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Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota



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• (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)): I'll call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting 13 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

You all know by now that we're meeting pursuant to the order that was adopted by the House on Wednesday, September 23, allowing committees to sit in hybrid format.

For the benefit of the witnesses today, I'll point out as well a few reminders that those who are participating virtually, members and witnesses, may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of "floor", "English" or "French". The floor language is for those who wish to listen to the language spoken with no interpretation.

Before speaking, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you are done speaking, please put your mike on mute to minimize any interference. This isn't necessarily automatically done for you. Please remember to do it yourself.

I would remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. Should members need to request the floor outside their designated time for questions, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order, or if they aren't present physically, then speak into the mike and try to get my attention by stating that they have a point of order. After that point of order is raised, those who wish to speak to the point of order, please either use the "raise hand" function or try to get the attention of the clerk, if you're physically in the room. Both the clerk and I will keep a consolidated speaking order.

I also want to remind everyone, to set their Zoom meeting view to gallery view. It's the most realistic option to what it looks like to be at the big committee table physically. You can see all your colleagues at the same time.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. Also remember to speak slowly and clearly for the benefit of the interpreters especially. It's quite challenging. Please do not speak over one another. It's almost impossible for the interpreters to interpret if we speak over one another. Be mindful of that as well.

It looks like everyone here on today's call has a headset. We've been providing headsets to the witnesses as well. These headsets have been determined by the House administration to be the most effective ones. Please, it's mandatory to wear the headset with the boom microphone.

Now we'll start today's meeting.

We have been able to get our witnesses into two separate panels. Originally we had it set up with three panels, but we had to do some reshuffling because of the availability of some witnesses.

For the first panel, I would like to welcome Professor Blais, who has been here before. He's coming to us from the University of Montreal, the political science department.

From Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba, we have Ms. Blumczynska.

Thank you, Ms. Blumczynska, for being with us today.

From the Canadian Federation of Students, we have Nicole Brayiannis. She is the deputy chairperson for the national organization.

Thank you for being with us today.

• (1105)

Welcome to all of you. Each of you has five minutes for your introductory remarks.

We'll start with you, Professor Blais.

[*Translation*]

Prof. André Blais (Professor, Department of Political Science, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

I thank the committee for inviting me to make a few comments on Elections Canada's recommendations in the event of an election during the pandemic.

I have three very brief comments. The first one is that I do not think there should be an election this year. We have fixed election dates. The next election should be in October 2023, not before.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Point of order, Madam Chair. I'm sorry to interrupt.

The Chair: Is it an issue with the sound?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Yes. We're getting the interpretation at the same volume as the floor sound. The two are the same.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive): Madam Chair, we'll look into what the issue is here if you would suspend very briefly.

The Chair: All right. We'll suspend for just a minute, hopefully. Usually they're very quick at resolving this.

• (1105) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1105)

The Chair: Let's continue.

Monsieur Blais, thank you so much. I'm sorry for the interruption.

[*Translation*]

Prof. André Blais: Should I start from the beginning or not?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, please.

[*Translation*]

Prof. André Blais: Okay.

I thank the committee for inviting me to comment on what we should do if there is an election during the pandemic.

I have three very brief comments. The first one is that I do not think there should be an election this year. We have fixed election dates. The next election should be in October 2023, not before. It is possible to have a minority government for four years. Just because minority governments traditionally last only one or two years doesn't mean that must always be the case. All political parties must learn to compromise.

Having said that, I agree that the possibility of an election in a pandemic must be anticipated. So I have two comments on that. My first observation is this: I fully agree with Elections Canada's proposals. We must avoid line-ups and make voting easier. It is easier to vote on Saturday or Sunday than it is to vote on Monday alone. I would add that there should be more polling stations to make voting easier. In short, we must do everything we can to avoid waiting in line. Actually, why not have an express line for those who are more vulnerable?

There could even be one for those who reserve their spot and want to vote at 10:38 a.m., for example.

I think these measures should be maintained for future elections. Every effort should be made to make voting as easy and quick as possible.

My final point is that I applaud the proposal to make voting in long-term care facilities more flexible. I think it is a great initiative.

Those are all my comments.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

• (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much, Professor.

Next we have Ms. Blumczynska.

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska (Executive Director, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba): Good morning. Thank you for this honour.

I'm speaking to you today from Treaty 1 territory, which is the land of the Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples and the homeland of the Métis nation. I want to begin by acknowledging that I'm a settler who's been allowed to enter this country by the colonial Government of Canada. I also want to say that I understand that I, and those who have arrived before me and after me, have been welcomed here and owe our freedom to the indigenous peoples—land and water defenders. I understand that by entering into nation-to-nation treaties, the indigenous peoples made it possible, amongst other things, for settlers to build new lives in peace and safety.

In the last week, I reached out to ethnocultural communities throughout Winnipeg to invite their voices into this chamber. I recognize that I am but one experience. Many who face barriers to democratic participation must be heard. My special thanks to the African Communities of Manitoba, the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations, and many trusted advisers who I call friends from our Syrian, Nigerian, Congolese, East Indian and Chinese communities.

To begin, I want to state the obvious: No one wants to expose themselves, their families or communities to possible infection and illness. The highest assurances must be made to protect the health and well-being of every person in Canada. Many factors can influence one's participation in an electoral process, especially voters originating from countries where the electoral process has often been neither fair nor free.

Our community shared that some elections abroad, in their lived experiences, were marked by violence, financial inducement, disenfranchisement, electoral fraud and a lack of voter education. This made people believe their votes did not count. It ultimately led to voter apathy and low turnout. The governments that emerged from these skewed democratic processes often lacked legitimacy and representativeness, and were not responsive to the needs of the people. This further alienated citizens from the governance and democratic process. A lack of inclusive governance leads to low participation in elections.

The first challenge is to overcome apathy and the belief that individual votes do not count. Regrettably, as many refugees and recent immigrants wait for years to become citizens, as permanent residents they're not eligible to vote. This inevitably affects their participation when they finally do become citizens and can exercise this right. There's a growing movement across Canada in municipal and provincial elections to extend voting rights to permanent residents. After all, they pay taxes, use government services and contribute to our communities. The federal government could lead the nation in extending this most critical right to all permanent residents.

Second, we've seen from recent elections in the United States that mail-in ballots and electronic voting may offer new and safer mechanisms for participation. However, I want to strongly caution you that these options can further disenfranchise those who lack literacy and digital literacy skills. The lack of digital literacy skills especially is a major barrier for many people from an immigrant background. Voting processes in many countries continue to be manual with limited online involvement, both because of low digital literacy and because of a lack of digital infrastructure. At IRCOM, as an example, more than 50% of the adult tenants do not possess the digital literacy skills to navigate the Internet confidently. Nearly 34% of families do not have access to reliable IT devices. Thus, building digital capacity of voters in advance of elections is required for everyone to adapt to the new reality of voting in a COVID-19 era.

Remote voting cannot completely replace in-person options. For elections to feel politically safe, they must be accessible in a variety of ways and be transparent and available in every community. In fact, in-community options need to increase to accommodate physical distancing and the necessary sanitization. Expanded locations and longer early voting hours will reduce crowding and physical contact.

- (1115)

At voting locations in communities with larger immigrant populations, staff need to be familiar with rules regarding language interpreters. They must be patient and culturally sensitive. For those locations, multilingual signs to direct people—polling station, wait here, show your ID—are important.

Security at voting stations must also be assured because, in the lived experiences of some new Canadians, expressing a political opinion publicly, even if voting is confidential, is an act that can be dangerous.

For mail-in ballots with prepaid postage, there must be a longer early voting period with an assurance that every vote postmarked by a predetermined date and time will be counted up to and including election day.

Before voting can even begin, however, there must be extensive public education about the structure of Canadian government and our parliamentary democracy. Educational resources should be multilingual and in plain language. Voters have the language skills needed to vote, but it can be specialized language of government structure that poses a potential barrier. The vital subject matter will be better understood in one's own mother tongue.

Furthermore, upon arrival in Canada, civic and voter education must be integrated into all orientation programs offered by newcomer-serving organizations. These should explore active citizenship, individual responsibility and the importance of participating in governance decision processes even before newcomers become eligible to vote.

Last, we must partner with ethnocultural community groups to promote inclusive governance and open government. These groups are invaluable communication channels for disseminating information and mobilizing participation. Include people early in the process through participatory budgeting and discourse about legisla-

tion. Increase representation at government committees at all levels of government. The more people participate in the governance decision-making process, the more they are likely to take part in the electoral process.

The Chair: Thank you. Does that wrap up your remarks?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: May I make three very quick points, please?

The Chair: Yes, if you can do so in 30 seconds.

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: Thank you.

I just want to point out that this is a matter of justice. It will cost the country to ensure that every measure is in place so that there is the right to free and democratic elections, but it cannot be compromised. This pandemic has created conditions that are ripe for the loss of our basic rights. I believe it is incumbent upon this House to restore them and at every cost to protect them. There should be no person in this land who has cast a vote whose vote is not counted.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Meegwetch. Merci. Dziękuję bardzo.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Ms. Brayannis.

Ms. Nicole Brayannis (National Deputy Chairperson, Canadian Federation of Students): Thank you, Chairperson, and thank you to this committee for inviting the Canadian Federation of Students to speak on this issue.

I want to start out by acknowledging the privilege that comes with addressing you today as I ask you to join in paying respects to the original caretakers of the land where I reside in so-called Pickering, Ontario, who are the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinabe, and the Mississaugas of the Credit peoples. I also want to share my solidarity with all indigenous land defenders, from east coast to west coast, who continue to fight these protective battles.

To share a bit of context, the Canadian Federation of Students is the oldest and largest student organization in Canada. We represent more than 530,000 students across the country. Our membership includes both domestic and international students at the college, undergraduate and graduate levels, including full-time and part-time students.

I want to emphasize how proud I am of the student voter turnout in the last two federal elections. The federation was a major part of making this happen, as we fought for the first on-campus polling stations back in 2015. We saw the benefits of on-campus polling through a 10% increase in youth voter turnout since 2011, and a 60% increase in votes cast at on-campus polling stations during the most recent election.

In consideration of young people as the largest voting population in Canada, we cannot afford for this pandemic to break down the hard-earned progress we've gained in youth voter engagement.

In this past year, students have suffered from being left behind without adequate pandemic supports. As classes shifted online and work became even more precarious, students experienced new and enhanced barriers and challenges to accessing post-secondary education. Therefore, in looking forward to elections, financial and accessibility barriers need to be prioritized in consideration of personal and community safety during in-person voting.

The first accessibility accommodation that needs to be addressed is extending the advance voting period to allow for safe in-person voting. This would give the potential for on-campus polling stations to still take place, while promoting social distancing measures.

The second accessibility accommodation that needs to be addressed is including the option for mail-in ballots. Recognizing that students are a diverse population with a variety accessibility needs, we need to be protecting those who cannot risk their health to appear at polling stations.

In line with these necessary accommodations, all changes to the typical voting process must be well communicated to voters. Here, I do want to give compliments to Elections Canada for their use of social media to engage voters during the last election.

Looking forward, this approach now needs to be taken even a step further to create a simplified and streamlined registration method for new and first-time voters. Due to financial and safety pressures, many eligible voters have had to relocate during the pandemic and may not be registered to vote at their new address, so this work should begin well in advance of voting days, and all messaging related to election processes must be consistent and transparent.

Additionally, recognizing that there will likely not be an opportunity for door knocking or leader visits and that fewer debates will be held, there needs to be a non-partisan virtual space that voters can go to in order to access party platforms for different campaign asks, such as COVID-19 recovery, housing, climate justice, health care, universal basic income and upholding treaty rights for indigenous peoples. Recognizing that many students do not have access to cable and/or limited access to the Internet, this needs to be a user-friendly cohesive website that young people can utilize to easily access this information and feel empowered to make a well-informed decision.

The final consideration I want to give focus to is protection of election staff. Polling station staff and volunteers are front-line workers and are critical to our democratic process. Therefore, it is integral that the health and safety of everyone in these roles is a top priority through ensuring necessary personal protective equipment

for all election personnel and voters, and that workers are fairly compensated.

Overall, this pandemic has already taken too much, and we appreciate being invited here today to engage in these important conversations. We've already seen how addressing barriers to youth participation in elections directly translates to representation of youth issues through our votes. It is critical that we keep this momentum going, because in a just social and economic recovery from COVID-19, youth representation and issue prioritization will be critical in rebuilding Canada.

The Canadian Federation of Students appreciates being a part of this consultation to address these needs, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thanks to all of you for your opening statements. We've learned a lot just through those.

We'll start with our formal question rounds. The first round will be for six minutes for each party.

We'll begin with Ms. Vecchio, please.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

I appreciate all the remarks that have been made today.

Mr. Blais, you applauded some of the things that had been done for long-term care homes when it comes to making sure they had the opportunity to vote.

Could you highlight some of the ones that you had noticed were very effective?

Prof. André Blais: I mentioned that I applaud the proposal by Elections Canada to make it much easier to accommodate different days of voting points at different places. I was expressing my support for one of the proposals made by Elections Canada.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Specifically with the long-term care homes, were there some highlights? We have not fully moved forward and we are looking through these plans. Were there some highlights? One of the concerns was about those in long-term care homes having the ability to vote. What are some of the things you saw that were extremely effective?

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I am being told by our staff that there is feedback on the phone line and weird background noises.

• (1125)

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we'll look into it, determine what the issue is with the phone lines, and try to resolve it.

The Chair: Mrs. Vecchio, please continue.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Blais, could you continue with your comments?

Prof. André Blais: I mentioned that in preparing my presentation, I looked at the proposals made by Elections Canada, and I am just reacting to those suggestions.

Understanding the possibility of being very flexible in how the voting would take place at these different places, my understanding is this could mean that in some places the vote could take place a week before, for instance. It would make it easier for the residents in that place. This is my only comment to make it more flexible.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Ms. Blumczynska, you were talking about permanent residents versus the people who became citizens and how this can disenfranchise people.

Do you have some data to support that, to show that new Canadians are disenfranchised because they did not have the opportunity to vote as permanent residents? Is there any information in your data to support that?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: Well, in terms of municipal and provincial movements toward—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Sorry. I want to look at federal data. I recognize the municipal rules, but I'm looking at the data for what they do federally. That's what I'm really interested in.

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: Do you want the number of permanent residents who currently reside in Canada who do not have the ability to vote?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: No. You mentioned disenfranchised Canadians, because as permanent residents they were not engaged, and therefore, the likelihood of them to continue to vote would be lower. Would you have any data to indicate what the voting levels are for new Canadians?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I do not have data related to new Canadians who are already citizens and are voting. I was referring to new Canadians who have permanent resident status and legally do not have the right to vote.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely, and I recognize that. You mentioned that the likelihood to vote, as Canadian citizens, was lower. Can we say this may happen?

I'm looking for data to support that new Canadians who have their citizenship are less likely to vote, because it does take a number of years to become a citizen, and it's three years after that. That's the data I'm looking for.

We know that in some ridings we have higher levels of immigration and lower levels of immigration. I'm looking for those numbers to verify that fact.

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I'm sure we could find those numbers. This was information brought to me by several ethnocultural communities. They specifically noted that the delay in obtaining citizenship, and the many years as permanent residents, removed them from the democratic process.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely, and I understand that variable because one of the biggest things about becoming a Canadian citizen is that right to vote. I see so many people choose that so they

have the full rights of all Canadian citizens. You're saying they should become permanent residents. I'm just looking for that data. Could you please show me, not specifically permanent residents, but information regarding new citizens of Canada and the likelihood of voting?

My time is very limited, so I will move on.

Nicole, you mentioned student voter turnout as being so much greater. That is wonderful. I know my children are all making sure that they vote and that their voices are heard. What did you find when it came to students? Western University is in the area I am from. Were they voting for the local candidate in that area, or were they sending home mail-in ballots and voting for the candidate in the residence where they usually reside? I'm looking for information on that, please.

Ms. Nicole Brayannis: I had the opportunity last year to work alongside the Elections Canada group at Ryerson. I was part of the part-time students union, the Continuing Education Students' Association of Ryerson.

Students were engaging with the advance polling stations because as it was advance, they were able to vote for their home riding but on campus. That really enhanced and empowered the ability of students to participate in the elections process. We found as well that students were really interested in the core issues that candidates were talking about.

I said that piece about having some type of non-partisan central platform that students could access to learn more about their candidates is really important, because often it falls back on student unions or different union groups to take on that work.

It's really great to have the reliability measure coming from the government and Elections Canada itself, as well, in presenting information in a non-partisan manner. When it comes to how folks were voting, yes, it does come back to the fact that on-campus polling stations are advance polls, so regardless of their riding, they are eligible and able to both register and cast their ballots at the polls there.

• (1130)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's amazing. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alghabra, please.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning and thank you very much to our witnesses for being here today and for their insight.

I want to ask all three of you a couple of questions.

Our role here at the committee is to finalize recommendations to government and to Elections Canada on the chance of an election during a pandemic. One of the things that all three of you refer to is the increased possibility of voters using mail-in ballots.

Are there any recommendations you may have for us to offer to Elections Canada in preparation for that potential increase in mail-in ballots? What should Elections Canada be aware of as we expect more people to use mail-in ballots?

Mr. Blais.

Prof. André Blais: I don't have expertise in mail-in ballots, so I don't have any clear recommendations for Elections Canada about how exactly this should be done. Clearly, there would be a lot more, and they would have to take special care in making sure there was no fraud, for instance, and so on, but I don't have any specific recommendations to make.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Ms. Blumczynska, from the voter's perspective that you're representing here today, what do you think Elections Canada should be prepared for?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I believe that Elections Canada needs to prepare multilingual resources that explain how to use the mail-in ballot in order for voters to know exactly what they need to do and by when they need to mail the ballot itself. The instructions need to be very clear and provided to ethnocultural communities in their first language.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Okay.

Ms. Brayiannis.

Ms. Nicole Brayiannis: I echo much of what Ms. Blumczynska just said.

It needs to be readily and openly communicated with folks well in advance of an election. I had given credit to Elections Canada for their social media strategy that was utilized during the previous federal election. This needs to be even more enhanced now, because even when that resource and material were available virtually, there was still a lot of confusion.

Questions were asked to both my student group on campus as well as the Elections Canada student group on campus, because the process is not always clear and concise. Particularly when it comes to registration to vote and changing addresses in advance of having those ballots mailed to folks, number one, that is critical. Number two is clearly and openly explaining that process and ensuring that folks are comfortable going into an election process and that it's not trying to be further explained. Although those resources should be available, it should be made clear in advance of those ballots going out.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Thanks, all of you.

The other thing that we're all witnessing an increased rise in is misinformation. I suspect that it's getting worse, particularly during the pandemic. Is there anything that you think Elections Canada can do to raise awareness about misinformation and to combat the spread of misinformation?

Again, I'll go back to you, Professor Blais.

Prof. André Blais: I'm really sorry. I don't have any clear solution for this. I'm really concerned about this as well, very much concerned. In fact, I'm involved in a study about social media misinformation about COVID.

I think it's a huge challenge, but having thought this through, I don't know exactly what else Elections Canada should or could do.

• (1135)

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Thank you.

Ms. Blumczynska.

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I think it was mentioned by another speaker previously, but I believe that a non-partisan platform that summarizes the various positions of the different parties, which could be under the care of Elections Canada or another body with authority to oversee it and ensure it is correct, could then become a single source of information. That way, community members across the country could be directed to that one single source of truth.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Yes. Honestly, I'm not worried just about how platforms are portrayed but also about the election process, such as how people can vote and where people should go to vote and all that stuff. Is there anything that you think Elections Canada can do other than to focus on spreading the correct information?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I think a great deal can be done through the ethnocultural community. I think there is a tremendously strong web of communities across the country who are interconnected, who are very invested in everyone having participation in the democratic process and who can be utilized in order to help direct community members to accurate sources of information. The more information that gets out to communities, the earlier it gets out and the more language accessible it is, including plain English and plain French translation, it will increase people's participation and their understanding.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I don't know if there's time for Ms. Brayiannis.

Ms. Brayiannis, do you have any thoughts on how Elections Canada can combat the rise of misinformation?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Nicole Brayiannis: I would just say that it's in disseminating information to different groups. We can then further disseminate that information to our members, and it's super helpful and super great in how we navigate conversations with folks. As well, then, if there are questions that come to us, we have clear and concise answers that we can provide on those measures, as well as having a space we can direct folks to if we do not have those answers.

Just making sure that process is very clear, concise and easy to follow I think is extremely helpful in ensuring folks are receiving the correct information.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Thanks, all of you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Therrien, go ahead.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Good morning to all three of you.

I have a feeling I'll have one hour of questions for each of you.

So let me start right away.

Mr. Blais, I find your idea of an express line with advance reservations to make voting faster really interesting.

Is this being done or has it already been done in other countries?

Prof. André Blais: No, it has not been done to my knowledge.

When I read the proposals from Elections Canada, I was trying to find ways to make it as easy as possible. That is actually the objective: it has to be easy and quick for as many people as possible.

You have to start thinking about all sorts of options and those are the ones that came to mind. I think they are probably feasible and should be considered.

We want everyone who wants to vote to be able to do so easily and safely.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I think it's really very interesting.

Since it is your idea, you will have the rights for it. That's very good.

I think it's really interesting. It remains to be seen how difficult it might be to manage. Perhaps we should talk to the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO).

Have you ever approached the CEO to see if it would be complicated to implement those measures?

Prof. André Blais: Honestly, I have just had these ideas for a few days when I found out I was going to appear before the committee. So I didn't have the opportunity to talk about it with other people.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay, duly noted, Mr. Blais.

I have one last question about long-term care. The CEO has been asked about it. All parties are concerned about the potential fraud because of remote voting and the fact that workers could have more influence on the vote.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on that in a few seconds.

Prof. André Blais: That is already being done. If I understood the proposal correctly, the intent is to have even more flexibility. I assumed that this meant that election day could be different. So it would be easier to have it on a Wednesday in a centre or a residence, for example. We would have the same safeguards that we have now. That's what I assumed, and I think it's quite legitimate.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you for the information.

Good morning, Ms. Blumczynska.

I am very pleased to hear what you have to say. You have pointed out some very interesting things about immigrants who come here and find that their vote doesn't always count. Their experience is not necessarily positive. I thought that was very interesting, but it contradicts what I have heard before.

I used to be a member of the Quebec National Assembly. It was noted that immigrants voted in greater numbers because they did not always have the opportunity to do so in their country of origin. They cherished the idea of being able to vote and they used that right extensively, which we thought was great.

Ms. Vecchio asked about turnout. It would have been interesting to see which of these two trends was more significant.

I dare say that if we had had longitudinal data on turnout in terms of whether immigrants vote at the first opportunity and whether their turnout improves over time would have been helpful.

I would like to hear your views on these two opposite movements and the turnout. Perhaps we should take a closer look.

• (1140)

[English]

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I agree with you that there is a profound desire to participate. Among some newcomer communities, immigrant and refugee communities, there certainly is high participation. I don't want to discount that.

I think we would need to look very carefully at disaggregated data, specifically data from countries where there has been an absence of democracy for decades and generations. The level of apathy in some of the communities is significant. I do believe that those are often the communities that have an intersectionality of disenfranchisement where we have to put a special concentration and focus to ensure that they do participate.

On the whole, I do believe that newcomers to Canada and new citizens are very eager to participate, but when we take the numbers apart and look at individualized ethnocultural communities, we will see that we can do a better job of engaging those who really felt very, very far from this act of freedom.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: That's very interesting. We could talk about it at length. Thank you very much for your comments, Ms. Blumczynska.

Ms. Brayannis, thank you for joining us.

You are saying that, because of financial and health problems, some voters have moved. Do you have any figures that show that this could have a significant impact on a future vote in the event of a pandemic?

[English]

Ms. Nicole Brayannis: The financial difficulties I was more directly speaking to were that throughout the pandemic, students have been experiencing hardships in terms of receiving less support than other Canadians have been receiving. It has only exacerbated the pressures they feel by attending education as well having to uphold a liveable status.

When it comes to elections, oftentimes where we see students being barred from being able to participate is by not being able to access election polls during the hours that are provided because of the requirements of school as well as working on top of that. We also see that sometimes students can't afford to travel to the polls. That was why on-campus polling stations were so great, particularly for students living in residences. It empowered them to be able to participate in the process without having to further incur those financial issues.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have for that round.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie, please.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you to all of our witnesses for appearing today.

Coming to you as well from Winnipeg, I just want to recognize the good work that IRCOM does here for new Canadians in Winnipeg. I'm very glad to hear testimony from you today.

I want to ask, Ms. Blumczynska, if you could give us a bit of an assessment. What I heard clearly from you when we talked specifically about some of the risks of disenfranchisement which the pandemic presents is that it's really important to be able to communicate with the people in the language they're most comfortable with. I'm wondering if you could give us a bit of an assessment of how Elections Canada did in that regard prior to the pandemic. How ready do you think they might be in order to do that well?

Then maybe let us know the extent to which you believe that settlement services organizations might be able to help Elections Canada. If it's a matter of Elections Canada not being able to do that in house, they could provide funding, for instance, for staff here or something within certain communities in order to be able to get those messages out.

• (1145)

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: Thank you.

I want to specifically point out the wonderful work that was done by "Got Citizenship? Go Vote!" a number of years ago in Winnipeg, which was organized by the Ethnocultural Council of Manitoba.

Voting instructions and encouragement to participate were recorded in YouTube videos in over 20 different languages and then disseminated throughout the communities. It simply explained the role of every person in voting, when and how they would vote and the importance of democratic participation.

I do believe that Elections Canada has very strong allies and capacity within the ethnocultural community to work in collaboration to disseminate that information in first languages to others.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Is that the kind of thing that in your opinion should be happening when the writ drops? Or is it something that you think Elections Canada ought to be starting on now so that people have an idea of how they vote, what the process is and also what some of the measures might be that are related to the pandemic, if we do indeed have an election during the pandemic?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I think that as much as possible we need to start as early as possible. I also want to point out that a lot of these platforms were made available online. I don't want to lose sight of the fact that what the pandemic has revealed to us is an enormous digital divide between communities that don't have the social economic means to have reliable Internet or devices and the digital literacy to participate.

Although online tools are very important and pass on oral information that otherwise would struggle to get to some communities, we can't lose sight of the fact that we need additional time in order to engage communities and get that information, sometimes on a person-by-person basis.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: One of the things we've heard in testimony over the course of this study from some is that, in their view, it would be important if there were an election called during the pandemic to have as long a writ period as possible. There's some flexibility within Canadian legislation.

Do you have an opinion in terms of whether a longer writ period or a shorter one would be salutary in terms of preventing or enabling people to get out the vote within the new Canadian communities?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I would agree with my learned friend Professor Blais that the longest period possible would be the best service to all Canadians.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

Ms. Brayannis, we've heard there may be less opportunity to vote on campus if we were to have a pandemic election. I know that you've spoken to some of the real challenges that students face in terms of costs for transportation to get elsewhere. We know that many students are engaged in remote learning.

Do you think there continues to be value in making on-campus voting services available? Could you speak a bit to that point, please?

Ms. Nicole Brayannis: Yes. Thank you.

On many campuses, although there have been transitions to on-line or remote learning, the residence centres are actually open for students who aren't able to access Internet in their home communities or who maybe are otherwise not able to access it outside of the area where they live. I think for those reasons specifically it would still be beneficial for on-campus polling stations, recognizing also that community members are able to access them too.

It's not only students who would benefit from this. If there are any workers on campus, they would be able to vote in those spaces, as well as the residence students. I do still see value in it, and I do still think that this should be an avenue that is pursued for advance polling stations.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Blais, I want to come back to your initial comment about the advisability of having an election during the pandemic.

One of the challenges here in Parliament is that our confidence convention is very loosely defined. Do you think it would be salutary for Parliament to do a little work in terms of getting more clarity on which kinds of votes in the House could trigger an election?

Prof. André Blais: I'm not sure that this could be easily done. I guess I'm just reminding all of you that there is a law which says that elections are fixed date. Of course it's possible to have a snap election despite that law, but there is the expectation, I think, that usually there should be an election only every four years, and citizens prefer to have elections only every four years.

I hope you take that into account when you decide how you will behave and what kinds of decisions you will make. This is for all the parties, I think.

• (1150)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Tochor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing today. It has been an eye-opener on what our country may look like potentially in the future.

Ms. Blumczynska, as are many on this panel, I was an immigrant as well. My family came from Hungary. I think you have some history that gives you a little insight on the makeup of other countries and how that might affect Canada. I applaud you for the work you are doing with, hopefully, increasing the number of new Canadians who vote.

I believe you come from Poland. I would like to hear a little of your back story, about why your family left Poland.

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: Very briefly, I arrived in Canada in October 1989 as a privately sponsored refugee. My family and I left Soviet-occupied Poland in about mid-1988 because of the civil unrest. We spent just over 14 months in a refugee camp in Germany before being resettled here.

In the seven and a half years that my mother lived in Canada before she passed away, she was only able to vote once in a federal election. In fact, it was the one and only time she had voted in a free democracy. For her, that democratic participation was the height of civic duty which she imparted to us, because that was the ability to exercise our voice and shape the future of our country.

Mr. Corey Tochor: It's interesting you bring up free democracies because there was voting in Poland in the 1980s. Did your parents share what that experience was like, that democracy?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: That was not exactly a free democracy and those were not exactly free elections. I think it had the facade of elections, but certainly at that point there was suppression of the media, suppression of civil rights and the ability to gather and to disseminate information that ran contrary to the government's narrative.

There was obviously a significant movement, Solidarnosc, which was fighting for a democratic and free Poland. It was not entirely viewed that one participated safely in an electoral process with the knowledge that whichever way one voted would remain confidential, so an act of voting was considered an act of defiance and civil disobedience.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Wow. You talked about the media being state controlled or paid for back then. The government would release the list of approved candidates or platforms, I suspect, and you got to pick which one it was. That's not a direction, I think, that is good for democracy at all.

Would you say the goals of communism were right back then, but the implementation was obviously wrong?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I'm not sure I can comment on the goals of communism, because I was born about six months before martial law was introduced. In my most formative years, I grew up in a country that was fraught with poverty, food stamps and insuffi-

cient freedom, so I don't know that I can speak well of communism from my own lived experience.

Mr. Corey Tochor: The variation that people talk about is like a democratic socialism that wasn't done right. Would you agree with that statement?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I would agree with that I think the role of government is to be centred on the best interests of the people, and especially the people who are left behind, so the 1% that certainly isn't at the top, but the 1% that is silenced and forgotten and neglected. I think everything built in government, that structure has to serve those who are the most kept from power and from privilege and from voice.

In the country in which I grew up there was, again, the appearance of solidarity among communities, but there certainly wasn't equality and there certainly wasn't the ability to author one's own life or have self-determination.

• (1155)

Mr. Corey Tochor: Yes. It's stories we hear like that, of being very fearful of drifting back to a time when government controlled everything, and democracy is out of there.

I'll switch gears and quickly turn to Professor Blais on the role of government and responsible government.

You talked about having elections during a pandemic and how that's a bad idea. Does that go against your view of responsible government? Is that where those thoughts come from, and what is your view on responsible government?

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're over time, and we only have one more questioner. Maybe you can get the answer in somehow.

Mr. Gerretsen, you're next.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Unfortunately, I won't have enough time to do that.

I want to ask each of you a question, so I'm going to have to ask you to be as brief as possible.

Mr. Blais, you indicated there's an expectation that a government will last four years. I agree that parties in minority parliaments should be able to work together, but when you say there's an expectation, who's expecting it?

Prof. André Blais: I should specify that the expectation is in the law. When you have an election, basically, there is a norm there. That's all.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's in the law. That's what I wanted to clarify.

Ms. Blumczynska, you indicated that you believe there should be the longest writ period possible, but I actually interpret your comments to mean there should be the longest voting period possible. Is that correct?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: Both the writ and the voting process are critical. All timelines need to be extended to increase participation.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Going back to the exchanges you had with Ms. Vecchio and Mr. Therrien, you talked about permanent residents voting. I realize this is outside the scope of what we're studying right now, because we're talking about an election during a pandemic. I must admit that I was also concerned that....

Many immigrants who have come to my community relish the democratic process and want to be part of it and are probably more active than a lot of people I know who have been in Canada for generations.

Ms. Vecchio asked for data. Was your comment an anecdotal observation or is there actual data out there to support that?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: I just looked it up. I would need more time to find the research, but there is data with respect to past elections and participation by place of birth, yes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I would really love to see that.

I do admit I'm very reluctant, because I think that becoming a Canadian citizen comes with certain rights, and the right to vote is one of those. Based on my observations, both my parents immigrated from Holland and Italy back in the 1950s, and they were very eager to make sure that everybody became a Canadian citizen as quickly as possible so that they could participate in the democratic process.

Do you think that might diminish the desire to become a citizen, if you were to give permanent residents the right to vote?

Ms. Dorota Blumczynska: No. I think people obtain citizenship for a number of reasons and also do not obtain citizenship for a number of reasons. There are many jurisdictions globally that do not allow someone to have dual citizenship. It is at the cost of their identity that they would give up one in order to have the other. Sometimes people simply choose that they cannot do it, in which case they live in Canada for decades and are not able to participate.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I hope we study this in some other capacity in order to explore this more thoroughly with you, because I'd really like to understand that better.

Finally, Ms. Brayannis, I want to ask you about the voter turnout among students. In 2015, it was up. I think it was about 57%, and then it dropped down in 2019. It went from 57% to just under 54%.

Do you have any sense as to why more people in that age group of 18 to 24 voted in 2015 versus in 2019?

• (1200)

Ms. Nicole Brayannis: I don't have exact reasons, but I can provide speculations as to why.

In speaking with students during the last election, there was a great deal of frustration in terms of interactions with the candidates who were present. Students felt a disconnect between what they were talking about and what candidates were actually putting forward. There was that element. There was a lack of investment in the causes that were being talked about.

During the last election, climate justice wasn't even deemed to be a topic of conversation that could be broached within the election, because it was deemed to be political, rather than being addressed as an actual issue.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Do you have any suggestions on what could be done by Elections Canada to improve that, and to continue to get an upward trend on that number?

Ms. Nicole Brayannis: I would suggest that having a central place where students can go to access this information would be a huge benefit and a huge step forward. Students are really busy, honestly. I know that sounds like an easy excuse, but when it comes to parties putting forward these 100-page documents about what they want to do within their terms, that's not accessible.

There need to be simple language and simple ways to interact with the election so that students feel empowered and feel that by contributing, their voice will matter. I think that hasn't been there in the last couple of years.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

I think that's all my time, Madam Chair. I do have more, if you want.

The Chair: Actually, that's all the time we have for all the witnesses.

I'd like to thank you so much for your participation today. It was really great testimony we were able to get out of your opening statements and the lines of questions.

Mr. Clerk, I do think we have all the other witnesses in the room now.

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair. I'm just letting them in now.

I'll do a quick sound check for the one witness who wasn't here earlier, and then you'll be able to get under way.

Madam Chair, we tested the other two witnesses earlier, so, you're ready to go with the second panel.

The Chair: Okay, thank you so much.

Thank you, witnesses, for waiting patiently. So that we have a smooth meeting, I should state right at the outset that we have interpretation services available at the bottom of your screen. Please pick the language you intend on speaking in. If you have an updated version of Zoom, I'm told there should be no issues in picking "floor", but if you lack the proper updates, then it's best to select the language you intend to speak in. We'll do the best we can if you need to end up switching back and forth. It is your right, of course, to speak in both official languages, so be mindful of that.

All the questions should be addressed through the chair. Each organization will have five minutes for opening statements.

From People First of Canada, we have two witnesses here today. We have Mr. Earle, the president, and we have the executive director, Ms. Fletcher. From Canada Without Poverty, representing that wonderful organization, we have Ms. Renaud, the national coordinator.

Thank you to all of you for being present for our study on conducting a federal election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Earle, are you the one who is going to make official remarks today?

• (1205)

Mr. Kory Earle (President, People First of Canada): Thank you, Chair.

It will be Shelley and I going back and forth in our five minutes.

The Chair: Okay, perfect. You'll be sharing the slot.

Thank you. You can go ahead.

Mr. Kory Earle: Good afternoon, Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you so much for inviting us here today to speak on behalf of People First of Canada. My name is Kory Earle, and I am the president. I am joined here today by Shelley Fletcher, who is our executive director.

People First of Canada is the national voice for people labelled with an intellectual disability. People First is unique because we are the only non-profit organization to have a board made up completely of people labelled with an intellectual disability. Our board includes people from across Canada, representing provincial and territorial chapter organizations, all working for inclusion and accessibility in their communities.

People First of Canada is founded on the belief that people who have life experiences with an intellectual or developmental disability are the best people to represent themselves and other people with intellectual disabilities. Our membership closely follows the idea of "nothing about us without us".

Currently, Shelley and I sit on Elections Canada's AGDI committee, the Advisory Group for Disability Issues.

We appreciate the opportunity to be part of the national conversation and share our feedback and recommendations with the committee.

People First of Canada has also worked with Elections Canada on the ground during the past two federal elections. We have been contracted to raise awareness and inform people living with an intellectual disability on where, when and the ways to register and vote. People First members put together 22 events in eight provinces and two territories. Our work is meant to reduce the barriers to voting faced by Canadians with an intellectual disability. We are happy to note that we have succeeded.

I will now pass it over to Shelley.

Ms. Shelley Fletcher (Executive Director, People First of Canada): Thank you, Kory.

We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic could affect how the federal election is conducted. The special report by Canada's Chief

Electoral Officer highlighted three main challenges as the provision of accessible, safe and secure voting services, the availability of election workers and the availability of poll locations.

We acknowledge that these would be challenges for everyone, but we know that they will have an increased impact on the people we are here advocating for today. Voting can be a challenge for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities even without a pandemic. It's important to consider their barriers to voting.

In considering the special report, People First of Canada strongly agrees with the statement, "Elections Canada is of the opinion that a variety of voting options continues to be the preferred path." Having a variety of voting options is important to people who have issues with accessibility and transportation. We strongly support having as many accessible polling locations as possible.

Accessibility is one of the biggest priorities for our members, both accessibility around physical space as well as having a variety of accessible voting tools. We shouldn't sacrifice the number of polling locations across this country or the level of accessibility at polls. While we very much support the suggestion of having two days of polling, along with an increase to 16-hour days, one concern that may arise is the issue of transportation, particularly in rural communities. We would recommend consideration be given to moving the voting days from Saturday and Sunday to Friday and Saturday. Given the transportation issues faced in rural communities, we know they are even more limited on weekends. Having one weekday and one weekend might help with that concern.

Also, many Canadians view Sunday as a day of worship, so by moving to a Friday and Saturday vote day it would take the criticism off Elections Canada and the federal government.

Along with longer polling days, we support moving to shorter shifts, two eight-hour shifts. Our membership has specifically said that one of the reasons they don't apply to jobs with Elections Canada is the length of the shift. This would help address the anticipated challenges of finding available election workers.

Finally, the special report states that facility administrators will be reluctant to allow election workers to operate a poll in the lobby or common area, so election workers would go bed to bed.

We recommend that Elections Canada use more temporary, pop-up voting locations. This has been done on university campuses, so why not increase this to include long-term care facilities, day programs for people with disabilities and institutions? This could include using movable or temporary structures such as PODS, which could be placed outside different locations. They could be easily sanitized. They could be easily moved from one location to another giving vulnerable people an increased opportunity to vote.

• (1210)

Mr. Kory Earle: Thank you, Shelley.

We appreciate the opportunity to share with you our recommendations today on conducting a federal election in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have come here today to advocate for those who have great barriers to voting, but who also have the right to contribute to the election process in a safe and accessible way. We hope that our comments will be helpful to the committee, so that Canada can support a federal election that is accessible and safe for all citizens.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

That is exactly our intention in inviting you here today. It is to make sure that we have a broad scope of perspectives to make sure that everyone is included.

Next, we have Ms. Renaud, please.

Ms. Emily Renaud (National Coordinator, Canada Without Poverty): Thank you, Chair, Vice-Chairs, Clerk and members of the committee for inviting me to speak today on behalf of Canada Without Poverty.

For 50 years CWP has represented the interests of people living in poverty and has been led by people who have personally experienced poverty. Our work is guided by our lived experience. CWP operates on the belief that poverty is a violation of human rights. We seek to eradicate poverty through education and to promote meaningful public policy action on poverty-related issues.

People in Canada living in poverty have faced devastating hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, women, racialized and immigrant communities, indigenous peoples, persons living with disabilities, young adults, seniors and folks living with intersectional identities have suffered the greatest impacts to their health, employment, housing and overall well-being. These communities in the past have also faced barriers exercising our most fundamental right as citizens: the right to vote.

CWP recently launched our poverty pandemic watch project and released a report identifying the various areas that pandemic relief policies have failed to address, including loss of income or reduced income, limited housing and emergency shelters, and food insecurity during the pandemic. Our findings detail the profound hardships that diverse communities in poverty are experiencing during this pandemic. These unique stressors can prevent people from feeling empowered in voting in an upcoming election.

We have several recommendations to safeguard and enhance voting participation for voters in poverty.

First, maximize the capacity to process and receive mail-in ballots in order to make voting accessible to those with shift work, living in remote communities, or needing to practice extra precaution because they, or someone in their household, are at greater risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms.

Extend early voting periods to accommodate those who are self-employed or are in shift work and may be not able to vote during the official voting days.

Moving the voting day to two eight-hour periods on Saturday and Sunday is a good step, but we feel it ignores precarious part-time shift workers who are more likely to work on weekends and are less likely to feel confident in confronting their employees to leave work early or for a long period to go vote. Further, it can be a barrier to single parents with school-aged children. We recommend extending official voting days to eight-hour windows on Saturday, Sunday and Monday—importantly, including a weekday in the voting days.

As our other witnesses have noted, translating information about party platforms and candidates to languages other than English and French will be essential, as will distributing these materials to communities where English and French are not the first language of the local population.

Similarly, translate all voting instructions into more languages and ensure that public health guideline signs at polling stations are translated based on local language demographics.

Allow incarcerated voters to request information about their local MPs and party platforms in order to overcome the barriers they face in accessing localized news media while incarcerated.

Finally, ensure that shelters, food banks and service centres can act as polling stations as long as they can meet those health guidelines for physical distancing. This will encourage voting in extremely marginalized and impoverished communities.

Of all our recommendations, CWP would like to stress the importance of mail-in ballots in ensuring that voters in poverty can vote, as they do not require voters to miss work, travel to polling stations, and risk COVID-19 transmission. Anti-poverty advocates across Canada have expressed that mail-in ballots will be key to engaging people in poverty to vote, both during the pandemic and in future elections.

Making voting processes, instructions and information as accessible as possible is necessary for encouraging and empowering marginalized and disadvantaged people to participate in our democracy. It is vital that they exercise their right to elect leaders who they feel will represent and fulfill their needs as marginalized citizens.

I thank you again for your invitation today. I welcome any questions from the committee.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you. That was excellent.

We'll start our six-minute round with Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

Thanks, everybody, for coming today to provide some additional insight.

I'll start off with Canada Without Poverty.

I was fortunate enough to work in a constituency office for a number of years prior to becoming a member of Parliament. A lot of times when I was dealing with government services, one of the biggest challenges people had was getting proper identification.

What methods do you have to help people get the identification they need? I know you look at expired health cards or loss of birth certificates, and I know many churches have assisted with some of those additional costs. What is your protocol to make sure people have appropriate ID so that they can even go to the hospital and get served?

Ms. Emilly Renaud: Canada Without Poverty hasn't done extensive research into these issues. However, we witnessed a lot of people with lived experience, noting that they have had issues accessing identification. This has been particularly stressful in accessing pandemic relief programs.

I think just being able to increase awareness about how to access government IDs that allow them to vote.... Perhaps mail reminders out to communities in poverty, with detailed instructions in languages that are accessible and relevant to those populations to outline the instructions on how to attain these IDs, and doing this as ahead of time as possible. Sometimes it can take six weeks to two months to produce these IDs and deliver them to people.

Further, as you mentioned, let these communities in poverty now access these IDs at cost since renewing identification can be costly. Even if it's only \$40, sometimes this is a big chunk of someone's monthly income.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely, for sure.

I remember one time having to get seven passports just so my children had some photo ID. I remember that bill was pretty hefty. I'm a very fortunate person, so I can only imagine the difficulty for some in getting ID or putting food on the table.

Continuing with Canada Without Poverty, with the shelter system, do you know if there's any framework there to try to help get those types of things, like identification, as one of the priorities?

Ms. Emilly Renaud: I know shelter workers can be there to assist people in retrieving their identification if it's been lost and

they've never renewed their identification. We have amazing social workers in our shelters who do assist with shelter users in this process.

Further, it's great that shelters can be the primary residence where a lot of shelter users can register to vote. I believe there are already these great processes and systems in place that are helping to reach those extremely marginalized people who are homeless, women and gender non-conforming people who are fleeing situations of violence.

We also have to note that a lot of homeless people don't use shelters for various reasons, because they use drugs or feel unsafe, especially during times of the pandemic, when shelters have had to reduce capacity. A lot of shelters have fewer beds. Emergency winter shelters have fewer beds. Also, a lot of people are couch surfing and living in tent encampments.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely. Everything you're saying makes sense. A lot of times you look at what people need for identification to be able to vote. I think of the bigger picture. What do people need when they go to the hospital? What do they need when they do different things like register for school or for benefits?

It's not just about one time every four years needing identification. It's about needing identification 365 days a year, all of the time. I think that needs to be easier. Rather than change rules on what we do, we need to make sure people are able to get proper identification.

Thank you very much for talking about that.

I'll go now to Shelley or Kory, whoever chooses to answer this question. I greatly appreciate your both coming and sharing your information.

When it comes to ballots, I know we've had lots of discussion on what ballots should look like. People have talked about photographs, Braille and a variety of things we may need. What are some of the things you think we can do to enhance the ballot so that it makes it easier for those to vote who may have a little bit of a disability?

● (1220)

Mr. Kory Earle: Thank you so much for the question.

Across this country, 42% of Canadians have literacy problems. We've really been advocating to have photos of the candidates on the ballots, so that people who are marginalized and new Canadians can identify them. This would make a huge difference for them when they go to the polling station.

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Just to add to that, through the work that we've been doing on the AGDI committee, this has been number one on our agenda since we joined Elections Canada, and we talk about it every opportunity that we have. We are very clear on the implications of changing the voting ballot to include photos. We are determined to keep advocating for that.

As Kory said, the illiteracy rates in Canada are ridiculously high. This is not just about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities; this is about a whole bunch of other Canadians who don't read or who don't have good literacy skills. As I'm looking around the screen and I'm making notes about who's on here, I'm having to reread some of your names three or four times to print them down, and I'm thinking, "How do you say that?" We know that names can be very confusing.

The other thing I wanted to say is that Quebec did this; it's been done in Quebec. They did have photos on ballots. We know it can be done. We know that we need MP support to do it. That's one of the things that Elections Canada has said to us, that we need to start talking to MPs about it, because there have been conversations with some MPs and they're very opposed to it for a lot of reasons.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fletcher. That's all the time we have.

Mr. Turnbull, go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks to everybody for being here today. It's really incredible work that your organizations do, and I want to applaud all of the efforts you make to support Canadians. I've heard about your organizations for many years and the great work you do, so I have a lot of admiration for you and the work you do.

I have questions, as always, and I'll start with People First of Canada and Mr. Earle.

In terms of the variety of voting options, generally we look at physical polling locations, and then we've been talking a lot about mail-in ballots. Are there any other voting options that you would like to see this committee consider?

Mr. Kory Earle: We really want to make sure that voting is in group homes, institutions and long-term care homes to be able to have people have that opportunity to vote. As Shelley mentioned earlier, sometimes the challenge in different areas is transportation to get to the voting stations, so if it's more accessible to them, I think that's really huge. Shelley may want to add more on that. Long-term care, group homes and institutions, some of them don't have that as is, so it would provide that opportunity.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks.

Ms. Fletcher, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: We've given some thought to the possibilities around telephone voting, where people would call in and have to answer specific security questions that Elections Canada would have. We've had some conversations around that, and I think there are lots of barriers that might be in place for people, particularly with literacy issues. They would have to know who the candidates are who are running in their area, whereas sometimes, if people

have an actual physical ballot in front of them, they will recognize the name.

I don't really think I have anything else concrete to add to that.

Thank you.

• (1225)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks.

Ms. Renaud, what about you? Are there any other options other than mail-in ballots and physical polling locations that you would like us to consider?

Ms. Emilly Renaud: I know Elections Canada has done research in exploring online voting, but we're unfortunately not quite ready to make it secure and accessible.

I think what I've gathered from my engagement with anti-poverty organizations across Canada is that mail-in voting is something that we see as breaking a lot of barriers to voting. Also, in addition to having an official election day, we could expand the window for advance voting for people who know ahead of time that they won't be able to vote on election day. Maybe they haven't gotten around to requesting a mail-in ballot but know they can access an advance polling day. Sometimes these are short, 48-hour windows, but if possible, if we could expand them, that would also be a great help.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for that. That's great.

Maybe I can dive a little deeper on the mail-in ballot process. We've heard from some other stakeholders that it could be streamlined or improved in terms of user friendliness, and the usability of it can be challenging at times, I think for multiple reasons.

Mr. Earle and Ms. Fletcher, would you agree with that? Do you have any specific recommendations on streamlining the process of mail-in ballots? I know you spoke to pictures on ballots, but is there anything else that you could recommend?

Mr. Kory Earle: I want to be perfectly clear, when I went into the elections to vote, one of the biggest struggles that I had was to know the candidate who was running, because I had to write it in. I actually put the name in slightly wrong and was really concerned that it was disqualified.

I want to caution that when we do mail-in ballots, there should be some kind of thing about who is running—not necessarily pictures, as much as we like them, but something that is easy for voters. I can tell you right now that, as a voter, I was almost turned off voting because I got really nervous that I might have messed up. Having a list of those candidates is extremely important.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

Ms. Fletcher, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: To add to what Kory said, when Kory went to do the pre-vote, he had to write in the name of the person running. It's important for you to remember that a very large part of the people we are representing today do not have access to technology. It's not as easy as jumping on a computer and seeing who is running in one's riding. That's not a reality for them.

I agree with what Kory is saying. I don't necessarily see it as the job of Elections Canada or of the MPs to make sure everybody in a riding knows who is running, but I would reinforce what Kory is saying that it's really important on the mail-in vote that people know who is running in their riding.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

Ms. Renaud, do you have anything to add to streamlining the mail-in process? It sounds like that is the option that is going to remove the most barriers for the people that your two organizations represent.

Can you make any recommendations on how to improve that?

Ms. Emily Renaud: From what I understand, as it stands currently, people have to request to cast their ballot by mail. I'm not too sure what the logistics around this are. I'm sure there are a lot of administrative deliverables that I'm not taking into consideration as I'm not working with Elections Canada. Similar to automatic voter registration, perhaps everyone would automatically be eligible to vote by mail. If they choose to cast their ballots by mail, they can do so or they could just destroy that ballot and decide to vote in person. I think that could be an option. I understand there would be some logistical issues around that.

I see Ruby with her hand up.

The Chair: Thank you for that point.

We have to go to Mr. Therrien for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to start with Mr. Earle and Ms. Fletcher.

I'm very pleased to hear from you. Welcome to the committee.

The first thing I must say to you is: well done and congratulations for the work that you do. My second daughter has an intellectual disability, so from your comments, I fully understand that you are standing up for my daughter. I am very grateful to you for that.

Approximately how many people do you represent in Canada?

• (1230)

[*English*]

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Kory, do you want me to answer that one?

Mr. Kory Earle: Yes.

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Our membership fluctuates. We are currently in every province and territory with the exception of Nunavut. Our Nunavut chapter in Rankin Inlet has closed. We hope that is temporary. We represent between 3,000 and 4,000 Canadians with intellectual disabilities who are members of our organization.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay.

As you know, these people's health is often more fragile, so I imagine that the pandemic is worrisome for you.

Do you know their usual turnout, and what the prognosis is in a pandemic like this? I think it will be very problematic to get these people to vote during a health crisis like this.

Could you comment on that?

[*English*]

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: That's a really good question. I don't have a statistic on how many people with intellectual disabilities across Canada are voting, but that's certainly something that we could look into.

We are very concerned about people with compromised health. You are correct that many people who have intellectual disabilities often have other health issues as well.

One of the things Kory was talking about in our opening remarks was around supporting people to access their fundamental right to vote. A pandemic is very challenging and we're hopeful that they are creative with different ways to come into people's homes, into group homes and into congregate settings where people live and have something in place to allow people to exercise their right to vote.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: So you're proposing to have two 16-hour voting days. The idea of having them on Friday and Saturday is very interesting, and Ms. Renaud also mentioned it. I think it's a very good idea to set one voting day on a weekday and another on a weekend.

I used to be an MNA in Quebec City and we had made arrangements to have pictures of the candidates. It's funny to hear you say that maybe the members prevented it. We were quite happy to help people vote with pictures of the candidates. I had even demanded, in 1998—I am very old—to have pictures of the candidates in the polling stations so that people could recognize us.

I find it astonishing that this is still not being done at the federal level. I think we should push for that. I'm not sure whether you agree.

[*English*]

Mr. Kory Earle: Absolutely. I think photos on ballots are extremely important. We have met with some MPs to discuss this. As Shelley mentioned earlier, the whole thing about pictures really threw some of them off that option.

Nevertheless, we are going to continue to advocate for this, because we believe it is the right thing to do. If we truly want a Canada where every Canadian votes, then we need to make it accessible. The people who are really marginalized are those with an intellectual disability and developmental disability. They are at the lowest rate below poverty than any others, and are facing this struggle today.

We'll continue to advocate for that with all MPs to get party support. Quite frankly, the majority of Canadians would support that. It's not just for people with intellectual disabilities. New Canadians would also benefit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Rest assured that you have an ally. You can be sure that I am entirely on your side.

Once again, congratulations for the work that you are doing. I am very pleased to talk to you.

I will now turn to Ms. Renaud.

Your suggestion to extend the advance voting periods is very interesting.

That said, you would like to have three eight-hour days instead of two longer days. Did I understand you correctly?

• (1235)

[*English*]

Ms. Emily Renaud: Initially, just from talking with people, we thought why not extend the weekend voting period to three days, to include a weekday?

That being said, when Shelley mentioned having a voting day, Friday and Saturday, that was actually an excellent point, especially in bringing up the fact that Sunday is a day of worship for many people. Having two eight-hour periods, one on Friday and one on Saturday, would also work in extending voting accessibility and reducing barriers. Originally, we said three days, but Shelley's suggestion is also quite good.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have.

We will go to Mr. Blaikie for six minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: One of the things we heard in our previous panel is that the best way to mitigate the potential challenges to voting in an election during a pandemic would be for parliamentarians to work together to collaborate in order to avoid an election.

Do our witnesses share the view of the witness in our previous panel who expressed that point of view, or do they disagree?

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Mr. Blaikie, could I ask you to rephrase that question in plain language, so that we could better answer you?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: We all recognize that having an election during a pandemic poses a lot of challenges to many different Canadians in order to be able to vote. We've heard from some witnesses that the best thing to do would be to have people like me and the MPs at this table find a way to work together as a Parliament, so that we don't have an election, because the fixed election date in Canada doesn't foresee an election until 2023.

We heard from a witness that we could avoid some of these problems if parliamentarians could find a way to work together, and extend the Parliament past the pandemic, provided that it doesn't go on for many years.

Would you agree or disagree with that recommendation?

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Thank you for clarifying that.

Kory, do you want to comment on that?

Mr. Kory Earle: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

We're in the midst of a pandemic right now. We're in the midst of a COVID crisis in this country. The last place that people want to head to right now is the polls. For people with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities, we must get the election process right—and we're not there yet—to make sure that people are ready during a pandemic.

I work out of long-term care. People are dying right now, and the last thing that's on people's minds right now is an election. As an organization, we have a job to work with all members regardless of what side they're on to push for the inclusion of all Canadians. We'll continue to do that whether there's an election today or next year.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Earle.

Ms. Renaud, would you like to comment on that as well?

Ms. Emily Renaud: Yes, thank you.

Absolutely, building off what Kory said, I think a lot of people just do not want to have to put an election on their plate while they're dealing with so many other things. I think even more important than the process of election is that people right now are dependent on these federal and provincial funding initiatives such as EI and, in a lot of small businesses, the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

The last thing you want is a lot of people in Canada worried that these benefits are going to change all of a sudden, as they've all changed dramatically and frequently in the past seven months. A lot of people worry that these benefits could potentially cease with the transition to a new government, so I agree that avoiding an election as much as possible is something that I think the majority of Canadians in poverty and people in poverty are going to support.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

One of the mechanisms for voting that has been discussed by some of the witnesses we've heard from has been voting by phone as a way to try to make voting more accessible to people. We've heard that was done in the B.C. election.

I'm wondering if each of you could speak a little to the impacts that voting by phone might have—both pros and cons—for the people you're representing at the committee today.

• (1240)

Mr. Kory Earle: I think the pros are that it would encourage some people who do have a phone to vote and have that as an option. I think having more options available to Canadians will only increase the voting in this country.

On the flip side, we have to remember that there are so many people in poverty right now who cannot afford technology, cannot afford a phone, and who are struggling. They're using the food banks right now because they can't.... Having a phone is a luxury for some people. That would be the negative side, that so many don't have that ability to connect. Those who do would obviously be welcome to, and I know we talked briefly about that earlier as an option.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

Ms. Renaud.

Ms. Emily Renaud: I think Kory brought up an excellent point about people in poverty not always having access to phones, and by voting by phone I assume you mean a call in and not a text in. I just wanted to clarify.

To be quite honest, I did not know that this was something that happened in the B.C. election, and I would be curious about the lessons they learned and how effective this was. I definitely think that, for those who are remote and who do have a landline or a secure phone, I can only see this being a positive option to the various ways to vote.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

Ms. Renaud, I know even in normal times there are a lot of barriers to voting for people who live in poverty, particularly when it comes to Canada's homeless population. In the pandemic context, what are some specific things that Elections Canada ought to be thinking about right now in order to use the shelter network as a way of encouraging people to vote safely? What kinds of things and support might that shelter network and other actors who are engaging Canada's homeless population need from Elections Canada in order to minimize the barriers to voting?

The Chair: Unfortunately, that's all the time we have. We're on a tight time schedule today, so I'm sorry I can't be more lenient like usual.

Next we have Mr. Tochor, please.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Thank you, witnesses, for being here today and, more importantly, for the work you do representing the different groups.

Mr. Earle, with regard to intellectual disabilities, is there a country that has better programs in general for voting by people with intellectual disabilities? Are there countries that are best in class or best examples, countries that have better services for people with intellectual disabilities?

Mr. Kory Earle: I'm going to ask Shelley if she can take this one.

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Thank you for asking that question.

People First of Canada is part of an organization called Inclusion International. We do work with many countries across the world.

I'm proud to say, believe it or not, that Canada is one of the leaders in this area for people with intellectual disabilities. There are many, many countries across the world in which people with intellectual disabilities are not allowed to vote. Even in some of the countries that are quite progressive, capacity is questioned and people are not given the right to vote.

Canada is viewed as one of the leaders in the area of intellectual disability and the right to vote.

Mr. Corey Tochor: I do believe we live in the best country in the world, so it warms me a little bit that, at least in this regard, maybe other countries can take our lead.

The pandemic has affected many different things. For your organization, has funding by the federal government decreased or increased during this pandemic, either hurting or helping your ability to represent your association?

Mr. Kory Earle: Shelley, do you want me to respond? No, go ahead.

• (1245)

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Our funding has not changed. In fact, we've actually had a small increase in funding to do a very specific project around COVID and people with intellectual disabilities. We've done work on providing plain language. A lot of the news coming out about COVID is not written...or the resources...or what does PPE mean.... We've done a lot of work over the last eight months on translating resources into plain language so all people can understand them, and we have been given a little bit of money to do that.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Thank you very much.

Ms. Renaud, I applaud your work and your association in helping people in tougher situations. It's obvious that COVID-19 has probably caused more people to seek the services and unfortunately to be in poverty.

Following an election, would it be fair to say that one of the most beneficial aspects that a government or a future government could consider would be providing the right climate for economic growth so that more individuals would have the dignity of work and the inherent virtue of work availability?

Ms. Emily Renaud: If I understand correctly, you're speaking more broadly to future government actions to reduce economic inequality and social inequality to empower everyone to live in dignity, to live at a dignified level so that people are not just getting the bare necessities but are living comfortably. To that I say, absolutely.

I think the way we phrase it is that it is not just economic growth but also things like our social security system and our welfare system. Right now they're all offering income payments that are below the poverty line, so it would be the federal government working with the provinces to better support those provinces to provide dignified income supports and to provide things like housing. I think these are all greater systemic issues that will allow people to live not so precariously and not so desperately just to meet the bare necessities.

Once those are met, and once people can live in dignity, they can better engage in democratic processes and can better engage in things like voting, because they will feel as though they have the time and energy to give to the voting processes, which takes a lot of time to reflect and think critically about.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: That's all the time you have. Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Chair, I believe Ms. Duncan is going to take my time.

The Chair: Dr. Duncan, go ahead, please.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Earle, Ms. Fletcher and Ms. Renaud, I would like to say thank you for the work you do. Thank you for your important testimony today.

Mr. Earle, thank you for the work you do in long-term care. It's not an easy time right now, and we appreciate your work.

I like what you wrote before. You said that you want to especially encourage people with intellectual disabilities to vote, as it is their right, and they should use it. What would help your members to vote?

Mr. Kory Earle: It's so great to see you, Ms. Duncan. We've crossed paths over the years. You've been a huge champion of pushing the agenda forward, so thank you.

We have to recognize that in order for people to vote, we need to make sure all tools are accessible. We'll continue to push for photos on ballots. We'll continue to make sure that this is an avenue that our members have strongly been supportive of.

We also want to encourage that many take the opportunity to work during an election as well. Give them that opportunity and experience because it's extremely important when you hear so many saying, "Have you applied for a job?" We know so many people who are below the poverty line who would really benefit even from the experience of that.

We talked a bit about phone voting. That certainly would help. On that, I'm curious about how B.C. handled that and what members took from that. Mail-in ballots are extremely important, but also make sure that everyone works together to make sure that the people have that information so they know who to vote for and who the candidates are. Although writing is valid and all of that, it's very challenging for a lot of our members. That's why a lot of us have our support workers who will do that.

The other thing is that when people have support workers who at this point can only help one person in the group homes and institutions, it's really important that these workers be able to help more than one person. So many across this country who are in isolation don't actually have families or have that support connection. That would help the homeless, etc., having that support aspect.

● (1250)

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Earle, it's so good to see you too. I'm very delighted to see you today, and thank you for that.

Mr. Earle and Ms. Fletcher, I know People First of Canada has had Zoom meetings with their members across the country. I'm wondering if you would like to tell us about what people's experiences are right now during COVID-19.

Mr. Kory Earle: Absolutely. We just held an event not too long ago called Conversations with Kory. I can't begin to tell you the struggles people are going through.

One at the top of mind right now is the mental health crisis in this country. People are isolated. People are lonely. Just think about all of us at the end of the day. All of us get to go home. So many don't. Many are struggling because they're alone and have no one next to them. Many have shared their tears that they just want this whole pandemic to be over. Many have said that they're worried about the holidays even being worse for them. Many have shared how their mental health crisis has not only increased but it's really made them think what there is to life when there's nothing to do any more.

These are stories of everyday Canadians. People face such difficulty. They don't have that ability. They are lonely and so many of them are isolated today. Just think about some people who are in group homes, etc., who already feel that way as is, but now they cannot hang out with the people they wish to hang out with.

When people across the country shared their experiences, we could only say that we felt hopeless, because that's what we felt. We felt hopeless because we wanted to help each and every person to have the best quality of life. Before the pandemic, people's lives were hanging in the balance. During the pandemic, they still hang in the balance and the struggles that they go through have only become a lot more severe.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Earle, thank you. They're lucky to have you and the fact that you listen. We appreciate that.

Ms. Fletcher, do you want to add to Mr. Earle's words, please?

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Sure. I'll be quick as I know that the time is running out.

We've been doing a project with CAMH, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and People First of Canada are running a class right now. It's a six-week session for people with intellectual disabilities around their mental health, on how to recognize it, what to do about it, what it feels like, the words to use if they need to go into a hospital. We're doing a ton a great work in that area right now.

The other thing is, as Kory said, this pandemic for our folks has just been so life altering for them. People who live in care are not able to see their families. People who barely make—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Shelley Fletcher: Are we out of time?

The Chair: Yes, we are. Thank you.

Monsieur Therrien, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Renaud, you talked about incarcerated voters who were having difficulty getting information from political parties on election platforms. We have heard it a number of times, and I find it a little odd.

My colleagues will say the same thing, but in the Bloc Québécois, when someone asks us for information on our platform, we provide it quickly, and in different forms to make our message accessible. If you ask my colleagues, I am sure they will say the same thing about their respective parties.

Have you approached the political parties to increase the dissemination of information through media that allow them to really grasp the information quickly so that they can subsequently make a more informed choice?

• (1255)

[*English*]

Ms. Emily Renaud: I don't have a lot of expertise in terms of incarcerated voters, but from what I've researched, they're having trouble accessing specifically information about their ridings and the MPs in their ridings. They usually are able to watch national news, like CBC's *The National*. These are available in common areas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay.

[*English*]

Ms. Emily Renaud: They might have an idea of these greater party platforms, but they're having trouble accessing local news media and local MP agendas. I think it's dangerous to assume that everyone understands that you're not just voting for the Liberal Party and you're not just voting for Justin Trudeau. You're voting for your local MP.

It's that whole electoral process, where you're increasing awareness of this for people in prison and incarcerated people and low-

income people. You're increasing the information and understanding of how that election process works. You're voting for an MP, and maybe your MP who isn't running for a party that you would prefer is a better candidate for what you need in your area. That's what I was speaking to. It's being able to understand election processes and getting that very localized information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: It's very clear now. We have to find a way to inform people.

I will ask Mr. Earle and Ms. Fletcher about temporary, pop-up voting locations.

Can you tell me what you would like to see in that respect?

[*English*]

Mr. Kory Earle: As we indicated, we'd like pop-up stations in long-term care homes, group homes and institutions, just as they have at universities.

The Chair: Thank you. That's excellent.

I gave you some leeway, Mr. Therrien, because I know translation takes a little extra time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Ms. Renaud, I was asking a question earlier about what Elections Canada might do to better mobilize the shelter network to support Canada's homeless in the event of a pandemic election. I'm wondering if we might be able to pick up where we left off.

Ms. Emily Renaud: As I think I spoke briefly to earlier, shelters have had to reduce capacity. You actually are seeing fewer shelter users and fewer people who are homeless who are able to access resources and have daily interactions with social workers in shelters. I think using shelter workers and using these networks to also reach out to homelessness advocates, who are very grassroots, who work in encampments, who help fundraise to provide basic necessities for encampment residents...and using them to give them information that is accessible, offered in different languages, offered in indigenous languages, letting them disperse to those people who are living on the streets.

A lot of homeless people are actually feeling safer on the streets than in shelters from the spread of COVID. I think it will be a bigger challenge during a pandemic to reach homeless people because of this reduced capacity in shelters. I think it will take a lot of communicating and organizing and taking advantage of these amazing advocates who might not be official shelter workers but are there on the ground and are very willing to help empower homeless people in Canada as much as possible.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Do you think where there are large encampments it might make sense to try to have a polling station?

Ms. Emily Renaud: Yes. In winter in many of our colder provinces these encampments tend to dwindle down. People try to couch surf in the winter. They use emergency winter shelters. I think you'll see fewer great encampments like we did over the summer. That being said, especially in Vancouver and in climates that are a bit warmer, by having a polling station right next to encampments, for people who are struggling, who panhandle and struggle to feed themselves, it would be about making it as easy for them as possible. If it took maybe 10 minutes out of their day for them to go and vote, I think that would be crucial in encouraging our homeless populations to vote.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have for formal questions.

Once again, I'd like to thank both of the organizations and all of the witnesses. You've done a wonderful job and I hope that we will be able to appropriately reflect your comments and feedback in our recommendations in the report.

• (1300)

Mr. Kory Earle: Thank you.

The Chair: You're free to log off at this point. I want to cover a couple of things with the regular committee members before we end today's meeting.

Members, I want to inform you about a couple of things.

In our last meeting, there was a desire to go in camera to take a look at some issues with MP security risks and have some of the witnesses back in order to do so. The clerk has checked into availability for times. I heard through the whips that there might be Monday evening slots available to committees. They're on a first-come, first-served basis. We looked into that and those slots are all taken until January 25, so January 25 would be the next Monday evening time slot we would have available. We have put our name in to hold that spot for now, if we end up having to take that long to meet on that issue.

There is a second option I want to present to the committee. The second option would be to meet after the House rises. There is some capacity for us to meet the week after. That would be the week of December 14. December 15 would be the actual date, in our regular time slot, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. It would be the Tuesday after the House rises.

It's up to you guys. Those are the two options. We have the evening of Monday, January 25, which would be after the House resumes again, or we have during the winter break or constituency time on December 15.

Do you have a preference?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Perhaps Alain Therrien can assist with this as he's working with the Quebec House leadership. There has been no agreement after December 11 to allow committees or the House to sit in hybrid format. The ability to continue to meet is something that I know is extremely important to many of the opposition members. I think this is exactly the case, as we're seeing right now, that

there's lots of work to be done. There has not been an actual formalization or anything coming from the government on the plans after December 11, so perhaps you could work on that for us as well, Ruby.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'd be a miracle worker, then.

Thank you for informing me about that, Ms. Vecchio. We were just looking at it in terms of the IT resources. I hadn't realized—and you are very correct—that I'll probably look into that a little bit further as to whether there is some agreement that can come about on that.

We'll just hold the time slot for January 25 for now, and then I'll update you in one of our next meetings as to what's happening with the security risk meeting.

I want to remind you that at Tuesday's meeting—the next meeting we have for this committee—we're going to be considering the interim draft report. Andre, if you want to give any feedback to the committee members, now is a good time. I think he's going to get us the draft report before the weekend starts—sometime tomorrow, hopefully, so you have the weekend to look over it.

I'm getting a thumbs up, so that's correct. You should be receiving that tomorrow, so you have the weekend and Monday to mull it over.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Madam Chair, excuse me for interrupting. I assume that interim draft report would be sent to our P9 accounts. Is that correct?

The Chair: Do you receive other emails and notices through your P9 account?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I can confirm that P9 accounts for all the members would be included in that distribution, along with other identified staff members.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you.

The Chair: Perfect. Usually, the only time there's an exception to that is if you've requested another email to be used, so your P9 is not flooded. You should receive that tomorrow.

As you're going through the draft report over the weekend, please bring your suggested recommendations to the meeting on Tuesday. In order for Andre to insert them into the report, the deadline for recommendations is later on that day, Tuesday, December 1, at 5 p.m. You will have the opportunity during committee time that day to talk about the recommendations, and then a few hours after the committee meeting to make the submissions to Andre.

That will be a good way of doing it, so we have the benefit of talking to each other about them, and seeing where people are on it.

We have a meeting scheduled for December 10 with witnesses for the study on prorogation. That's going to be for 90 minutes. It's a three-hour meeting. The first 90 minutes will be the continuation of our study. Hopefully, we'll have the chief medical officers of Quebec and Ontario. The other 90 minutes of that meeting will be for the prorogation study.

Some parties have submitted a witness list. I would hope that all parties would submit their choice of witnesses as soon as possible. We're talking about having a constitutional expert, or an academic in that portion. We would only have enough space for four people on that panel, so I'm looking for one recommendation each.

As for that whole study, if you could start submitting recommendations for witnesses for the prorogation study, as well, so the clerk will have enough time to slot it in over the winter break, and start

talking to witnesses, so we can be prepared when we come back. It gives him some flexibility to go back and forth with different organizations and people.

The suggestion would be that by December 11, which is the last sitting day of the House, we have the complete list of witnesses from all parties for that whole study, or as complete as you can make it, so we can start planning.

I need the one witness for now, and then by December 11, the rest of the witnesses for the prorogation issue.

Does anyone have any questions? No.

I'll see you on Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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