



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

PROC • NUMBER 085 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

—
Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. It's the holiday season. Welcome to the 85th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Today we are continuing our study on the creation of an independent commissioner responsible for leaders' debates for the first hour, and in the second hour we'll be giving drafting instructions.

Go ahead, David.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): I have a question. Am I on the speakers list? Thank you.

I wasn't here last week. Since we're about to give instructions, does that mean we've concluded witnesses? If so, I was wondering when we're going to bring the parties in.

The Chair: We asked the parties to do written submissions, which they've all done except for the Conservatives, who aren't doing one. The NDP submission is en route, and all the other parties have already submitted them.

Mr. David Christopherson: Is there a special reason we didn't call them in? I know that was the intent. Sorry; I was away and I'm just trying to get up to date. Is there a reason we didn't call them in? Our people were ready to go. Given that they play a major role in this, why would we not have them here?

The Chair: There was a reason, but that discussion was in camera. I'll tell you in the second half of the meeting, when we're in camera.

Mr. David Christopherson: The answer is it's a secret.

The Chair: It was in camera. We're not allowed to repeat what was in camera.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, but for the rest of the world who weren't at that meeting, we were planning to bring in the parties. Can I get some explanation as to why not?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): It's an issue in camera, but the NDP was present. You can speak to Randall, who was here, who agreed, who was part of that discussion.

Mr. David Christopherson: So no matter what, you're going to keep it secret. The reason the parties aren't here is secret.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Speak to Randall.

Mr. David Christopherson: He could tell me the secret. Okay.

The Chair: Okay.

I will introduce this morning's witnesses.

[Translation]

From *La Presse*, we have François Cardinal, editorial page editor, and Yann Pineau, senior director of continuous improvement.

[English]

We also have Andree Lau, editor-in-chief of The Huffington Post, and Bridget Coyne, senior manager for public policy at Twitter Incorporated. Her colleague Cameron Gordon, head of communications, was supposed to join her, but his flight out of Toronto this morning was cancelled.

The witnesses from *La Presse* have an app that they would like to show us, if possible. It's not for the content but just to show how it works. It's only in French, so we'd need committee permission to use that as part of their presentation.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you all for being here.

I also notice that we have a celebrity, Althia Raj, here from the *At Issue* panel.

We'll start with *La Presse*.

[Translation]

The floor is yours. You may go ahead.

Mr. François Cardinal (Editorial Page Editor, La Presse): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Allow me to thank the chair, along with the members of the committee, for the invitation to contribute to your work.

My name is François Cardinal; I'm chief editorialist and senior director of the debates section with the newspaper *La Presse*, in Montreal. I'm accompanied today by Yann Pineau, senior director of continuous improvement at *La Presse*.

At your request, we will be showing you our application. Although I will touch on *La Presse's* model, it will not be the focus of my remarks. If the committee would like more information, I would be happy to answer any questions the members have on the subject.

I'm here this morning in my capacity as a representative of the paper, but also as moderator of the French-language leaders' debate that took place before the municipal election in Montreal, last month, between Denis Coderre and Valerie Plante.

Please note that I will not formally be taking a position for or against the creation of the position of commissioner responsible for leaders' debates this morning. I'll instead try to respond to the question asked by the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Karina Gould, in her opening remarks—"How can we reach the largest number of Canadians?" Therefore, I'll elaborate on three observations that, in my opinion, deserve being taken into consideration in the deliberations under way.

First, broadcasters are no longer the only ones on board.

Up to this point, television-broadcaster control over leaders' debates has been more or less total. But the media industry is undergoing a major transformation. What was valid five years ago is not necessarily valid today.

In her preliminary remarks, incidentally, Minister Gould drew up a list of the stakeholders concerned by future leaders' debates, referring to "the Canadian public, political parties, broadcasters", but also to "new media organizations". The minister is right to clarify things in this way, but it strikes me as important to add to that list the established print-media organizations—such as *La Presse*—that have strong footholds on digital platforms. Before you sits one such example.

We are, in our own way, a new media organization thanks to our tablet application La Presse+, the basis for the *Toronto Star's* Star Touch app, which you may be familiar with. But we're also an established mass-media outlet, one that, on a monthly basis, reaches no less than 40% of the adult population of Quebec.

At a time when Canadians are watching television less and less, when a great many are cutting off their access to cable, when they're turning in considerable numbers to mobile and digital platforms, it becomes essential to move away from an approach that revolves exclusively around broadcasters and to involve the major players in the written press, who today are broadcasters in their own fashion.

A sign of the times, parenthetically, is that *La Presse* was part of the media consortium in 2015 helping organize the leaders' debate. The reason for this was the indispensable nature of *La Presse* and the large numbers of people it reaches by way of its various platforms.

It needs to be pointed out that *La Presse* is confronted with the same serious revenue problems as all the other major newspapers in the country, and I am very glad to be here to make that point today. The income crisis is hitting hard everywhere, but thanks to our current digital shift, we are confident of continuing our momentum. And readership is very much there. It is important to draw a distinction when talking about the media crisis. We reach close to three million Canadians a month thanks to our three platforms. On a daily basis, that comes to more than 1.2 million people that we reach thanks to mobile, tablet, and web platforms.

This presence on the web, moreover, was highly useful during the Montreal election, last month, because not a single television

network agreed to broadcast the only leaders' debate in French between Valerie Plante and Denis Coderre.

So, *La Presse*, like *Le Devoir* and the paper *Métro*, addressed this gap by broadcasting the debate live on the web.

It's therefore of paramount importance that the established mass-media organizations that are not official television broadcasters have a significant say in the management and organization of leaders' debates.

It's essential, to this end, to take into account their point of view and their technical needs, which are often different from those of broadcasters, during the organization of and preparations for leaders' debates. And we'll be happy, Yann and myself, to answer your questions on this topic following the presentation.

Second, the organization of the major debates must be depoliticized, and rules for participation must be clear.

If we're here this morning, that's in large part because the leader of a major federal party refused to take part in the English-language debate organized by the consortium in 2015. There was nothing exceptional about that, in a context where the organization of debates is done behind closed doors, according to the requirements and arrangements of the moment. That situation opens the door not just to random rules, but also to the decision of a leader or someone else not to participate.

• (1105)

What matters therefore is to have a transparent structure and clear rules that prevent candidates from taking themselves off for the slightest reason.

The leaders' debate in Montreal that I moderated is a good example. The incumbent mayor had no interest in numerous debates taking place. He therefore decided unilaterally that there would be only one, and even who would organize it. Broadcasters didn't care much for this sort of control, which contributed to the decision not to televise it. The result: as was the case with the English debate in the 2015 federal election, we had a wasted democratic opportunity. The debate was broadcast on the web only.

So it's important that organization of these debates not be entrusted to the political parties and to the arrangements of the moment, but also that it not be left in the hands of broadcasters alone, whose needs are not always the most favourable from the democratic point of view.

It's just as critical, furthermore, that the established rules be clear, predictable, and provided in advance.

Lastly, the multiplicity of platforms calls for a multiplicity of formats.

A number of stakeholders appearing before the committee are advocating the appointment of a commissioner whose mandate would be to supervise the two big leaders' debates. Some have gone further and proposed as well the appointment of a host broadcaster, like CPAC. I leave it to you to judge the relevance of these ideas. But if you find yourselves tempted by proposals tending towards a stronger oversight of the two big debates, it would be important to present those debates in different formats and at different times, while allowing for the possibility that media outlets organize other debates concurrently.

First, at a time of YouTube, podcasts, and videos on demand, it's more critical than ever to present the debates in their entirety, in delayed time, in places voters expect to find them, such as the websites of mainstream media outlets, including the print media.

It's important, in that light, that all media have unlimited access, with no restrictions whatsoever, to the complete version of the debate. Just as it's important that there be no restrictions on the use of excerpts from the debates.

La Presse has had some difficulties in the past gaining access to the raw material of a debate, without restriction, without a broadcaster logo, and with the possibility of disseminating as many excerpts as we would have liked.

So, in order for as many Canadians as possible to have access to the debates, it's crucial to offer a debate at the moment when voters want it, and above all, to offer them summaries and highlights. Many voters, it so happens, don't have two hours to devote to a leaders' debate, or are not available at a time convenient to broadcasters.

Moreover, there must certainly be a high point in the campaign in each of the languages, but media organizations present on the web and on digital platforms must also be permitted to organize their own events.

What immediately comes to mind are the debates organized by *Maclean's* and *The Globe and Mail* in 2015. I also think of the debates that *La Presse* organized alongside the 2012 provincial election with representatives of each party on the themes of young people and health.

Today, it's a lot less difficult to produce good television, or at least to use video properly. *La Presse* regularly demonstrates as much, and if the committee members so desire, Yann and I can present a recent example of the use of video on the *La Presse+* tablet application. The video is about the Trudeau government's first hundred days in power.

In closing, Mr. Chair and committee members, please bear in mind that *La Presse* would be willing and eager to participate as part of any advisory committee, or any organization whose mandate would be to organize the next leaders' debates.

I have to add that this discussion demonstrates the democratic importance of mainstream media in Canada. This is an important precision at a time when an unprecedented crisis is hitting the print media, with a number of newspapers already extinct. At this rate, without government intervention to support the transition, the discussion that we're having this morning could well turn out to be futile in a not so distant future.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I hope that our participation in your work will prove to be useful.

My colleague Yann and I are available to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

It is now Andree Lau's turn.

[*English*]

Ms. Andree Lau (Editor-in-Chief, HuffPost Canada): Thank you for the invitation.

I have read the minutes of the previous public proceedings and the excellent presentations from the different witnesses, so I will try not to repeat their points.

I come to you as a representative of a digital-first media outlet. The Huffington Post—we recently rebranded as HuffPost—has never been weighed down by the often ponderous transition from broadcast or print because it has always been online only, but that doesn't make our commitment to inform and engage Canadians any different from that of so-called legacy media.

In fact, I would argue that we have built our success in a short time on a nimbleness and flexibility to adopt and adapt to technological developments, to online habits, and to users' increasingly nuanced and educated media consumption. There's a thirst for transparency and for a real reflection of what Canadians look and sound like. It's this lens that I apply to the organization and management of Canada's federal election debates.

Not counting 2015, they have largely remained unchanged. The broadcast consortium of big networks decides behind closed doors the who, what, when, and how. Don't get me wrong—they do a beautiful job of orchestrating high-quality live television production, but the result doesn't necessarily reflect the habits or the expectations of many voters.

By the next federal election, the biggest single bloc of eligible voters will be young Canadians who were born between 1980 and 2000, according to the polling firm Abacus Data. They don't live by appointment television. Most of them don't own televisions. These digital natives expect content to be delivered to them where they are, which is largely on their mobile phones. Some of them will watch live events, but even more will catch up through on-demand service later, perhaps when they are finished their non-9-to-5 contract job. My point is that the reasons for having a consortium controlling the details of a debate—such as a prime evening time slot—are no longer valid.

HuffPost, combined with its parent company brands such as Yahoo and Microsoft partnerships, reached 28.6 million unique visitors in October, making it the number two digital property in Canada, just behind Google's sites. That's according to comScore. In comparison, the combined digital reach of the top three broadcasters—Bell, CBC/Radio Canada, and Rogers—is 26.1 million.

It's time that the process is opened up to allow digital-first media entities to contribute, and also to widen the discussion and decision-making. Greater transparency and inclusion can only bring a greater evolution of the process—for example, how has the debate format or moderator been decided? I'm not saying that all the consultations need to be completely public, but there needs to be some transparency to it.

By the way, as far as I can tell, there has never been a moderator who is a person of colour, who's indigenous, or who has a disability. Is that part of the consortium's discussions?

An independent commissioner or commission could set some guidelines as to who gets a seat at the planning table. We still need the networks, but we also need entities that bring innovative and novel ideas to challenge what's been done before, and to deliver them on new platforms.

At HuffPost Canada, for example, we've used Facebook Live to directly connect users to the Prime Minister and to cabinet ministers in digital town halls, and more recently to the NDP leadership candidates in a debate. We were not trying to be a legacy broadcaster and reach as many people as possible with the broadest coverage possible; we target specific audiences and engage them where they are, when they want it, and how they want to be engaged.

If we want Canadians to be more engaged in the democratic process, we need a variety of voices in planning and broadcasting debates.

In 2015, the main broadcasters ended up wasting their time holding out to see if a political leader would change his mind about participating. An independent commission, supported by major political parties, would remove that influence and delay, and allow media providers to focus on the important details in bringing robust and engaging debates to the public with some degree of certainty.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions and discussion.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to Bridget Coyne.

Ms. Bridget Coyne (Senior Manager, Public Policy, Twitter Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members, for the invitation to speak before your committee today and participate in this discussion.

I am Bridget Coyne, senior public policy manager for Twitter, based in Washington, D.C., and I work closely with our Canadian office in Toronto with over 45 employees, including Jennifer Hollett, our head of news partnerships in Canada.

In my five years at Twitter, I have worked on nearly three dozen U.S. presidential, gubernatorial, and senate debates, and I have supported our leader debates and election coverage across the world. With the advent of open social platforms like Twitter, televised events, including political debates, have transformed from an isolated broadcast experience to a shared communal activity.

Before this committee, I will enumerate three main points for your consideration: first, how Twitter and politics are deeply intertwined and in the fabric of Canadian popular culture; next, how Twitter has

historically been a part of political debates and the democratic process around the world and in Canada; and last, how Twitter may play a role in future leadership debates.

Politics and Twitter go hand in hand, especially in Canada, as evidenced by the popular culture and conversation we see on our service. People on Twitter often use a hashtag, written with the pound symbol, to index topics and bring together a diverse chorus of voices. In August 2017, we reported that #cdnpoli was the second most used hashtag of all time in Canada.

We've also hosted a number of major Canadian politicians at Twitter Canada headquarters in Toronto for Twitter Q and As and events. They include Justin Trudeau, Rona Ambrose, Jagmeet Singh, Navdeep Bains, and Melanie Joly.

Next, as it relates to debates, Twitter has a history of working with debate organizers and media partners to incorporate our platform and information into the democratic process for a more robust dialogue. As a service delivering public, real-time information, Twitter captures the roar of the crowd and reactions from outside the debate hall. Twitter can be a meaningful tool for determining who is performing well and what the audience is reacting to, based on public signals.

Here are a few of those Twitter data measurements that we have captured for political debates: What moments caused the most conversation on Twitter? What topics were the most talked about during the debate? Which candidates were the most talked about during the debate? Which candidate grew the most number of followers during the debate? What were the most retweeted tweets of the debates?

Twitter has also directly partnered with debate organizers to take our measurements and incorporate them into their broadcast, both during and after the debate. The broadcasters have editorial authority for how to incorporate this information. For example, in the 2015 federal election, we supported the Rogers Media debate, the *Globe and Mail*-Google debate, and Global News election night coverage, all to provide key Twitter data insights that enhance the public's understanding of the civic process.

Lastly, Twitter can be a meaningful method to drive participation in the electoral process, both for candidates and for voters. For candidates, Twitter can be a microphone to engage the public, to let voters learn more about them, and to permit participation by those not formally invited onto the debate stage. As some previous testimonies have cited, in 2015 Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party of Canada, tweeted her way into the debate, which drove 2.1 million impressions, a 2,000% increase from her daily average. For voters, Twitter can be a microphone for those not invited into the debate hall. To that end, we have worked with debate organizers to include questions from Twitter users.

When looking ahead for how Twitter may play a meaningful role in the future of leadership debates, there are three primary focus areas we ask you to consider.

First, we ask you to consider providing open access to viewing and following the debate through regularly live-streaming the event across both broadcast and social networks. Live-streaming video is a new format and one that we anticipate more news programs will adopt.

● (1120)

Two Canadian news programs began live streaming daily on Twitter in 2017: CBC's *The National*, and TVO's *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*. In 2017 alone we have worked with broadcasters to carry their debates and election coverage on Twitter in the U.K., France, Germany, South Korea, Japan, and the United States, in many cases drawing millions of viewers.

Second, we ask that you consider encouraging and incorporating audience questions and participation into the debate experience. This includes establishing a clear and consistent hashtag for the public to join the debate, identifying Twitter usernames on the stage and on air for the public to follow the candidates and to connect with them, and bringing public tweets and questions into the broadcast.

Third, we ask that you consider supplementing event coverage with Twitter data to further understand public opinion and bring voters into the civic process.

On behalf of Twitter, thank you again for the opportunity to present these ideas for how you might reform the political debate process and access to civic participation.

The Chair: Thank you very much. *Merci à tous* for being here.

Now we'll start with Mr. Graham.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Thank you all for being here today.

My first question is for Mr. Cardinal.

You spoke briefly about access to debate material. I want to make sure we are all on the same page. When a debate is broadcast, what happens to the debate content?

Mr. François Cardinal: Thank you for the question.

It varies depending on the debate and the broadcaster. In Montreal, for instance, the people at TVA began to organize their own debates. They did not think the format involving multiple leaders was compelling enough. For business reasons, they opted to go with a one-on-one format.

We, at *La Presse*, have had a lot of trouble accessing, first, the full stream of the debate and, second, all the clips we wanted. What's more, owing to a legal vacuum, we still don't know whether we are allowed to broadcast as many clips of the debate as we want. We don't know exactly who holds the rights to the broadcast. From a very technical standpoint, TVA's logo could appear on the stream, for instance.

Hence why it is so important to make debates available not just in their entirety, but also in delayed time. The actual time at which the debates are held may not necessarily be convenient for all Canadians. It is equally important that access to the debates be

unlimited and unfettered, in terms of both the full debate and the subsequent use of clips.

● (1125)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That means that the principle of fair dealing does not apply to debates, and that is a source of concern.

Mr. François Cardinal: It's a grey area. Despite asking every single time, we never manage to get an answer.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Perhaps the committee should include that aspect in its copyright discussion. It might be helpful.

Mr. François Cardinal: Yes.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Do you think television broadcasters should be mandated to broadcast the debates?

Mr. François Cardinal: Would you mind repeating the question?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Do you think television broadcasters should be forced to broadcast at least one debate during an election campaign?

Mr. François Cardinal: I wouldn't want to say definitely one way or the other, but it's an excellent question.

I mentioned the municipal election in Montreal a month ago. The incumbent mayor decided that only one debate would be held and that the chamber of commerce would organize it. Radio-Canada and TVA weren't pleased with that level of control and opted not to broadcast any of the debate. It was a missed opportunity for democracy.

It may be worthwhile to seriously consider whether at least one broadcaster should be required to broadcast the debates. As for whether everyone should, that is up to you.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

I will now turn to the Twitter representative.

[*English*]

Ms. Coyne, thank you for being here.

I have a very quick question for you. I've always observed that on Twitter there are very few undecided voters, and when you're talking about using all the data coming from Twitter, the campaign with the best digital organization then has the best performance, as opposed to the best reaction from the public.

Do you have a reaction to that observation?

Ms. Bridget Coyne: Twitter is unique in that you don't have to identify who you are. That's really important in a lot of democracies around the world, where it's important to have an open communication platform.

When it comes to debates and how we track our data, it's also important to understand how those measurements play out. You may respond to something with a hashtag and I may just say the political party, but we're both talking about the same event in the same time period, so we're able to take that aggregate number of key words and look at when people are responding and make conclusions about what moment they are responding to.

Often those are the opportunities to persuade somebody, and campaigns and parties are often on Twitter during debate too, finding those persuadable people who are tuning in to learn more.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

This is for Ms. Coyne, and maybe for Ms. Lau as well. I'm not sure.

You talked about involvement in debates in other countries. You listed a few. What best practices or lessons can we learn from these other countries that you would want to share with us?

Ms. Bridget Coyne: I think it's always important to inform the voters. Tell them how to tune in. Have a hashtag on the stage so that they know what to look for. Have a username on the podium so they know how to connect with them. Often a handle is the same across multiple platforms, and that's a great way for people to learn more about them and get involved.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: My question was about whether you have experience with a specific country whose model we should be following and looking to.

Ms. Bridget Coyne: I have the most experience with the U.S. elections.

This year we saw a lot of innovations around live-streaming debate. In New Jersey there was a governors' debate that we partnered with, and they had multiple media partners. They took questions from Twitter users both before and during the debate.

That's a best practice: allowing people to tweet before the live event, but also to tweet during it if something really encourages them to get involved. They took those questions live, and we also covered what people responded to at the end of the debate through Twitter data.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

Ms. Lau, did you have any final comments before I hand it over to Ms. Tassi?

Ms. Andree Lau: It's not my area of expertise.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: All right. Thank you.

I'll pass the remaining time to Ms. Tassi.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I'll reduce it to one question, then. My question's going to focus on the input that you can give us with respect to the structure of the commission or the commissioner.

Ms. Lau, listening to your comment about the changing digital world, and, Ms. Coyne, your comment with respect to Twitter and how engaged people are, what input could you give us with respect to how we structure this commission or commissioner to allow for the most optimal engagement and flexibility so that we can in fact reach the audiences through all these advancing social media?

• (1130)

Ms. Andree Lau: I have a very basic suggestion, which is a commissioner or participants who actually use all of the tools we're

talking about—someone who in their daily life doesn't have a TV, doesn't have cable, and can give on-the-ground advice as a user.

I would also add someone with a digital journalism background in order to bridge the needs of broadcasters as well as digital outlets.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: You're suggesting a commission, and part of the panel or the board of that commission comprises individuals of the kind you have identified.

Ms. Andree Lau: Yes.

Ms. Bridget Coyne: From Twitter, we encourage working with media partners who have access to the debate, and we want to make sure that happens on Twitter as well. I have a few numbers to cite from political events this year, and the young audiences that they bring in.

In the U.S., the presidential inauguration had 6.8 million unique live viewers, and 70% of those were under age 35. Having these unique audience opportunities to get new voters into the process through regular government events, but also political debates, by live-streaming on Twitter, as well as having the commitment that it's going to be open for any broadcast partners to stream on Twitter, would be our recommendation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go on to Mr. Nater.

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

Thank you to our witnesses.

I want to follow up on that last comment from Ms. Coyne about the availability of a live stream. I get the impression that's something that I suspect this panel would support: generally, the ability to take a broadcast and stream it live.

I know our friends from *La Presse* mentioned doing it without labels or a broadcaster logo on it. I'm curious. We do have CPAC as our national political broadcaster. If CPAC were to be tasked with organizing an English and French debate, would your three organizations support having CPAC directly tasked with organizing and then providing that stream live to any and all people, whether it's for a nominal fee or whether it's free of charge? Is that something that would be supported by this panel?

Ms. Bridget Coyne: We're open to working with CPAC as a media broadcaster—and Elections Canada, or whatever other group of folks who want to partner with Twitter—to bring more people into the process.

[Translation]

Mr. Yann Pineau (Senior Director, Continuous Improvement, La Presse): I'd like to say something, if I may.

In order to reach as many voters as possible, a debate should be broadcast not just live, but also in delayed time. Not everyone is available to watch a debate at the same time, and not everyone necessarily wants to watch the full two hours of a debate. Reaching as many voters as possible means being able to replay a debate and break it up into smaller, more digestible segments.

Mr. François Cardinal: I would simply add that making a debate available, in delayed time, on a website such as *La Presse's* is a potential solution that we haven't really seen in the past. It is clear that this is a one-shot deal event, and then it is over. I would say that posting the full debate, whether on YouTube or platforms such as *La Presse* or The Huffington Post, is a must in 2017.

[English]

Mr. John Nater: I appreciate that.

Coming from someone who doesn't have cable or satellite, that ability to engage online is where my generation.... One of you mentioned Abacus Data. That's exactly where we're going. It really questions, to some degree, the relevance of the major broadcasters in terms of this discussion, when so many people from the millennial generation, who will make up the largest voting segment, are not going to be using those traditional formats.

Ms. Andree Lau: Sorry, can I just...? There is one more thing to keep in mind.

There is the live stream for sure, but we've run into problems in that after the live stream is over, we couldn't record it. We have to depend on the broadcaster to provide the recorded tape; sometimes that's an hour later, and sometimes it's 24 hours later. There is also an understanding of what digital outlets need, which is that we need it immediately so that we can package it for our users and get it to them so they can watch it at their convenience.

• (1135)

Mr. John Nater: That's a good point. Thank you. I appreciate that.

I want to talk a bit about the number of debates and the variety of debates. In the last election, there were five debates. In the past, there have been one English and one French. In 2005-2006, there were two English and two French.

What significance do you place on having a variety of debates, whether it be a variety of formats, topics, or combinations of political leaders? What significance would you place on that aspect of debates?

Ms. Andree Lau: From our experience doing the digital town halls that we've had at HuffPost Canada, what's been interesting is that the most engagement has come from an ability to talk directly to cabinet ministers—perhaps not the leaders who are in the spotlight, but people who hold considerable influence in cabinet, because the public generally doesn't have a chance to interact with them on those types of very specific issues.

I would ask that you consider that those types of specific topics become possible areas of focus so that people can focus down their questions. A lot of times the general leaders' debates are very broad, and there is only so much time to briefly touch on a topic before they jump on to something else.

Ms. Bridget Coyne: I would defer to the commission to determine the number of debates.

I think it's important to make sure that people know how to tune in, and that this is a clear part of the process so that people aren't fragmented and miss a debate. There's also the replay functionality to be able to see the clips.

In terms of topics, having some nimbleness based on the live conversation is really helpful. We saw that play out in the U.S. presidential debate in November 2015, when a Twitter user sent a tweet, and that changed the entire course of the debate. The moderator was able to see that question in real time and pivot to address Hillary Clinton head-on, based on a user's feedback.

[Translation]

Mr. François Cardinal: There are three key things I would add to that.

First of all, it's important to have at least one major debate in each official language. I think that's a given for everyone.

Second, having a variety of formats is important, not just to appeal to Canadians, but also to test the leaders in various debate formats. The debate I moderated during the Montreal municipal election was a highly structured debate organized by the chamber of commerce, and the questions were of interest to the general public and very much focused on public issues. Conversely, in English, the questions came mostly from voters. The different formats, then, put the leaders to the test in different roles.

Third, having debates that focus on various themes is also important. Some people take a very narrow view of current affairs, only paying attention to specific issues such as health or youth. In 2012, *La Presse* organized candidate debates around such themes as health, and I know they were very popular. It's important to bear in mind that only certain issues interest some people.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. John Nater: I just have a quick question. You may not have time to answer it.

I believe *La Presse* mentioned forcing leaders to attend debates. Do you have any thoughts on how that would work in a practical sense? How do you require a leader to show up? What mechanisms should be there to make that happen?

[Translation]

Mr. François Cardinal: I know witnesses who appeared before the committee in recent weeks put forward various scenarios.

I think it is possible to establish a mechanism to somehow punish a leader who fails to participate in a leaders' debate or perhaps just the most important one. I would say it's necessary to impose some sort of sanction. It is always in the incumbent prime minister's interest to reduce an opponent's visibility. I think, then, that such a mechanism is needed. Requiring leaders to take part in at least one leaders' debate in each official language is an important way to facilitate Canadians' participation in the democratic process.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go on to the chap who chose England over us.

Mr. David Christopherson: Just temporarily, Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

I have a couple of observations. I'm at least one generation, if not two, ahead of Mr. Nater, but I can tell you that the life he just described is my daughter. She's 25 and she doesn't have cable. She wouldn't dream of it. She doesn't do appointment TV, and she wants everything on her mobile. Exactly what you said is my daughter and her colleagues, to a T.

I also just note, as I thought it was interesting, that now all of a sudden anybody who's not digital is legacy media. Words matter. It's interesting.

That's an observation. I'll just leave that there.

I want to start, Chair, with Mr. Cardinal's remarks. I thought it was important that he said what he did. If I can repeat it in English, he said, "If we're here this morning, that's in large part because the leader of a major federal party refused to take part in the English-language debate organized by the consortium in 2015", and that's the truth of it. That's what riled me up in terms of the debate's failure. Aside from my own partisanship, citizens were denied what they needed in an election by virtue of not having that major debate. Something's got to be done.

Having said that, I have an observation. It needs to be said. The major party that wouldn't show up was the Conservatives, and it's the same party that's even refusing to make a submission to this committee.

We need to understand that there's a pattern here. There's one particular party here that doesn't want these debates, because that fits their agenda. How many of their candidates in the last two federal elections wouldn't even go to local debates?

Now, we're not dealing with that, but it does speak to a strategy, and if you take a look—I'll just throw this out there—at what they did in their last piece of legislation, the "un" Fair Elections Act, and add it all up, it does not conclude to their being a leading participant in democratic elections and debates. That's my partisan part.

Mr. Cardinal, I've been a little disappointed in some of the major consortium players, the big media, because most of you have refused to take a position on whether it's a good idea to have a commission or not. I suppose I can maybe try to figure that out, but it's disappointing for me in trying to do my best in a non-partisan way when the biggest players are sitting back and saying they don't really want to comment on whether there should be this or that, but these are the things I'd like to see happen.

I pose to you, sir, that if we don't go down this road.... You seem to agree that the last occasion failed Canadians. If we don't go down the road to a commission, then what do we do to prevent failure and to ensure we don't have a repeat of that if we don't take some action?

If it's not this action, what action would you recommend?

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. François Cardinal: That's an excellent question. To be perfectly frank, I find it a bit unsettling.

I'll explain my hesitation regarding the creation of a commissioner. From one year to the next, from one political cycle to the next, from one election cycle to the next, things change very quickly.

Five years ago, broadcasters were still king, calling the shots. Today, a media outlet like *La Presse* would no longer have a print presence. Our full transition is just a few days away, in fact. Next year, *La Presse* will exist entirely in digital format. Would having a structured body headed by a commissioner allow for innovation at a rapid enough pace to stay ahead of the curve? The comments of my Twitter and Huffington Post counterparts show that we could very well have an altogether different position if we were to appear before the committee next year. The reason is simple: we try to keep pace with our readers, regardless of their age.

That is why I did not take a stand today. My fear is that such a structured mechanism might prevent innovation.

I am, however, in favour of some sort of debate oversight so that no political party can shirk their responsibilities from one election to the next. If the creation of a commissioner turns out to be the lesser evil, I will support it.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you. That's helpful.

That really is helpful, because we can link what you just said—that we'd like to see that kind of flexibility—to other important issues being raised by Mesdames Coyne and Lau in terms of who chooses the moderator and whether that reflects all of Canada, providing access to the digital after a broadcast, the timing of when it should happen, and real-time influence in debates. Those were just a few of the ideas I heard, but they can only be implemented if we have some kind of framework. I think I heard you saying the same thing, that we need something.

The only place I depart—and I'd be open to having people change me on this, because I seem to be marching a little differently than the army—is that everybody is talking about a sanction on a leader who does not attend. It seems to me that if we profile the debates well enough, in the way we should, the sanction is that you wouldn't dare not show up, because a price would be paid. With regard to the idea of imposing a sanction on a democratic leader in what they do or don't do, my initial reaction is to back off a bit. Let's set it up so that we can say, "I double-dog dare you not to go." That's a little more open.

My sense—and we're getting close to giving instructions and stuff like that—is that we do need something. I can tell you that I'm listening to my colleagues over here, and we have a repeat coming down the line. Make no mistake: if we don't do something, we're going to be back where we were, guaranteed.

I want to make sure that while there's an openness to doing something now—and I'm looking at the majority government—we put in some kind of framework. I don't really care what we call it or where we put it, although I have some ideas based on the submissions, but it still seems to me that we, as a nation, need to have some kind of framework that guarantees that Canadians will have at least those two major focal points, which are two major national debates, in French and in English, if nothing else, and I would assume, listening to Mr. Nater, that there would be a whole lot of other things too. Those are all great.

However, the absence of that one big debate was a real failure on our part as a country to provide a democratic means for all of us to understand the issues and where the parties were.

I have to say that I'm heading into our next in camera session with a view that we need to do something. It needs to be light and it needs to be something that doesn't create a permanent bureaucracy and it needs to be nimble, but more than anything, it needs to take into account all the changes that are happening. The framework needs to provide for that kind of flexibility to happen, and then hopefully we can frame this up well enough. You'll do your job, and we'll do ours to promote what it's going to be when we finally get it.

Again, just leave it to the party leaders. Dare them to not show up and say to Canadians why that's their role in democracy and why they should be the prime minister when they won't even come to the debate.

If I have time, I'll give it to you.

• (1145)

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're way over time—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: —but if you want to respond in 280 characters, you can.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you again, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Cardinal: Mr. Christopherson, I'd like to add one thing, if I may.

I don't think leaders who fail to show up to a debate pay a democratic price or other penalty in voters' minds. People don't even remember that, in the 2015 election, one of the two major party leaders did not participate in the English-language debate.

That is why I believe some sort of sanction is necessary, if only to force a leader to show up to a leaders' debate. Two or three days later, Canadians have already forgotten about it.

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson: It would be to make a point.

Mr. François Cardinal: Yes, to make a point.

Mr. David Christopherson: Understood. Thank you so very much.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota is next.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): My first question is for you, Ms. Coyne. When Radio-Canada appeared as a witness before this committee, they talked about being in discussions with Google and Facebook during the 2015 election. Were you also in discussion with the consortium at the time, and were you guys trying to create a role for Twitter?

Ms. Bridget Coyne: We work with all the media broadcasters in Canada and likely in that case offered them the same services as in every other debate, with data and partnerships to tune in as well.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You also stated previously that the role Twitter played in this last American election was quite great, with more

users tweeting about the election and the debates. However, for the turnout in that debate.... I'm not saying this is necessarily because Twitter was involved, but it's just an interesting observation that the voter turnout, even though there were so many people engaged with different platforms, was lower.

As for what we've seen in terms of our last election, sometimes this committee has discussed the fact that perhaps because of the breakdown of the consortium model and the fact that we had all these various platforms airing the debate, which people did not expect, we had fewer viewers tuning in, and it was somehow an injustice to the democratic process because people were not as engaged or informed about the leaders and the platforms of the different parties.

Twitter was around then, and people were using Twitter quite a lot. Some of those debates were online. They were in various formats. How do you explain that even though we had the variety—it wasn't created by the consortium—we still had fewer people tuning in? How do we change that?

Ms. Lau, you stated that your job is to target certain markets and not to necessarily reach the broadest viewership with just one model. Our struggle and my struggle on this committee is that I do want to reach the broadest viewership, but I want there to be a way to still target those who do not watch by the regular means.

• (1150)

Ms. Andree Lau: I think the answer is echoed by my colleagues from *La Presse*: make it available to everyone. Hit every possible outlet, platform, and distribution and have those places decide how to package it and how to distribute it, not just on the night it happens or the next day, but over the next three weeks. Maybe they can repackage things as topics come up during the campaign, but open access to all I think is key, because that way you are hitting every mark. You're just going for it instead of limiting it—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: How many debates do you think we should be having?

Ms. Andree Lau: I'm sorry; I just mean the distribution, let's say, of one main debate, and having that distribution access open to everyone.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you think we should limit the number of debates, though—or, rather, that there should there be a limited number?

Ms. Andree Lau: I can't prescribe a certain number. I think it's common sense to say that people can pay attention to only so many national debates. I mean, if you start going to 20 or 30, they're all going to tune out, but I can't give you a magic number.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You're thinking a layering approach is better?

Ms. Andree Lau: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's better to have a few debates rather than a variety of different debates at different times? In your opening remarks, I think you mentioned something about different formats and different times.

Ms. Andree Lau: It requires more investigation, because you could go two different ways, as you mentioned. One way is a concentrated handful and then distributing all of them, but it doesn't preclude you from other smaller outlets doing targeted ones and having those distributed as well. Those are hosted by smaller outlets, but they're also distributed to all.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: This question goes out to all of the witnesses today: how do you think the commission or commissioner—whatever model it takes—should be funded? Should it be funded through the government? Should it be funded through outside sources? Funding for the American commission is based on fundraising they do through private citizens and corporations. I'm wondering what you think the Canadian model should have.

[Translation]

Mr. François Cardinal: I'm going to answer both of your questions at the same time.

I think what the committee members have to do is find a way to organize a major debate in each official language that leaders cannot avoid, an event that is eagerly anticipated because it is recognized as the most important debate of the election campaign, one that is meant to draw as many Canadian viewers as possible. The debate could be publicly funded.

As for whether to limit the number of debates or make a variety of debates mandatory, I would say that the answer should be up to us, in the media. We should be able to hold 18 other small debates if we so desire; that should be for the media to organize.

What parliamentarians need to do is create a not-to-be-missed event that all the leaders have to attend. Canadians should expect something to happen that evening, given all the momentum leading up to the event.

[English]

Ms. Andree Lau: That's a fine proposal, because in the past what's been prohibitive or a barrier for smaller outlets to join a pool is the cost.

Ms. Bridget Coyne: Twitter works with all the media partners and gives them a lot of free tools, which we invest in as well, so live streaming is possible because we have a service called "Periscope" through which we enable people to take their feed onto Twitter. We also acquired a company in 2014 called "SnappyTV". That's really the engine that powers a lot of clips of live television on Twitter, and it is available for free for all media broadcasters. We take on a lot of the responsibility to make sure this content is available.

• (1155)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do I have another minute left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you think the commission should be legislated through Parliament? The commission in the U.S. is not legislated. It's a body that everyone just adheres to, but I worry sometimes about where they derive their authority. Are there any last-minute remarks? Are there no opinions on that?

Okay. I guess that's all we have time for.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go on to our last questioner, Mr. Richards.

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

I have just one quick question. I've been listening to the conversation today and listening to the questions and answers. There's been a lot of talk about the variety of different formats, a lot of talk about viewership and the changing nature of it. I'm curious as to the thoughts each of you has on this. In order for a debate to be a national debate, there are varying opinions out there. It seems that some people believe that unless the major networks carry a debate, it's not really a national debate. I would assume there are others, especially as has been mentioned, millennials, who don't have cable or satellite or things like that and who get their news or their programming in other ways. For them it probably isn't necessary that it be a national debate.

I want to hear your thoughts—each of you—as to whether it has to be carried by CBC and CTV in order to be a national debate.

Ms. Andree Lau: I don't think so. I think the Internet has become the great equalizer.

Certainly I think everyone agrees that we want a certain production quality. Whether it's a body such as CPAC or CBC and whoever, we still want that quality behind it, but does it have to be carried by the networks in order to be defined as a national debate? I don't think so. I think that goes to the people who are participating.

Ms. Bridget Coyne: We're open to all formats in that regard, and we'll commit all sorts of partnership opportunities. One thing we use on our platform every day is a hashtag emoji. That's a guiding light to tell you that this is the hashtag you should use for the debate.

That's something we can commit to.

[Translation]

Mr. François Cardinal: I tend to disagree with the idea that it isn't necessary to broadcast the debate on television. I think that, in order for it to truly be a national debate, it has to be carried by CBC, Radio-Canada or some other major network.

We saw that with the Montreal mayoral debate I mentioned earlier. The leaders' debate was broadcast by the mainstream print media organizations: *La Presse*, the *Métro* newspaper, and *Le Devoir*. The event was much less popular and had much less of an impact because it was not broadcast by the major television networks.

Yes, it's important to appeal to younger Canadians who do not watch television, but not necessarily all Canadians are on Twitter or read the Huffington Post either. My view is that the debate should absolutely be broadcast on a wide scale, at least in the case of a national debate in both official languages.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: To follow up on that, Mr. Cardinal, I guess there's been some talk about requiring leaders to participate. In this case you're indicating that your thoughts are that it would have to be broadcast on the national networks to be a national debate. Would you then apply that principle to the networks? Would they be required to carry debates that were set up? Would we force that, mandate that, and they wouldn't have a choice?

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Cardinal: I think it should be mandatory for CBC/Radio-Canada, as the public broadcaster. Broadcasting an event of that nature falls entirely within its public television mandate.

• (1200)

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. That's all I have.

The Chair: Thank you all for being here; we really appreciate it. You've added another dimension to our very important study.

We'll suspend for a minute while we go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>