specific question, and if you don't know the answer, we'll move on.

This question comes from Michael Bednarski, who said that under the Australian alternative vote, around 8% of the first-choice candidates lost to second-place candidates and no third-place candidates won. Can you explain that phenomenon and how that alternative vote system produced results in which first-place candidates, as much as 8% of the time, didn't win? If you can't, we'll move on to another question.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It's perfectly likely that the first-place candidate might have been, for example, a Liberal candidate, the second one a Labour candidate, and then a Green candidate in third place, so when the Green candidate was eliminated, their preferences would have taken the Labour candidate ahead of the Liberal candidate.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I see. The candidate initially seen as the most popular doesn't end up winning the riding, with Australia as a recent example, 8% of the time—

Mr. Michael Gallagher: That's right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —simply because they were popular within a constituency, but not popular with anybody else.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes, but the logic would be that the person who eventually wins, the Labour candidate who was second, actually was more popular among the voters as a whole, even though he or she didn't have as many first-preference votes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Someone has raised this scenario, and I hadn't thought of this before. If we end up with a mandatory voting system, plus alternative vote, is there a potential to skew the distortions that alternative vote gives us even more?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: The alternative vote is not a kind of PR and the outcomes it produces are not that different from first past the post, really, so in some ways I think it would be a huge amount of effort to achieve very little if Canada had a really strong deliberative process and then simply moved to the alternative vote. It wouldn't make a great deal of difference.

Mandatory voting is a different thing entirely, but in Australia it means that voters, when they vote, have to give a preference to every candidate, because "mandatory" means not just that you vote but that you have to vote right down the ballot paper.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let me just walk back to the first part of that comment, and I'll get both of yours.

You said to go to an alternative vote would be a huge amount of effort without producing much or changing much of the results of what we have right now in first past the post.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes, I think so, because the results of Australian elections tend to be just as disproportional as elections in Britain or Canada, for example. You don't get very close proportionality, and in particular the smaller parties really lose out systematically.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's interesting.

What have we done for diversity under proportional systems, including your open-list system in which voters get to choose who constitutes that proportionality? Have we seen greater diversity of under-represented groups in Ireland or other countries?

• (1110)

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think gender is the one looked at most often, and in general, proportional representation systems using lists have far more women elected than we see in first past the post... [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Putting several people on the ballot is a different process from just putting one or two.

Obviously if the aim is for a particular characteristic, that can be done in other ways. As it's done here, all parties have to put forward a certain number of women candidates, because otherwise they would not get their election expenses back.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I see. There's an incentive in Ireland to ensure that you have a certain proportion, particularly of women, on your list as a party. There's a similar law—

Mr. Michael Marsh: Women candidates.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right, candidates.

We have a similar law being proposed by Kennedy Stewart right now in our Parliament to create an incentive for diversity on the ballot. It's interesting.

I'm not sure how I'm doing for time, Chair.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I have one last question. I want to skip back to this independents notion.

What has been the public's reaction to having independents participate in government? Has there been any backlash or negative feeling toward the government for having incorporated independents or toward the role of independents in the Dail?

The Chair: Please answer briefly.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: We had an opinion poll just last week that showed that the support for independents had really gone down a lot since the election, so the public as a whole doesn't seem to like it a great deal, but these are early days and things may change.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Thériault.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: In answer to my last question, concerning the relationship between the value of an election platform and the alternance phenomenon, you rightly said that the first-past-the-post system would not be any more or less legitimate than another proportional system. The situation would be the same if the Prime Minister, who was elected with 36% or 38% of the votes, did not take into consideration the official opposition as part of parliamentary dynamics when it comes to improving legislation.

We travelled across Quebec for an electoral reform project. Ministerial responsibility—accountability—was an issue that was raised many times in that context.

How is that accountability reflected in the context of electoral dynamics in a system like yours?

In Canada, the government submits its financial statements, which are then criticized. It has to assume full responsibility for its governance.

How does that manifest itself in a system with coalition governments?

Out of curiosity, I would like to know what happens to cabinet solidarity in an electoral environment. Since there are several different parties, I assume that, come election time, those parties disagree with one another and are not really solidary in terms of governance. Could you tell me how that works?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Gallagher: When it comes to, say, manifesto promises, if you have a small left-wing party that people expect to get about 10% of the votes, their manifesto might say that if they form the government, they'll do all these things, but the voters know they're not going to form a government on their own. What it means to vote for them is that you want their influence on government. They won't be able to achieve everything they promised, but they will have some input into government. Voters understand the rules of coalition governments. Voters understand that voting for someone means to strengthen their voice, hopefully to strengthen their voice in government, not that they're going to do everything that's in their manifesto.

When it comes to ministerial accountability, the practice in this country is that a lot was inherited from the British practice, perhaps as in Canada. We're not experts on Canadian politics, but it means that government's collective responsibility is very strong. All ministers go out and defend the governmental line. You don't get ministers arguing with each other in public. They have their arguments in private, behind closed doors, but they all defend the government line.

Coalition governments in this country have been just as united as single-party governments; in fact, the most divided governments we've had in the past have been single-party governments, but that's not a problem anyway. There might be other problems, but government unity really isn't a problem.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault: There may be fewer campaign slogans that concern change. That's a joke.

You say that there is government solidarity. In fact, the minority government cannot criticize the mandate. That is why I asked about how it works.

How are election speeches or election platforms created when that desire to change is present? However, it should be noted that change is often an empty election slogan. I am trying to grasp the prevalent dynamics in Ireland when a coalition government is in power.

Can you answer that?

[English]

Mr. Michael Marsh: What we do have is typically called a "program for government". When there's a coalition, the coalition parties will get together and agree on a program for government. That tends to have to go back to the party conference of each party to approve going into coalition with that program from the members. In that way there is some external validation for it, but once they've gone in, that's the program they try to deliver.

The Chair: Ms. May is next.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you very much.

I have question on Twitter.

I note, Mr. Chair, that we're not being broadcast live today on CPAC, so that accounts for fewer questions on Twitter. For our Irish academic colleagues, we're trying to make this committee process as inclusive as possible, so we are inviting live questions. This one reflects that we didn't cover the basics here with you today. For the benefit of Canadians, the Twitter question is from Andrea Oldham. She asks, "Why did Ireland pick STV as opposed to different systems, and what lessons can we draw for Canada from that decision?"

It's a historical question, but Canadians want to know.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It's quite an interesting history, and it goes back a long time, nearly 100 years.

Ireland, as you know, was part of the United Kingdom, and in the U.K. there have always been electoral reformers who wanted to move to some kind of proportional representation. The model they wanted 100 years ago was STV. One of their people came to Dublin and spread the word, and that convinced the people who became the political leaders in an independent Ireland. In fact, there was surprisingly little debate. If we now look back on it, we see there was very little debate within Ireland in the 1920s, when the country became independent, as to what system should be chosen. The choice was to go for proportional representation, and people genuinely did not know that there were lots of different types of proportional representation out there to choose from. It was

assumed that proportional representation meant the single transferable vote, so that's the one we chose and that's the way it's been for the last 94 years.

Mr. Michael Marsh: From an academic's point of view, one of the interesting things in Ireland is that the system is known as PR rather than PR-STV. Irish people think we have proportional representation. At the time it was adopted and for some time afterward, people didn't know that there was another form of proportional representation, so I think the lesson for you is—and I'm sure that's the one you're following—if you want to adopt a new electoral system, find out more than the Irish and British did originally about what's on offer.

Ms. Elizabeth May: As I understand it—

Mr. Michael Marsh: It's easier now.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I understand that in 1921 the British were looking at how they would be able to protect minority rights in Ireland. Is that fair?

Mr. Michael Marsh: Yes, that's why proportional representation was seen as important. It was to protect the Protestant minority.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I don't know if you saw the testimony of Jean-Pierre Kingsley, who is our former chief electoral officer, but his proposal to this committee was remarkably similar to yours. It was to look at the map of Canada and maybe leave it alone for the huge remote areas, but for areas where you can cluster, try STV. I'm curious about this. Did you happen to see Jean-Pierre Kingsley's testimony, or is this just independent advice from Ireland that's rather consistent with his?

• (1120)

Mr. Michael Gallagher: We did have a chance to see it and read it, and it was very interesting.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Good. The question I wanted to ask is this: when you have a multi-member constituency, how does Ireland handle it if somebody resigns suddenly or, God forbid, dies? How do you do a by-election for one member in a multi-member riding?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It simply is a by-election, so the entire riding votes to fill that one seat. That's what happens at general elections for the national parliament. We also fill seats for the European Parliament, and there it's done a bit differently. There at election times each candidate has a list of substitutes, and if they resign or die, their substitute takes over the seat.

There's probably no perfect way of doing this under PR-STV.

Ms. Elizabeth May: There is another question I want to put to you in terms of advice for Canadians, and I know it's a hard question to ask.

We see a lot of perverse results from first past the post, and you've hinted at them in terms of the minority of the popular vote creating a majority government. You're certainly familiar with it with your closest neighbour in the U.K.

When there have been these debates in Ireland on recent efforts to change your voting system to first past the post, how much are the Irish aware of the risks of what we call here “false majorities”, when a minority of the popular vote results in a majority government?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: I think that would be the overwhelming reason that even if there was any discussion on changing the electoral system in Ireland, no one would suggest changing to first past the post. It would be to change to some other kind of PR, although even that issue is not very live. The last referendum we had on the electoral system was in 1968, and no one has really ever proposed going to first past the post since then.

The Chair: We're out of time, but I've been told by the clerk that we're not live on CPAC, but we're live on ParlVu.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I realize that, Mr. Chair, and I'm hearing from lots of people on Twitter that they are not able to access ParlVu, not everyone. CPAC is much more accessible, so they're regretting it.

The Chair: Of course it is. Okay. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

I'd like to take a minute for this. We had started, through one of the other witnesses, talking about the issue of a referendum. I'd like to get into a bit of the strengths. Ireland obviously has some experience here, but I also was getting the sense from Professor Marsh that there may be some downsides from your perspective. I'd like to take a minute and just talk about the Irish experience on the question of referendum, if you could give us what you see as, perhaps, the strengths and then if there is the flip side as well, just to get some thoughts on this as a way of engaging citizens in an important issue.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Well, I suppose the strength is that it potentially engages the citizens and legitimizes a change in policy, a change in electoral system, or not, as the case may be. The difficulty with referendums is that quite often the thing that people are asked to vote on is not simple. Adopting a new electoral system, for instance, is not simple. Exactly what are the implications? You can find one expert to tell you one thing, and you can probably find another expert to tell you something else, so the voters have to decide between the points of view being put forward by those who say you should vote yes, and those who say you should vote no.

Some voters won't bother to sort out who they want to follow; they'll identify someone they don't like, like the government, and say, “Well, if the government says this, we won't do it”. And that's common in many referendums, and particularly those referendums that are lower in salience, that are not so important to people, and therefore they don't get to know the issue.

The referendum in Scotland on independence had a huge turnout and a very high level of engagement with the topic. I think referendums you've had in Quebec were fairly similar. We've had some referendums like that. We've also had referendums with relatively low engagement. We had two referendums on European treaties when the voters gave the wrong answer and said no, so we had the referendum again the following year with almost no change, and the voters then said yes. Turnout was higher, campaigning was more extensive, and people had time to think about it. If you do have

referendums, I think you need an awful lot of resources going in to inform people. You've also had a referendum, I think, in British Columbia on adopting the single transferrable vote, which was carried overwhelmingly, but not overwhelmingly enough, so you've got that experience to look at.

• (1125)

Mr. John Aldag: Could I just get clarification of, in the case of a referendum in Ireland, who controls the messaging? You mentioned in an earlier response something about a central body. There was a comment that they sometimes are criticized for not doing it. Is there a body that does the primary engagement piece, or is it a free-for-all where whoever can spend the most money can control the message? How does that work?

Mr. Michael Marsh: We've changed on those things over the last several referendums. We have a referendum commission charged with mobilizing voters and occasionally with disentangling truth from fiction. It doesn't campaign and it no longer puts out a booklet telling you exactly what the referendum is about in fine detail.

There was a time when it put forward the pro argument and it put forward the anti argument, which was rather confusing. Now we leave that to parties and civil society groups, and the one control over that is that no public money is spent. So even if the government puts forward a referendum, it can't spend government money on that.

Mr. John Aldag: Just to conclude this, are there other thoughts you have on ways of engaging our citizens, beyond simply a referendum? Are there other best practices you could point us toward?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Surely you have to look at the New Zealand experience, if you haven't already. They've had two referendums on changing to PR from first past the post, and that certainly engaged the New Zealand public and created a well-informed debate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kenney.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thanks very much.

I gather that in the last two elections to the Dáil, Sinn Fein has done relatively well, much better than its historic levels. Sinn Fein currently has, if I'm not mistaken, about 19 seats in the Dáil. Is that right?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It has twenty-three, in fact.

Hon. Jason Kenney: What was it in the last Dáil?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It was fourteen, and before that, five.

Hon. Jason Kenney: So historically, into the last two elections, Sinn Fein had between zero and five seats. They were a marginal party. Is that correct?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Yes. They never got beyond five seats until the last election, 2011, when they went up to 14.

Hon. Jason Kenney: What percentage of the final distributed vote did Sinn Fein candidates win in the last Dáil election?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: They won about 14% of the votes.

Mr. Michael Marsh: That's 14% of the first preferences, which is the figure we tend to look at.

Hon. Jason Kenney: So in a first past the post system, it would be reasonable to infer that they probably wouldn't win any seats. Is that right?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Well, there are certain areas where they would be particularly strong. There is one near the border with Northern Ireland that's always been a strong Sinn Fein area. In a single-member constituency riding up there, Sinn Fein candidates might be the strongest. The result would be unpredictable, I would say.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Is it fair to say that in the PR-STV system, Sinn Fein does much better than it would in a first past the post system?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It's unclear. We have a multi-party system now and how votes would be translated into seats under first past the post is unpredictable. You could get some parties getting a huge overrepresentation, while others might be very under-represented. It would be a bit random.

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think the party system we now have is completely incompatible with first past the post. First past the post is easy enough when you have two or three parties, but if you have six or seven, it's quite incompatible.

• (1130)

Hon. Jason Kenney: That sort of begs the question, does it not? The point is that the PR-STV system is an opportunity for smaller marginal parties to win more seats. Under that system, they grow and prosper as opposed to how they'd do in first past the post, which channels voters towards two or three major parties, typically, correct?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Generally speaking, that's correct. The small parties don't do so well under PR, but sometimes it can work for them. A good example is the United Kingdom. In the last election, the Scottish nationalist party was hugely overrepresented. Even though their overall strength across the U.K. is not great, they're the dominant party in Scotland, so they won almost every seat there. So for some small parties with concentrated regional strength, first past the post can work to their advantage.

Hon. Jason Kenney: On that point, as a comparator, in the U.K., correct me if I'm wrong, UKIP has a plurality of seats from the United Kingdom in the European Parliament, which are elected according to proportional representation. But they have only one seat in the Westminster Parliament, which is elected according to first past the post.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: That's right.

Mr. Michael Marsh: They also get a lot more votes in the European election than they do in the Westminster election.

Hon. Jason Kenney: For the edification of my colleagues who are not familiar, or viewers, Sinn Fein is a party that is historically the political wing of the IRA. It now has 23 seats in the Irish Dáil, with 14% of the vote. UKIP, which many would describe as a marginal party here, prospers in the PR system in the European Union, but has difficulty winning a single seat in the Westminster system. I think this underscores the point that sometimes marginal parties that are outside the political Overton window profit from PR systems.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Far be it from me to stand up for Sinn Fein, but there have been times when they've got close to a quarter of support in the opinion polls. So whether you like them or whether you don't, there are an awful lot of people who support them. If you look at people under 35, they're probably the most popular party in the country.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much.

I want to thank you again for talking a little bit about how we can increase engagement from women. You mentioned that only 22% of women make up your Parliament. Here in Canada we have 26%, so we still have a long way to go, and I want to thank you for identifying some of the solutions we can put into place to increase that.

One area we've wanted to increase participation in is our youth vote. At our last federal election we saw an increase of youth engaged, so what we've been doing on this committee is also inviting Canadians from coast to coast to coast to submit questions via Twitter. I have a Twitter question from Sebastian Muermann from British Columbia: Any studies on youth engagement in Irish elections? What kind of outreach is done in educational systems or in civic leadership?

Mr. Michael Marsh: Essentially, I think, very little. They're now beginning to teach about politics in schools for the first time, I understand, in the hope of engaging young people in politics rather more. We did have a referendum on same-sex marriage recently in which, on most accounts, engagement with younger voters was huge and they turned out in very large numbers. But there's no indication that those people then turned out at the next election. Again, I think I go back to, what's in it for them? Do they really see a value in voting? The feeling seems to be no, they don't. Who's to say they're wrong?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: In terms of participation rates for youth, what is the current participation rate for general elections in Ireland?

Mr. Michael Marsh: Let's say voters under 24, something like that, it would probably be less than 40%.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay. Are there any outreach efforts on behalf of the government to increase this? I know you mentioned educational systems, but are there any initiatives you're taking to not only increase votership, but also increase interest in youth to actually run for office? I'd like to know if you have made any initiatives in that regard.

• (1135)

Mr. Michael Marsh: No, no initiatives, although several of the parties put forward relatively young candidates. At the end of the day, for all those young voters out there that nobody's mobilizing, you would expect parties to go out and start mobilizing. That's one of the things that Sinn Fein actually do, and they get far more support from the youngest group of voters than any other party. In a sense, there's a free market. There are votes out there. It's up to the parties to go and mobilize them, not up to the government.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Switching gears, in terms of recommendations you would have for Canada, we know there is no perfect voting system. We've heard that from multiple witnesses. If we had to ask you for your expert opinion on what Canada should be looking at, what would your recommendation be?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: I don't think we would dare make a recommendation. I think we would respect the sovereignty of the Canadian people on that.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Sorry to put you on the spot. When we have great witnesses in front of us, we like to be able to leverage that competency.

Do you have any final suggestions for us?

Mr. Michael Marsh: From a professional point of view, I'd love to see the single transferable vote work in some other system. A friend and colleague of mine in British Columbia devoted a great deal of time and effort trying to get the single transferable vote in Canada. I'd love to see him get it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I want to follow up on the question of regionalism in Canadian politics and the voting system. In your presentation, you say that one of the positives of proportional representation is that parliamentary groups and main parties would have MPs from right across the country. I'm wondering if you could speak to the difference, if you think there is one, between what an STV-type system might mean for regionally based parties and regionally based politics within a country as large as Canada versus a different model of proportional representation, like a mixed member model.

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Well, probably nearly every kind of proportional representation would bring that about. The parliamentary groups would have members from nearly—

I apologize for the building work that's going on here, incidentally. I don't know whether it's audible to you. Ireland is building, and it's a hive of activity here.

The Chair: I thought you might be coming in from Montreal this morning.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michael Gallagher: We notice, for example, that typically... I think this time in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Liberal Party won all the seats there, so when the parliamentary groups of the Conservative Party and the New Democrats meet, there is no voice from Newfoundland and Labrador. Quite often another party will sweep all the seats in another province, whereas with more or less any kind of PR, whether it's PR-STV or any of the other methods, the parties will have representation from right across the country.

We see that in Britain as well where, as I mentioned earlier, the Scottish National Party won almost all the seats in Scotland, so when the Conservative parliamentary party meets in Britain, they have just one MP from Scotland. It is likewise for Labour and likewise for the Lib-Dems. The voice of Scotland really is just unrepresented within the parliamentary groups, and hence within the current government.

That's one consequence of PR, and I don't think it would matter that much which particular kind of PR was chosen.

Mr. Michael Marsh: The difference is that if you have the mixed member system, you might find that all the members elected for a constituency would be from the same party and all the rest would be from other parties, so all the people who might be called on to do the work would be from the same party and those who got elected from the list would be from all the other parties.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: In light of the experience in Scotland with the SNP and in some elections with the Bloc Québécois here in Canada, how facetious do you think it is to suggest that somehow a PR system is going to be more advantageous for certain small regionally based or single-issue parties than a first past the post system, when we have seen that those kinds of smaller parties can monopolize the seats in a particular area under the first past the post system?

• (1140)

Mr. Michael Marsh: I guess the argument is that democracy is not just about majorities; it's about minorities. It's about blending minorities to make political decisions, and that's quite difficult if the minorities are not represented.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Can we just return, for the last little bit of time that I have, to the question of online voting?

We talked earlier about electronic voting and how you can have a hybrid model of electronic voting with a paper validation system, but how do you see that translating to online voting, which is different from electronic voting in person? Do you think it's possible to have some form of paper validation for an online voting process, or do you have to accept electronic voting and electronic counting whole hog, if you will, if you go to an online voting system?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: It's hard to envisage an online voting system that has a paper component to it. One concern about online voting here and in a lot of countries would be the secrecy of the ballot, which means in this country not just that you don't have to show anyone else how you voted, but you can't prove to anyone else how you voted even if you want to. The fear, then, is that if there were online voting, how do we know there isn't someone sitting and looking over your shoulder, making you vote in a particular way or bribing you to vote in a particular way? If there were a paper record of how you voted, then clearly the problems would be even greater, so there is really no demand here for online voting.

I realize that is one of the terms of reference of the committee, but it's not something that Ireland could really throw much light on.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Yes, I think that's it.

The Chair: We'll have to move on to Mr. Deltell.

[Translation]

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

I would like to continue along the lines of my colleague's comments by asking you a question about electronic voting. I completely understand your position. When people vote from home, we don't know whether the vote is being cast by them or someone else, or whether they are being influenced by a third party.

Why not give people access to a paper ballot, but one that would go through a machine that would immediately tally the vote? That way, after the polls close, when the votes are being tallied, all the results could be known within 10 seconds. Has that procedure been tested? What do you think about it?

[English]

Mr. Michael Marsh: That's used in Scotland and in parts of New Zealand with their electoral system, but it wasn't known when we had our experience of electronic voting. I think such was that experience that no Irish government is going to explore the effectiveness or otherwise of the Scottish system.

In many ways it's a good way to do it because it's quick and you can carry out a rather more sophisticated count that's perfectly accurate, which is not possible when you are counting 30,000 or 40,000 ballots by hand. The big downside is that in this country, election count day is a day on which people engage with politics, and you'd reduce that from 24 hours to 15 seconds, which I don't think would go down so well. I don't think people want the count to be quick here.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: People appreciate the big show on TV. I'm a former TV journalist, so I know what I'm talking about. In Quebec City, in the municipal election 10 or 15 years ago, we had that kind of experiment: people having to vote on the paper but the paper going directly into the machine. It was a real mess. So, that is just for your knowledge.

I would like to get back to the philosophical aspect of the debate that we have now, talking about referenda. We know that you have a lot of experience in Ireland, more than we have in Quebec and Canada. But on the other hand, it's an obligation for you if you want to make any change in your constitution, if you want to change the electoral system, you shall pass by your referendum. As an academic, what do you think of the value of a referendum when you want to know the will of the people?

Mr. Michael Marsh: The problem with our referendums is that we have a referendum on any change in the constitution, however marginal. Some of those changes are not very interesting to the general public, so when we wanted to be able to cut judges' pay as part of dealing with the economic crisis, that had to go to a referendum because the government has no control over judges' pay in the former constitution, and people signed up to that. Well, there were two items up for referendum. Turnout was high, but that's because we had an election at the same time. We've had other referendums saying, for example, that bail might not always be given, and the turnout, I think, in that one was extremely low. We had a referendum on changing the rules for constituting our upper chamber, and again, turnout was extremely low. Sometimes it's up around 70%, and sometimes it's down around 20%. But in either case it's supposed to reflect the will of the people.

• (1145)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: So, when the government has to move on a very specific issue, a very major issue, the referendum is a good idea.

Mr. Michael Marsh: Well, you only have referendums on constitutional change. Some of the biggest and most important important things never went anywhere near a referendum. When we decided to repay bondholders in our bankrupt banks with public

money, to the tune of tens and tens and tens of billions, that didn't go to a referendum. Had it gone to a referendum, it wouldn't have happened.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: But changing the way of votes and elected people, is that—

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Generally speaking, the bigger the issue and the more clear-cut the issue, the more sense it makes to have a referendum. My colleague mentioned the referendum last year on same-sex marriage. That clearly meant a lot to a lot of people. It was very clear-cut. People could see the arguments and it really did engage society. But because our constitution is quite detailed, we do have to have referendums on things that logically shouldn't really go to a referendum.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll end with Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thanks once again, professors.

Taking note of your remarks in your presentation on the simplicity of ranking the ballot for voters in Ireland and your knowledge of comparative political systems, can you speak to the ease with which Irish voters see this process compared to other European voters and/or other voters around the world?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Well, the truth is that nearly all PR electoral systems look pretty complicated from the outside, if you try to understand them in every detail, but for the voters they're all pretty straightforward. I really can't think of any electoral system where the reports have said the voters found this just too complicated. They're all fairly straightforward for the voter.

Now, under PR-STV, voters can say a bit more about what they really think. They don't have to just say, "Yes, I like that one and I don't like the rest". They can rank all of them. They can say, "This is the one I like the best and that's the one I like second best" and so on. They give a bit more information and because of that it's a bit more complicated, but really it's not in any way too complicated for voters to be able to do what they're meant to do.

Mr. Michael Marsh: I think there are systems that we might think are complicated. The Swiss system strikes me as very complicated, but the Swiss don't find it so. They did some tests in Scotland before adopting STV. People did lots of focus group studies, and there were many voters who said this sounded very complicated. But Irish voters don't think it's complicated and they do it perfectly easily. It's easy, I think, to exaggerate the complexity of voting under any electoral system.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: What about changing electoral systems and going from one system to another? What value does your research suggest voters place on ease of understanding how to vote, comparing a new system and an old system?

Mr. Michael Marsh: To begin with, I'm sure voters are not quite clear what they have to do. I keep going back to the Scottish experience. The Scottish experience is a very good one, because they have different electoral systems in local government, in Scottish assembly elections, and in European elections, and in their Westminster elections. They seem to manage perfectly well; there are very few spoiled votes.

•(1150)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: In your experience in the PR-STV system in Ireland, in the balloting, is there any culture, any prevalent instances where voters clearly demonstrate their disfavour with candidates or parties by spoiling ballots, or clearly demonstrating who they are not in favour of supporting? Does that happen with any regularity?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: Certainly, in situations of lower preferences when votes are transferred, we can see that some parties are very transfer attractive. They may not be that many people's first choice, but lots of people kind of like them. In this country, for example, the Green Party often has that status, or Labour Party at some elections. Sinn Fein, who were mentioned earlier, tend not to be very popular among other parties' voters. They've got their own base of support but they don't do very well in attracting second preferences from other parties and that plays into the final relationship between votes and seats.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: In spoiled balloting, is that something that happens often, even with first choices?

Mr. Michael Gallagher: I wouldn't say spoiled voting happens very often, because if you write anything on a ballot paper it becomes a spoiled vote and it's invalid. There are some spoiled votes by people who feel so strongly they can't refrain from writing so and so is a such and such, but there are not too many of those.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thanks very much.

That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Professor Marsh and Professor Gallagher, thank you for a very fascinating presentation. You enriched the discussion and our information base immeasurably.

Again, thank you for making yourselves available at this time of the year.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Earlier, I raised, on a point of order, something which ought to have been presented as a notice of motion. I'm now prepared to give notice of motion. I've prepared something here. I apologize for the fact that it's somewhat hand-held.

Given that the Honourable Stéphane Dion is a recognized and credentialed academic, who, in April 2012 expressed the view that "precedent makes holding a referendum necessary in Canada. Changing the voting system would require popular support."

Given that Mr. Dion was invited to appear as a witness at these proceedings and has formally declined that invitation.

Given that this committee is very likely to have accommodated Mr. Dion's attendance any time, including at an irregular meeting.

Given that Mr. Dion has deeply held and compelling views on these matters, we are currently engaged in studying, the public expression of which would have benefited this committee and those observing its proceedings.

Given that no member of the House of Commons may be impeded in his or her right to be reasonably heard in a proceeding of the House, including its duly constituted committees, therefore, I move that this committee refer to the subcommittee of whether the Honourable Stéphane Dion has been inappropriately or unjustifiably impeded in his right to be heard by this committee contrary to the rights and privileges of members and if so, by what or by whom?

The Chair: This is a notice of motion which you want debated at a future time?

Mr. Scott Reid: I guess it would have to be, unless we want to start debating it now, but I think I'd need unanimous consent of the committee to do that.

The Chair: Do we need unanimous consent to debate it now? I'll defer to the clerk on this.

Mr. John Aldag: Forty-eight hours' notice.

The Chair: I don't know if that was in the rules that we adopted. We'll just verify that.

We did create a rule or approve a rule at the very beginning on motions. I'm just going to refer to that.

It says here that 48 hours' notice be required—so you're right—for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to the business then under consideration, which is the case, so we don't need the 48 hours, and we don't need unanimous consent to debate it. In some ways it's up to you if you want to debate this now or if you want to do it at another time.

•(1155)

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, I suppose the answer to this would be as follows. In the event we can resolve this quickly, then I'd be in favour of dealing with it now. It's not my intention to cause us to be still here after a length of time, but we did plan to be here until noon, so I'll just point out to members—this will be my way of addressing the motion—the intention is to refer this to the subcommittee.

The Chair: Right. It's not to have a big debate on it.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's not to have a lengthy debate on this, but members may not agree with that nevertheless, and I understand that.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Reid would like to refer this matter to the subcommittee. I don't know if there are any comments or questions or if people want to just go to a vote on this.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Just to clarify a couple of things, I think perhaps the subcommittee suggestion is helpful so it won't take all of our time up. I'm only struck by the fact that at another committee, I believe it was environment, my Conservative colleagues very much resisted the idea of having any of our MPs testify. It was on a proposed review of some environmental legislation there.

My only concern with the motion is that there's an inference that Mr. Dion is being denied access, or his access is being impeded. Whether an MP comes and testifies or not, we can't compel.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I just resist the suggestion that somehow someone as independently minded as Mr. Dion is being impeded by some force from testifying here. I've known Stéphane for years on this issue and he has a great deal of interest. I'm sure if he wanted to come he would have made that known to us as a committee, but I think there are more politics than substance in this conversation.

The Chair: Are there any other comments, questions? Do we just call the vote?

Yes, Mr. Kenney.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I do think it is interesting because the position of the government, which ultimately will be making the final decision on what electoral system we have, is the decision will be made by one person named Justin Trudeau, and a senior member of his cabinet has repeatedly and publicly expressed himself as supporting referenda as being necessary for the legitimacy of any electoral reform. Insofar as all members believe in hearing a diversity of voices, I think it would be interesting to hear from a senior minister whose view is different from that of the government on the question of referenda. I think that's why it's in the public interest for Minister Dion to appear.

The Chair: Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Instead of descending into the politics of all of this, I'll just call for the question.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell.

[*Translation*]

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

We're not talking about some random individual. We are talking about one of the most respected scholars in the area of constitutionality and constitutional debate in Quebec, if not in Canada. He is formally educated. He holds a doctorate in France. That's far from being nothing. Just a few years ago, in 2012, that man wrote, in a text published by L'Idée fédérale, that "precedent makes holding a referendum necessary in Canada". He did not say that during a discussion, a meal or something like that; he said it in a well thought-out text.

However, that contradicts his current government's position. We feel that he should explain himself duly. He has had dozens of opportunities to do so during question period, but he refused. For the sake of democracy, public debate and understanding in general, that renowned academic should be able to take the time he needs to explain his position on the matter clearly.

The Chair: Yes, but you say that he expressed it clearly, in black and white.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: He expressed it in two sentences. But I think that line of thought deserves more than two sentences.

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

[*English*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: My suggestion is to call for a recorded vote.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I just want to say that Monsieur Dion has also put a tremendous amount of effort into a system of electoral reform that he believes in, so I think the referendum question is a waste of our time, but I think Mr. Dion's testimony would be very useful on the substance of what he cares about, which is an electoral reform system that is proportional.

• (1200)

The Chair: In all sincerity, and in all neutrality, I've heard the minister say that they didn't want to pre-judge as a cabinet, because it is a cabinet decision. There will no doubt be a discussion in cabinet; I think that's the way it works in our system. And I remember hearing the minister say that they didn't want to pre-judge anything

on any issue. So there is a notion of cabinet decision-making after it receives our report. I'm just throwing that out as a thought, but it's obviously up to the committee to decide what it wants to do.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If I may, Chair, I'm not sure what we're doing. I thought perhaps we were headed to a subcommittee; now I'm hearing from the government that—

The Chair: Well, we have to exhaust debate before we vote.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: But what are we voting on? Are we voting to send this to the subcommittee, or are we—?

The Chair: Yes, to send it to the subcommittee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay, that's fine.

The only suggestion I would put to the committee—and it comes back to our terms of reference—is more of a foundational thing for what we're doing here. It came up a little bit yesterday that perhaps the concerns that are being expressed by Mr. Kenney and Mr. Reid about the decision-making process and what we're engaged in here, that the committee stray itself more towards an explicit recommendation on voting systems that this committee comes up with, rather than another set of values. It assuages the fears that it is—as Mr. Kenney has suggested, which was, I think, corrected by you, Chair—only up to one person or the cabinet to make a decision on what comes out of all of this.

Our witness yesterday asked what it is that we're doing here and why we are not making explicit recommendations. That, I think, is something that the committee members should consider. I just want to be clear before we head to the vote what it is that we're voting on.

The Chair: Are we ready for a vote, or does anyone have anything else to say about this?

Go ahead, Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I just basically want to say that this discussion is more appropriate at the subcommittee since it is about witnesses, and it should be discussed there. I don't know where the notion of impeding someone's ability to come...we've been a very open committee and have stated that several times. I think this discussion should be had at the subcommittee and we should go for a recorded vote on that matter.

Mr. Scott Reid: To be clear, just to respond to Ms. Sahota's point, first of all, the goal is to get this to the subcommittee. That's what the motion actually states.

The Chair: Right, yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: The second point, of course, is that there's no suggestion here that this is an issue of the committee having impeded Mr. Dion. I think I am right in saying—and the preamble to the motion does say this—that we will be willing to go to considerable lengths to accommodate Mr. Dion, including holding a meeting at an extraordinary time, adding a meeting into our schedule. It certainly is the case for members for my own party, and it sounds as if it's the case for Ms. May, and I'm just going to guess that it would be the case for any of the members here.

So that's just to clarify on those points.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's just be clear as to how this works and what the subcommittee does with witnesses, because typically, as was said, it's at that level that we seek the witness list from different MPs. We had a subcommittee meeting just yesterday to try to discern what comes next for the committee hearings. We're essentially working with three lists right now; I don't think this is in confidence or anything. We have witnesses who are suggested by the various parties; we have witnesses who have written to the committee asking to appear; and we also have witnesses from our analysts who have been collected over time.

What we're talking about with Mr. Reid's motion today is adding Mr. Dion to that process, right? I ask that through you to Mr. Reid, Chair.

The Chair: Could you give me a second?

He was invited; he just declined.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So this motion is simply to suggest that we invite him again?

The Chair: No, my understanding is Mr. Reid wants to discuss it further in subcommittee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay. We can't compel—

The Chair: Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: With your permission, Chair, because it is a recorded vote that we'll be having and this is all in open session, I

want to make it clear that I want to discuss it in the subcommittee, but I don't want to associate myself with Mr. Reid's preamble about impeding.... I don't see any conspiracies. If there's a way to have Mr. Dion testify, I'm all for it. In private, in our subcommittee, in camera, the clerk can provide more details as to why he declined. He's entitled to decline. I don't want to create the notion that, in supporting Mr. Reid on this motion, I think there's anything nefarious going on.

● (1205)

The Chair: Understood.

Are there any more questions or comments, or should we just vote on the motion?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: As I understand it, we'll be discussing it in the subcommittee at a later date.

Thank you.

We do have some housekeeping to discuss in camera. It'll take about five minutes at the most. If we could go in camera and get these other issues off the table, that would be appreciated.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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