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Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):
Good morning, everyone.

[*English*]

Good morning, everybody.

Welcome to meeting number 130 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

I just have a quick reminder for witnesses and others. When your headset is not in use, please make sure that it is placed on the sticker in front of you in order to protect the well-being of our interpreters, who are working so hard on our behalf.

[*Translation*]

Today we are meeting for our study of Bill C-65, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

Our witnesses this morning are from the Privy Council Office. We have Allen Sutherland, assistant secretary to the cabinet, and Rachel Pereira, director, democratic institutions.

[*English*]

We will have five minutes total for our witnesses and their introduction, and then, as per usual, we will head into our line of questioning.

With that, witnesses, I turn the floor over to you for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Allen Sutherland (Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Machinery of Government, Privy Council Office): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I'm joined by Rachel Pereira, director of the democratic institutions secretariat at the Privy Council Office.

We are here to discuss the proposed amendments to the Canada Elections Act in Bill C-65 and to answer your questions.

Before I begin, I would like to note that Hon. Dominic LeBlanc will be appearing before this committee on November 7 to discuss Bill C-65, as well as his mandate in general.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, as you may know, Canada has built a robust and resilient electoral system through the Canada Elections Act. Much of

its success is a direct result of Parliament's tradition of applying lessons learned and responding to evolving issues to continually improve the act.

The Elections Act is a key part of the Canadian advantage in keeping elections secure, accessible and democratic.

Bill C-65 draws on key learnings and recommendations from the 2019 and 2021 elections, including from the Chief Electoral Officer and the commissioner of Canada elections.

In 2021, Minister LeBlanc was asked to consider these recommendations to further support electoral participation and transparency, and to respond to emerging threats to Canada's democratic institutions. The government also committed in 2022 to remove barriers to voting and to expand opportunities for people to vote.

The resulting bill, Bill C-65, the electoral participation act, targets three key areas with measures designed to encourage greater participation in our elections, enhance the protection of personal information and safeguard the electoral process.

I will start with the amendments to encourage participation in the electoral process. These measures aim to reduce barriers for electors and provide electors with greater choice and flexibility over how and when they vote.

Key proposals include adding two additional days of advance voting; improving the process to vote by special ballot, known commonly as vote by mail; making the vote on campus program permanent; offering dedicated, on-site voting for electors in long-term care; giving voters who require assistance, such as persons with disabilities, greater choice in terms of who may assist them when voting; taking steps toward enabling electors to vote at any polling station in their riding; and assessing the measures needed to move to an expanded election day that might include three days of voting.

With respect to the proposed amendments to enhance protections for personal information, as you know, as a condition of registration, every federal political party must provide a policy on the protection of personal information.

To further ensure Canadians' personal information is protected, the mandatory privacy policies of all eligible and registered federal political parties and those acting on their behalf would need to include a suite of new requirements, including a dedicated privacy officer; physical, organizational and technological security safeguards; new disclosure requirements in the event of a breach; and enforcement measures under the administrative monetary penalties regime of the CEA.

The final area of focus relates to proposals that would further enhance safeguards to the electoral system. These include ensuring that key protections against foreign interference are not limited to the election period; banning intentionally false or misleading statements about election activities or the voting process to disrupt an election or its results; prohibiting contributions through money orders, prepaid gifts, gift cards and crypto assets, whose source can be unknown or difficult to trace; and finally, introducing new third party contribution rules to increase transparency and prevent dark or foreign funds from entering the system.

Mr. Chair, that is an overview of some of the key amendments proposed through Bill C-65.

Regular reviews of and incremental improvements to the Canada Elections Act help improve our already robust system and help us to keep pace with the realities facing Canadian electors.

We look forward to the discussion.

● (1105)

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

Colleagues, we'll enter into our first round of questioning.

Mr. Duncan, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here this morning.

One thing that was not mentioned in the opening statement when it comes to Bill C-65—I think a lot of Canadians are focused on one specific section, which really shows the cynicism that the Liberals and NDP have rightfully earned from Canadians—is the attempt to change, through this legislation, the date of the election.

I want to go back and talk, though, about how yesterday the NDP leader came out and gave unconditional confidence in the Liberals, and here we are 24 hours later talking about advancing what we call the NDP-Liberal pension protection act.

One thing that I had some concerns about several months ago was when there were several CTV articles that said that former NDP MP Daniel Blaikie, who was in the NDP caucus at the time, and Minister Dominic LeBlanc, had been working together in conjunction with bringing forward this legislation.

The first question is, could either of you confirm how many NDP MPs or staff were briefed and provided information before the bill was tabled?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I cannot.

Mr. Eric Duncan: At PCO, was there no record of any conversations or information by NDP MPs or staff?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I believe your question was about the number of meetings Minister Leblanc had with Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I mean meetings with anybody in the government—PCO, PMO or anybody—that the NDP had access to in advance of the legislation being tabled.

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Mr. Chair, I don't think it'll be a surprise for you to understand I'm not in a position to.... I don't have control of Mr. Blaikie's timetable. I couldn't give you an assessment of the number of meetings that took place.

Mr. Eric Duncan: My point about briefings is that it was very clear in the *ctv.ca* article from January, where he had said he'd been working very closely with the government. He said there had been "a fair amount of work done". The article says the two parties had "quietly been in talks to table electoral reform legislation before the next federal vote."

My point is that coordination clearly happened beforehand.

I want to get specifically to the consultations you did in advance. You talked about all the feedback you received, and best practices.

Whose idea was it to back the election up by a week, from October 20 to October 27?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: That's a proposal in the amended bill.

What it speaks to is really the difficulty in today's multicultural society. You have a lot of cultural and religious observances that take place during the fall. It was found that October 20, which was the fixed-date election—which is still the fixed date, because this bill hasn't passed—occurs at the same time as Diwali, the festival of lights, which I believe is also occurring right now.

The question became how to find another date that better suited and didn't have that sort of conflict.

What you try to do in these situations is choose the date that is closest to the date. You don't want to go too late into the season and get into December and heavy weather. You don't want to go too early, because that would break into the summer.

● (1110)

Mr. Eric Duncan: It was moved from October 20, as proposed, to October 27.

Mr. Allen Sutherland: That's correct.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Do you track when provinces and territories are scheduled to have their own elections?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Yes, that's one of the things that comes into...and it's a very good point you raise, sir, that municipal elections, provincial elections and territorial elections are all things that need to be considered.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I appreciate your saying it's a good point, because we had to move away from October 20 for the reasons mentioned, but go to October 27. On October 27, there's a territorial election scheduled in Nunavut, which would impact tens of thousands of electors directly, because they would have an election day on the same day. I don't really think Canadians buy the argument that it had to be moved solely for that reason.

Just coincidentally, what would happen if the election date was backed up a week is that several NDP and Liberal MPs who are likely to lose their seats in the next election would be guaranteed their pensions, because, as opposed to missing it by a day, they go over by six days by doing so.

Do you not think there's some cynicism there, though, when you say that you did it for Diwali, but when there's a territorial election taking place in Nunavut on the same day, which was known? Is that really the true reason?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: To get back to the sorts of considerations that were made, one is just whether or not it would be a continuous fall election. You wouldn't want a break with summer holidays through Labour Day, so some of the days in September were not very good.

If we moved forward a week to October 13, that would conflict with Thanksgiving, which I think most people would agree would not be a good choice, so the decision was made to make it October 27.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I think the considerations weren't anything more than trying to save their pensions, to let the class of 2019, the group of Liberal and NDP MPs who are panicking, secure their pensions. It failed miserably, because many Canadians were outraged by this blatant attempt at what it was.

In the PMO and PCO, you track correspondence that comes in from Canadians to your office, to the Prime Minister's Office and PCO. Is that correct?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I don't personally, but yes, it is tracked.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Would you be able to provide us the volume of correspondence that came in? I'd be very curious to know.

As a member of Parliament, I know that my inbox was quite full of anger and frustration from Canadians about this blatant move for securing pensions. I'd be curious to know the volume of correspondence and the feedback, push-back, opposition and anger. Would you provide us those numbers on how many pieces of correspondence have been received by the Prime Minister's Office since Bill C-65 was introduced?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: We will endeavour to do so.

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

Ms. Romanado, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and, through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I want to pick up on that last point from my colleague Mr. Duncan and to clarify, for those who are listening, his claim that the reason this was brought forward was to move the election date to allow more Liberal and NDP MPs who were elected in 2019 to receive a pension. Actually, there are 32 Conservatives who were elected in 2019 who would benefit from this, including the member opposite. It actually would benefit the Conservatives more than it would benefit the NDP and the Liberals, but I digress.

I want to talk a bit about your mention of reducing barriers for participation. This is what this bill is about. I know that after every election and during an election period, I hear often from seniors who have mobility issues: "Is there a way for me to have someone to come to where I am to come and assist me to vote?" It's not something that we have in our long-term care facilities.

Can you elaborate a little on how this would assist those who are in long-term care to participate in their democratic right?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Certainly. In fact, I'll pass the floor to Rachel to answer this.

Mrs. Rachel Pereira (Director, Democratic Institutions, Privy Council Office): Thank you for the question.

Bill C-65 does a few things for residents in long-term care. One of them is the removal of an obstacle for many residents in care who don't have their proof of residence with them. This requirement will be removed for residents in long-term care. This proof often resides with their families at home, and they don't receive bills at long-term care residences. That will help to facilitate. They do need ID, of course.

There will be polling stations set up in LTC homes. Elections Canada estimates that up to 7,000 electors will be served by these polling stations. They will be set up for each facility for the days and times that work for them over a 12-hour period. That might be for one day, for 12 hours, that best suits an LTC. It might be over two days of six hours each. Elections Canada will have a lot of flexibility to serve those electors.

To your first point about moving from room to room, there's an existing measure under the act: the use of mobile polls. In LTC facilities, those polls also will be available in certain facilities, so that they can move from room to room to help electors and residents in those homes to vote.

• (1115)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much.

With an aging population, we anticipate that we're going to have more and more folks who will be needing assistance in terms of voting. Can you agree that this would be an accurate statement?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Yes, we can.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: One of the other areas we were talking about is the vote on campus program. Previous to my election, I worked in higher education at McGill University and at a local CEGEP. To engage young people to vote, I was on the electoral reform committee. I can talk about that for days, but one of the things we heard is that when people vote at a very young age, they're more likely to continue to vote.

How will this help to assist those who are studying in university and maybe are not in their hometowns to exercise their right to vote and to continue to do that along their journey while they're in school? Can you elaborate a bit on that?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Yes, and I agree with the premise of your question. One of the things we talk about in the democratic institutions secretariat is that developing the habit of voting builds on itself.

It speaks to earlier changes to the electoral act, where we have a registry of young people about to turn 18. This vote on campus feature and putting it in concrete in legislation is a very promising part of the current proposed bill. In 2019, when we at Elections Canada last had the vote on campus feature, some 110,000 young people voted in some 120 or so institutions. I think we can build on that.

Just speaking to your original sentiment, people need to acquire the habit. There's no point in having a democracy unless you have people who exercise their democratic rights. This is a way of building it in and making it easier for young people to vote and to build those good habits.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: On the additional days for voting, we know that not everyone takes advantage of advance polling and so on, and some folks, for whatever reason, wait for election day. Whether it be because of bad weather, traffic, professional obligations, travel or so on and so forth, not everyone has the ability to do their electoral duty on election day.

How will this help others have the flexibility to increase their participation in our democratic institutions?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I think you said it very well. It just provides greater flexibility to folks. The proof of the pudding's in the eating.

In the last election, 34% of Canadians exercised their franchise in advance polls. That's been rising at a very high rate. We could see a future, with these two more advance polls, in which up to a majority of Canadians exercise their franchise earlier. That's a very important part of trying to get the participation rate up.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

[Translation]

Welcome to the committee, Mrs. Gill. You have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for having me. I also want to thank Mr. Sutherland and Ms. Pereira for their testimony.

Mr. Sutherland, one of the ideas underlying the reform of the Act in Bill C-65 is to increase accessibility. You cited a number of measures at the beginning of the meeting. Do you think that someone who might not be able to vote on a particular day would be able to exercise their right to vote at another time? This may seem pretty basic, but it's a straightforward question.

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Thank you for the question.

[English]

There are a variety of ways in which Elections Canada continues to work to make voting more accessible. Additional advance polling days are one of them. Making the polls themselves accessible is another. A third is improving the vote-by-mail system, which allows Canadians to exercise their franchise in a different way. These are all....

I'm sorry.

• (1120)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I didn't mean to cut you off. I was just going to agree that there are three ways for us to exercise our right to vote.

The Bloc Québécois has questions about the proposed date, and I will come back to that later. However, I think we could agree that no one would be adversely affected and that everyone could vote, regardless of the date of a general election, could we not?

Furthermore, if someone wanted to celebrate Diwali, with all these other options, including advance polling, the measure would not be necessary for them to exercise their right to vote. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I understand what you're saying, and I appreciate what you're saying. I would hesitate to tell a Canadian they can't vote on election day—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Okay.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: —but they can vote five days earlier. I don't know what their—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: It's a mathematical possibility.

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Mathematical, yes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Okay.

I could raise two other points about Diwali. The reason is that the Bloc Québécois advocates state secularism, the separation between religion and politics.

I think this will be more of a comment than a question. If that is the reason we are moving the election date, it confirms our sense that it shouldn't be moved. I've heard it from other members as well, but we obviously have questions about the fundamental reason for the date change. Are there other reasons, perhaps hidden ones that we are in the dark about?

Do you see any other arguments to justify the change? I ask because it seems that the Diwali argument is no longer valid. What other arguments could be made to change the date if, mathematically speaking—and I very clearly understood what you said—we didn't have to change it? Am I missing something?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I think it's a question of making sure Canadians can exercise their franchise on the election date. The signal it sends to at least some part of the Canadian family is that the election date occurs during a time when they're in religious observance.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Your answer tells me that there is no other reason, because people can already exercise their right to vote. Thank you.

Do I have a little time left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute and 35 seconds.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I would like to come back to another topic that was also discussed.

In Quebec, there will be municipal elections next year. I want to come back to the issue of accessibility and being able to exercise our right to vote. We have even discussed cynicism about politics, which we would like to counter. In this case, the general election would coincide with municipal elections, which could cause confusion or fatigue among voters. There are a lot of theories to be made about that.

Is that something you took into consideration when you came up with these dates? Based on the objectives of the bill, do you think that could undermine the desired result?

[English]

Mrs. Rachel Pereira: Thank you for the question.

Speaking to the issue of religious and cultural conflicts, I would note that the act currently accounts for conflicts with religious and cultural days of significance, and that the election date could be—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I was actually talking about municipal elections in Quebec, whose date is going to conflict with that of the federal election. My question made no reference to religion.

• (1125)

[English]

Mrs. Rachel Pereira: I apologize. That was on the previous question.

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I understand.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: No problem.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: This is why a variety of factors went into the consideration. What parliamentarians have before them is October 27 as the date.

However, you're right that municipal, provincial and territorial elections, as Mr. Duncan pointed out, are also things that need to be considered.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: That brings me to another question.

The Chair: Unfortunately, you're out of time, Mrs. Gill.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I'll come back to it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Barron, welcome to PROC. You have six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): To the witnesses, I'm happy to be here on this important topic.

Mr. Chair, I want to say that, first of all, it's always interesting to me to see the ways in which the Conservative Party show their disappointment that they're unable to deliver for Canadians in so many ways. Here is yet another example of Conservatives trying to kill a bill that is moving us in the right direction.

Are there problems with it? Absolutely, there are. The NDP is able to put forward ways the Liberals can see full participation in elections, so Canadians have more faith in our electoral processes. That is exactly what we've done. Now, with the Liberals... We can't control what is done from there or the actual delivery of it. There are pieces in here that I agree are problematic. I've made it quite clear in the House of Commons that the piece around the election date being changed from the existing one is a problem. The result is that members of Parliament would be receiving a pension and benefits they would not have received otherwise. We know people are struggling across Canada to make ends meet. It is not the time for members of Parliament to be looking at their own pensions. This is why I was very clear in the House of Commons about ensuring we get commitment from all members of Parliament to see this removed.

Can I get a clarification, Mr. Sutherland?

Instead of looking at killing this entire bill, the NDP has put forward an amendment to have this specific section of the bill removed, so that the election date would continue to be as originally planned. Therefore, the pensions of members of Parliament would not be impacted.

If that were to be removed, would there be any benefit, unintended or not, to those pensions? Can you answer that question?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I'm not an expert in MP pensions.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Do you anticipate that, if it were to be removed, the problem would be solved?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Yes, I guess so, but only from what I've heard in some of the debate today.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

There is a solution. My understanding is that the majority of the people around this table—except for those in the Conservative Party, who want to see it killed—are in agreement. Again, there are solutions to see this work move forward.

Mr. Sutherland, there are so many important pieces in here that are of benefit to Canadians. One particular piece is around people who need support to cast their ballot.

My question is this: Although it's moving in the right direction to expand on support people being there, we know people much prefer to cast their own ballot with supports in place—to do it on their own. I'm wondering if you are aware of any movement or work happening to, for example, have Braille as an option for people who are appearing to vote.

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I'm not aware of any.

That is the sort of thing that might be considered as part of Elections Canada's ability to pilot different ideas. There have been examples in which, in the interest of accessibility, things have been piloted.

That might be a good question, perhaps, for the Chief Electoral Officer.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Yes. Hopefully, we'll be able to ask those questions soon.

Can you tell us a little more about making voting easier in long-term care facilities? You touched on that. We know there have been many barriers for people in these homes, who have contributed to our communities for generations, and they have not been able to vote.

Can you speak a bit more about the importance of that?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Yes, we can.

Rachel, why don't you take that?

Mrs. Rachel Pereira: Yes.

That was one of the lessons learned from the pandemic election—seeking ways to facilitate voting for electors in long-term care. As I mentioned earlier, the requirement for approving their address will be removed, so they will only require identification for themselves. Regular polling stations will be set up in long-term care homes, and we'll be able to suit those according to the best

days and times that work for those electors and care homes. There will be mobile polls within an institution, whereby Elections Canada officials can move from room to room in order to help those electors vote. That is also in place.

• (1130)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much.

I want to get my last question in, because I don't have much time left.

With everything happening in the United States—their election is coming up soon—I think this particular new component is very important: the implementation of new protections against people knowingly making false or misleading statements related to an election or the voting process.

Can you share a little more about what that looks like and how we can make sure those protections are in place here in Canada?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: There are a couple of steps to these protections. One thing to note is that Elections Canada, as an institution, is much different from what we see in the United States, where you have the electoral process divided pretty much by region. It's not even at the state level. It's at the subregional level. That creates many of the problems you see. Canada starts with an enormous advantage by having a single elections administrator.

On top of that, we have the commissioner of Canada elections, who is empowered to look into issues.

Then, through the Chief Electoral Officer, we have created good relationships, so that when issues arise.... Let's say it's something like, “We look forward to everyone voting on Tuesday,” and that's misleading people. He already has well-established relationships with the social media companies and can get that disinformation addressed in a thoughtful way.

Now, specific to the act, I'll turn to Rachel.

The Chair: Go very quickly, please, Mrs. Pereira.

Mrs. Rachel Pereira: You're correct. There is a new prohibition in the act to help safeguard against this. It would prohibit false statements regarding voting and the voting process. In the act, there are seven areas that provide that guidance, so the commissioner can determine whether they are false or not. It's not limited to the election period.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Ms. Barron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, over to you for five minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Sutherland and Ms. Pereira.

I want to come back to what my colleague said earlier about the January 27, 2024, CTV article that said that Trudeau's and Singh's teams are quietly planning electoral reform and legislative change. Were you or anyone in the PMO involved in any of the conversations between the NDP and the Liberals?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: As part of the SACA considerations, I attended, I believe, two meetings of that kind.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: As a professional and senior public servant, Mr. Sutherland, did you not find it odd that discussions on reforming the Elections Act involved only two political parties to the exclusion of the others?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: It's important to understand what my role was in those meetings. It was simply to provide background information and technical information.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Can you commit to providing the committee with the information you provided to the other two political parties? To maintain Canadians' trust in the system, I think it's important that all political parties be given the same information that has been provided to the Liberal Party and the NDP.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: My understanding is that the briefing was primarily oral. I will take a look at whether I had any materials. If that's the case, I will provide them.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Were those discussions used to establish a basis or draft of the bill that is before us today?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: No. In terms of my role, we had been working with the minister, developing a proposal. We attended a meeting at which the substance of that proposal was discussed. At no time did I provide a draft to the opposition—

• (1135)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: However, you still submitted legislative proposals, including the date change and assistance at the polls, following the discussions between two political parties.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Once again, Mr. Chair, my role was to provide information and a response. It wasn't to initiate.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Can you provide the committee with the dates of those meetings, Mr. Sutherland, as well as the names of the people who attended them?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I can't offhand, but I can look in my—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Can you commit to providing us with that information?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I can try, yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I'm looking for the dates of the meetings and who attended them.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

I would like to come back to a statement made by my Liberal colleague, Sherry Romanado, who spoke earlier about the people who would benefit from a pension if the election date were postponed by a week, as proposed in the bill. The Conservative members affected voted against the bill because they are sure they will win their ridings. They don't need a legislative change to continue their mandate. I just wanted to clarify that, because I think it's quite important.

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

The Chair: You have 70 seconds.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Sutherland, clause 40 of the bill states that someone can show up at the office of the returning officer and specify the name of the party they wish to vote for, even if no candidate has been nominated for that party. I'm very concerned about that.

What will happen to these ballots if, on the one hand, no candidate runs for the specified party or, on the other, the selected candidate chooses not to run? If all the ballots are in a ballot box, how are you going to know how to remove those votes in the absence of a candidate in the riding?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Is the situation you've laid out one in which someone marks a ballot with the party's name, and that party doesn't choose to run a candidate?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Or a candidate just decided not to—

Mr. Allen Sutherland: They withdraw.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: How are you going to find that ballot in the ballot box?

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I think it would simply not be counted. The vote wouldn't be counted, because there is no candidate there.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: If a candidate changes, that's fine, since it's the party that counts. People will vote for a candidate thinking that they were the one running, but, along the way, a new candidate may run.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Right.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: However, the vote will still count.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Mr. Chair, in what is a rare circumstance—it does happen from time to time that a candidate withdraws and another candidate comes forward to represent that same party—if you had marked your ballot with the party's name, the candidate who officially represents that party would be the vote that would be counted.

That's what I would assume, unless you....

Mrs. Rachel Pereira: Yes, the way that electors vote is not changing. The vote, if the name of the political party is written on the special ballot, is deemed a vote for the candidate in that riding. If there were no candidate in that riding, that ballot would be spoiled, and it would not count. There has to be a candidate endorsed in that riding for the ballot to count.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

[English]

Mr. Duguid, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony.

Thank you for all your efforts to make our elections fairer and more accessible.

I'd like to talk, Mr. Chair, about the issue of disinformation and voter suppression, which has profound implications for our democracy. We know now what happened in Brexit and also in the 2016 and 2020 American elections. We see massive amounts of disinformation in the American election as we speak, with evidence of the involvement of foreign actors.

Mr. Chair, we've seen it right here at home with the Conservative Party, which clearly has been involved in voter suppression. I refer to the unfair elections act that the leader of the official opposition brought in himself. I would point to some of the provisions in that bill that really prevented access, particularly in the northern communities, which have limited ID options. The Conservative Party was fined \$1 million for breaking election law, Mr. Chair. Of course, there was the very famous robocall scandal, for which I believe a Conservative operative went to jail. I know I had personal experience with that in the 2000 election, Mr. Chair, when seniors were being phoned at 11 o'clock at night on behalf of my campaign, supposedly. I think all will agree that's totally unacceptable.

My question is this: What kinds of penalties and what kinds of measures are going to deter these kinds of activities in the future? They are obviously very serious threats to our democracy.

• (1140)

Mr. Allen Sutherland: When we talk about issues of electoral interference, of course, the Elections Act provides a solid base upon which we work. You spoke of previous incidents through time, which I think speaks to the layering of what is a good piece of legislation, and it continues to improve.

In your current context, what happens is part of a broader set of supports and protections that the Government of Canada has put in. You will have seen in the foreign interference inquiry the testimony of different officials who they talked about the different sorts of protections that exist. When it comes to the Elections Act, however, there have been supports that have been enhanced for the commissioner of Canada elections. In particular, on her supports, we engaged with her and asked what she needed in order to do her job more effectively. The proposed legislation reflects the things that she identified in order to enhance her role, including the use of AMPing powers.

Rachel, do you have some other things?

Mrs. Rachel Pereira: Yes. The commissioner has an administrative monetary penalty regime whereby she can issue potentially a warning letter to those who contravene the act or who potentially enter into compliance agreements with individuals who contravene the act, or she can issue an administrative monetary penalty where warranted following an investigation. No changes are being made to that particular regime, but there are more provisions under the act that will fall under the AMPs regime.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Sutherland, does this bill help hold party leaders accountable for taking foreign interference seriously?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: To the extent that everyone needs to follow the law, it certainly does that. However, there's nothing specific that I know of in the bill that directly implicates party leaders.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Would you agree that party leaders should treat the matter with the seriousness it deserves?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Yes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Does that include getting a top secret security clearance in order to be able to review the intelligence that would enable them to better protect their MPs and their parties?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Mr. Chair, I don't feel I can speak competently to that.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: You don't think they should get security clearance, sir.

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I feel very strongly that this is an issue I am not able to speak competently about.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duguid and Mr. Turnbull.

[Translation]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sutherland, you said you worked with the minister on proposals. I would like you to quickly remind us of the essential pillars underlying the bill.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: There are three main pillars to the bill. The first speaks to accessibility. The second speaks to privacy protections for Canadians. The third speaks to countering foreign interference.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Sutherland.

I was talking earlier about the issue of municipal elections taking place at the same time next year.

I'm a bit surprised because, in my opinion, measures for people to find other times to vote during Diwali become pointless when people can still exercise their right to vote. Issues like that are considered more important than accessibility or trying to reduce the cynicism of Quebec voters. Is that a fair assessment?

In fact, the pillars should underpin the bill. In proposing a date change, we are working against one of the three pillars we wanted to work on.

• (1145)

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Mr. Chair, I think the issue before parliamentarians is whether that date is the appropriate one or not, and that's a discussion you folks should have.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: As an elected official, I can ask whatever question I want.

I think I'm absolutely interested in the voters and the choice of dates. We wanted to work on certain values, we had objectives, but we're moving away from those objectives or undermining them by deciding to prioritize a measure that will ultimately be completely pointless. It will undermine the objective of accessibility because voters, specifically in Quebec in this case, will definitely suffer negative consequences from the overlap of the general election and municipal elections.

The Chair: Mr. Sutherland, give a quick answer, please.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I didn't hear a question.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mrs. Gill, would you like to comment?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Actually, I was repeating my question. I wanted to know if the date change would contravene the objectives of the bill.

[English]

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I am not changing the date. I am merely representing the technical aspects of it.

I would simply say that in Canadian society today, in all its complexity, it's very challenging to find a date when there isn't a conflict of some sort, whether it is municipal, provincial or territorial, or religious or cultural observances. That is what is before members of the House. It is to find that appropriate—

[Translation]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but Ms. Gill's time is up.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Barron, you have two and a half minutes. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, again, to the witnesses.

I'm wondering, Mr. Sutherland, if you could speak a bit about the mail-in ballot process. What are the changes and current barriers? Every year, we hear about so many Canadians waiting for mail-in ballots. We know there are delays and problems.

Can you talk a bit about that?

Mr. Allen Sutherland: I'd be happy to.

This represents, as I think I said earlier, an important and growing element of how Canadians choose to exercise their franchise. There are a couple of elements that are proposed in the legislation for consideration.

The first is that for a fixed-date election, registration would be open during the pre-election period, to give more time for electors to register. The second is to offer an online registration option, which is particularly important for folks who may be overseas.

This is really intended to provide more flexibility to citizens. I may choose as a citizen to get a mail-in ballot, but I may, in the event, want to exercise my franchise the normal way by going to a polling station. You actually have the option to return your mail-in ballot in person at a polling station, again, to provide that flexibility.

We've already talked about permitting ballots with the name of the registered party. Part of that is because for mail-in ballots, it may not be known who the candidate is at the time when you want to fill in your ballot. That's part of why allowing the parties.... It's something that's done in most western provinces at the provincial level, by the way.

We're also making progress on allowing people to vote at any polling station, which isn't exactly mail-in balloting, but it allows greater flexibility in how you exercise your franchise.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: There are many important points in there. I know I've heard from people who didn't get their mail-in ballot on time and then tried to show up at the polling station with it and were turned away because of that; they were not able to vote in person because they had the mail-in ballot. It's a big problem, and I'm happy that's being resolved.

Also, being able to vote at any polling station, in the recent British Columbia election, was a big bonus for British Columbians.

The last question I wanted to ask, although I think I'm running out of time, is around enshrining into legislation the vote on campus program. We saw vote on campus being removed recently, and we saw the student vote decrease along with community members' access to another polling station. I was hoping to get some information around that, but I think I'm out of time.

• (1150)

Mr. Allen Sutherland: Very quickly, I think you're right.

B.C., to be crystal clear, is a leader in this area. We're trying to follow them down that path. We're not going to be there for the next election, but the hope is in future elections we'll hit that standard.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Ms. Barron.

Colleagues, the next four witnesses are virtual, and it's going to take a bit longer for a sound check.

I was going to give us the 10 minutes back here, but colleagues would like to use that time with the current witnesses.

We may cut 10 minutes off the back end in the second panel if we end up going too late, because we're not sure how long it's going to take to do our sound check. Nonetheless, we're going to finish this round with five minutes from the Conservatives and then five minutes from the Liberals.

Mr. Duncan, for five minutes, the floor is yours.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it's important to understand what we've heard this morning, through the testimony.

We now have confirmation, after several rounds of questions, that the NDP were invited to...and provided briefings by the Liberals in advance of proposed changes to Canada's election laws. I can clarify: I'm pretty sure Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois were not invited to those briefings. Canadians should be very surprised, stunned, by the fact that we have two political parties that were denied the possibility of working behind the scenes, at first. Then we found out they were provided information briefings. We're going to find out who was at those meetings and when they took place.

It's completely unacceptable, now, for the NDP to say there are problematic parts of the bill. This proves what we heard this morning: They were absolutely complicit and aware, and they agreed to the bill proposed—specifically, changing the election date, which did nothing more than preserve their pensions. The NDP leader is going to get his pension in January or February of 2025. That's why he doesn't want to have an election now. The NDP complain that it's problematic. It's problematic for the NDP now only because they got caught this morning. They were fully aware of what was happening. They knew what was in the bill. It is only because of the backlash they rightfully got from Canadians that, all of a sudden, they now deem this problematic.

The other part that I think was important to learn this morning is the rationale for the date change and the arguments that were made. I'm trying to understand what the rationale is. The date had to be moved back a week, to October 27. It couldn't be moved ahead. It had to be moved back so it wouldn't conflict with a cultural event—

Diwali. Instead, it now conflicts with a territorial election. However, here's the interesting thing: You didn't want to move it ahead to conflict with or “break into the summer”. That was the line given, yet the Prime Minister had no problem calling an election in the middle of August 2021, when it seemed opportunistic and advantageous for him.

This morning, we heard all the reasons...and confirmation that the NDP were in on this all along. Second, the rationale the Liberals and the NDP are desperately trying to spin away was exposed. The date was moved not for any cultural event. It was moved for purely political purposes, in terms of pension protection for the Liberals and NDP.

Look, Conservatives want an election now. I'm not worried about my pension or anybody else's pension. I'm worried about Canadians. I think what we've seen today is confirmation. There were many opportunities for some sort of clarification or rationale. It remains crystal clear. The cynical attempt by the Liberals and NDP to protect their pensions and claim something else.... That just disintegrated at this committee this morning.

That's all I have.

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

Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead for five minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Would you just stop, Eric?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Honestly, just so you know, it sounds as ludicrous to everybody else as it does to us on this side. The reality is this, Eric: You're the only one sitting at this table who would benefit from that.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Give me a second.

There are two points of order at the same time, one from Mrs. Gill and one from Mr. Berthold. They're probably identical.

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you. We should do what we are supposed to do, which is to ask the witnesses questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: That said, I would still like the tone of the conversation to remain respectful and professional.

The Chair: Thank you. On the other hand, Mr. Gerretsen can choose to use his time as he sees fit.

I want to reassure members that I have stopped the clock.

Mr. Berthold, you had a point of order.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, I think that Mr. Gerretsen's arrogance and tone, and especially the fact that he addresses another member directly in this way, are not acceptable. As we all know, in this case, questions for members and particularly for witnesses are normally addressed to the chair. Mr. Gerretsen's actions are unacceptable in a committee.

I think you don't want us to fall into a situation where we start accusing each other directly, without respecting your authority. I think it's up to you to maintain order here, and Mr. Gerretsen has clearly crossed a line that is unacceptable.

The Chair: All right. Thank you for your comments.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerretsen, did you want to speak on the points of order? If not, I'll respond.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I do.

On the first point, to Madame Gill's point, Mr. Duncan didn't ask a single question of the witnesses in his last round, and to suggest that I am being more personal than he was is just simply false.

Second, to Mr. Berthold's point, we don't speak through the chair in this committee. Everybody who's been sitting here has been directing their questions directly at the witnesses and receiving them back.

It is very common in committee meetings to have your time and use your time for your own purpose. If I want to use my time to be critical of other things I've heard at this table, it is entirely within my right, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay, colleagues. Thank you.

Is this on a point of order, Mr. Arnold?

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): It is. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to point out that Mr. Gerretsen said he was being no more personal than Mr. Duncan. He was. He was directing the attack at Mr. Duncan when he stated that MP Duncan—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: This is debate.

Mr. Mel Arnold: —was the only one in this room to be advantaged by this. Mr. Gerretsen was out of line.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

Okay, colleagues—

Do you have a point of order, Mr. Duncan? Go ahead.

Mr. Eric Duncan: First, to be very clear, I would like an election now. I'm not worried about my pension. I want an election now, so that we can end all of that.

An hon. member: I have a point of order—

Mr. Eric Duncan: Secondly, if it's not a personal attack and you're not talking through witnesses, which witness's name is Eric?

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Duncan, I don't think we're on the point of order anymore.

Colleagues, there are clearly differences of opinion. Emotions have elevated a bit in the last couple of minutes. I have heard on both sides of the table a degree of elevation in terms of aggressive tone. I would ask all members to be respectful of our colleagues around the table and to do their best to make their points, however adamantly, in a way that is becoming and expected of us as parliamentarians.

With that, I'm going to return the floor to Mr. Gerretsen for four minutes and 30 seconds, which is what was remaining prior to the point of order, and I hope that in the remaining amount of time in his line of questioning, we will be able to be respectful.

Thank you, colleagues, for your interventions.

Mr. Gerretsen, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I plan to use my time to make a comment, Mr. Chair.

I've been sitting here for an hour, watching Conservatives utilize witnesses in this room to advance their own political partisan narrative and for potential gain that they perceive.

Don't point at him or anybody on this side....

My reference on that was specifically about Mr. Duncan and the way he's been engaging with the witnesses.

Listen, what I can tell you is that Mr. Duncan and Conservatives, and perhaps the Bloc, are unwilling to accept the reality that a date was chosen based on what the witnesses have told us. I've been sitting here, and they've said it was based on trying to observe religious holidays and getting as close as possible to the actual date. We all heard the same thing, and then somehow Mr. Duncan interprets that to be something completely different, which is completely false, so he's just trying to drive the narrative that they've been setting up.

I know I don't have to defend the NDP. They can do that on their own, but when the NDP decide to say, "Oh yeah, you know what? Maybe the Conservatives have raised a good point; we didn't recognize this and we agree that it should change," Mr. Duncan's response is, "Well, you knew all along, so now you're trying to save face." It's absolutely ludicrous and ridiculous, and Eric will sit here and demonstrate this kind of behaviour over and over to try to illustrate this point.

What I can guarantee you of, Mr. Duncan, is that there's never been a Liberal Party member who has been taken away in shackles and handcuffs for violating the Elections Act, okay? I do recall a Conservative in that position, so with all due respect—

An hon. member: Today's the anniversary, actually.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Is today the anniversary of that? Isn't that fascinating?

Perhaps you can just tone down the rhetoric a bit so that we can actually advance an important piece of legislation. If you're against the legislation and you don't believe in it, that's fine. Vote against it. Give us the reasons you're against it, but not everything is scandalous, Eric.

Not everything is scandalous, okay? I know that Conservatives like to try to make absolutely every single issue around here into some scandal, but that's just not the reality, and I think your hyped-up rhetoric is starting to catch up with you, so please, just tone it down. Ask questions about the legislation, and if you don't want to support it, don't support it.

• (1200)

The Chair: Okay, this is a great time for us to conclude our first round.

[*Translation*]

Are you raising a point of order, Mrs. Gill?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Yes, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to check with you that, when a point of order is raised, it's usually the chair who disposes of the question, not the colleagues around the table. I have the impression that it was a colleague who answered me instead—Mr. Gerretsen—and not the chair.

The Chair: I think I've answered the question; I had not heard anything problematic in relation to the procedure.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you. It was out of respect for the chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is this on a point of order, Ms. Barron?

Okay, go ahead.

Colleagues, there's a bit of noise in the room. We haven't suspended yet, so please.... I'm having a little trouble hearing.

Ms. Barron, go ahead.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

On a procedural point of order, if the time is going to be reduced by 10 minutes, is there going to be a reallocation of time? How does that work out as far as the distribution of questions by each party?

The Chair: It's a fair question.

There would not have been, in that current plan I had, a loss of time for yourself, because the 10 minutes would have been the Conservative five minutes and the Liberal five minutes. That was prior to this elongated discussion we had, so, depending on resource availability and how quickly it takes us to get the testing done here, I'm not sure how far over we will go.

I can assure you that the plan was not and will not be to devoid you of your time. It would be the five minutes of Conservatives and Liberals combined that we were planning to cut. We'll see where we get, okay?

We're briefly suspended in order to transition.

Mr. Sutherland, Ms. Pereira, thank you very much for being with us.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are going to resume this meeting.

We have four witnesses in the second round. Each will have five minutes to speak, so that's a maximum of 20 minutes we're about to head into, and then we'll go into our round of questioning. We'll see where we end up.

All witnesses appearing with us today are virtual. Hello to you from Ottawa.

They are Dr. Sara Bannerman, professor and Canada research chair in communication policy and governance at McMaster University; Dr. Jean-François Daoust, professor, school of applied politics, Université de Sherbrooke; Dr. Holly Ann Garnett, associate professor at the Royal Military College of Canada; and Ryan Campbell, who is a board member from Fair Vote Canada.

With that, Dr. Bannerman, we are going to turn to you first. You have the floor for up to five minutes.

If you don't mind, witnesses, I would really appreciate it if you could time yourselves; maybe pull out your phone and get the timer going. It is helpful. Otherwise, I'm going to be waving frantically to let you know that we are at time. If you have the ability to keep yourself in that five-minute window, it would be greatly appreciated.

Dr. Bannerman, it's over to you for five minutes.

Dr. Sara Bannerman (Professor and Canada Research Chair in Communication Policy and Governance, McMaster University, As an Individual): Thank you inviting me.

Today I want to discuss the privacy measures in Bill C-65 and my relevant research.

Bill C-65 purports to provide a complete personal information regime for political parties, but it's far from complete. It fails to subject political parties to the 10 privacy principles that are understood as core to privacy regimes. It's designed to undermine existing privacy law that applies to political parties. In its current form, it's a privacy-busting bill, a bill that would undermine existing privacy rights for Canadians.

Bill C-65 has many missing pieces. It doesn't meet a number of fundamental privacy principles. It doesn't meet principle 2, that the purposes of collection should be identified. Instead, it requires only illustrative purposes.

It doesn't meet principle 3, that knowledge and consent should be given. Instead, it gives near blanket permission to collect and use any type of personal information. Most Canadians that my team surveyed felt that sensitive information like ethnicity, religion and social media information should never be collected and retained by political parties, or only with an individual's explicit consent. Bill C-65 would allow any entity, which could be data brokers, tech companies, people search or foreign entities, working with a party to collect and use any breadth of personal information while they're working for the party.

It doesn't address principle 4 on limiting collection. There are no limits on the types of personal information that parties and entities can collect. My team's work suggests placing the most sensitive types out of bounds.

It doesn't address principle 5 on limiting use. While it incorporates two new limits, it doesn't prevent giving personal information to third parties like social media companies or others; using personal information to profile electors; making statistical inferences about personality types, interests, opinions, religion, sexual orientation or anything else; nor any uses involving AI.

It doesn't address principle 6 on ensuring accuracy, nor adequately principle 7 on safeguarding personal information. Instead, it allows tech companies or any other entity working with political parties potentially total unbridled access and use, with little or no meaningful protection or oversight.

It doesn't address principle 9, giving a right of individual access for electors to know what information parties hold about them, nor principle 10, the right to make a complaint or challenge a party's compliance with these principles.

Bill C-65 aims, according to Kevin Lamoureux's speech, to "engage more people and increase the confidence" of Canadians in elections. My team's work surveying Canadians raises the concern that failing to subject political parties to the 10 basic privacy principles may threaten both of those objectives.

We found that, first, respondents were not aware of parties' data collection and the range of data they may collect, particularly on political views, ethnicity, income, religion or online activities and IDs.

Our second finding relates to engagement. We found that awareness of parties' collection may reduce electors' willingness to interact with political parties online.

Our third conclusion relates to confidence. We found that increased awareness of datafied campaigning goes hand in hand with growing concern as opposed to confidence about collection.

Finally, very few respondents saw data collection as important to the democratic process. If collection is important to democracy, our respondents were not convinced of that.

Bill C-65 seeks to undermine the applicability of a complete privacy law, B.C.'s PIPA, that currently applies to political parties. It seeks to undermine a leading B.C. privacy case that recognizes privacy rights for Canadians in relation to political parties. It seeks to displace those rights.

Bill C-65 would undermine privacy, engagement and confidence. It would facilitate parties' exploitation of electors' data without limits, transparency or consent.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Bannerman.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daoust, you have the floor for five minutes.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust (Professor, School of applied politics, Université de Sherbrooke, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank the members of the committee for their invitation.

My remarks today are based on my experience as a professor of Canadian politics and electoral studies at the Université de Sherbrooke and, previously, at the University of Edinburgh, as well as an academic researcher working with institutions such as Elections Canada, Elections Québec and Elections Montréal.

Today, I'm going to focus on two points. First, I'm going to focus on the one-week postponement of the 2025 general election. Second, I'll briefly touch on the addition of advance polling days.

Regarding the election date, I understand that the bill moves the election back a week so as not to overlap with Divali, the Festival of Light. I don't think we should be closed to this kind of religious accommodation, but it's very delicate, particularly in terms of the state's principle of secularism. So we have to ask ourselves whether accommodation brings more democratic advantages than disadvantages. Unfortunately, in this case, I see at least two major problems caused directly by the postponement of the date.

First, the postponement of the Canadian general election will result in an overlap between that election and Quebec's municipal elections. The latter, scheduled for November 2, 2025, are very important, as millions of voters are expected to cast their ballots. With the postponement proposed by the bill, the two election campaigns will overlap almost perfectly. In fact, only five separate days would remain for the municipal campaign.

In addition, advance voting at the municipal level would literally take place during the end of the federal election campaign. This situation is highly problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it would create even more electoral fatigue, and Quebec municipal elections would essentially pay the price. Voter turnout there is already very low, at around 38% in the last election. Secondly, it would affect the organization of elections. For example, it would be much more difficult for institutions such as Elections Montréal, among others, to secure available premises for the proper conduct of voting, particularly advance polling, which would take place during the federal election. In other words, the current bill would likely adversely affect turnout in Quebec municipal elections.

The second reason why postponing the date of the 2025 general election is problematic, in my opinion, is that it would most likely fuel voters' political cynicism. Postponing the election date will almost certainly be interpreted as an opportunistic measure to preserve the personal interests of certain MPs from several political parties, who would obtain a House pension thanks to a few extra days of service. This measure risks damaging public confidence in democratic institutions.

The research I've conducted, notably with André Blais in our book *The Motivation to Vote*, shows that citizens' attitudes are fundamental to understanding their decision to vote or abstain. The problem here is that the measure proposed in the bill will undermine political confidence and fuel cynicism, and could, in the short, medium and long term, harm voter turnout, which is already problematic in Canada.

In summary, I consider that the decision to postpone the date of the 2025 general election has the potential to have very serious consequences for participation in Quebec municipal elections, for the organization of this poll and, more generally, for the democratic attitudes and public opinion of Canadians towards parliamentary institutions.

The big question now is: is accommodating those who will be celebrating the Festival of Light reasonable?

People celebrating Divali will have the opportunity to vote in advance for six days, since there are usually four and it is proposed to add two. There would therefore be six opportunities for advance voting, in addition to other measures in schools. Given my previous findings, considering the problems I mentioned, and remembering that there are measures to accommodate the fact that there is a religious holiday on October 20, my answer is unequivocal: the committee should not push back the date of the 2025 general election.

I now want to briefly address the addition of two days of advance voting. I don't see it as problematic, but it shouldn't be seen as a quick fix. My research shows that the vast majority of voters, over 78% of people, consider that voting is already either fairly easy or very easy. If they abstain from voting, therefore, it's not because they consider it difficult, but for other reasons. I mentioned democratic attitudes. So it's not clear to me how going from four to six days of advance voting will change anything if the goal is to increase voter turnout.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that amending the Canada Elections Act is a delicate exercise that should ideally enjoy a very

broad consensus, broader in fact than other bills, for reasons that seem obvious to me. We can come back to this during the question period if you wish.

• (1220)

So those are the two points I wanted to mention today. Once again, thank you for your invitation and I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Daoust.

[English]

Dr. Garnett, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor, Royal Military College of Canada, As an Individual): Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I'm an associate professor of political science and a class of 1965 professor in leadership at the Royal Military College of Canada. I also co-direct the Electoral Integrity Project, which is an international research network that focuses on the quality of elections throughout the electoral cycle.

In this work, I've had the opportunity to study the academic research and perspectives of electoral officials around the world on issues relating to the voting process. This includes what we often call in the academic literature "convenience voting measures"—methods of voting outside of the regular polling place on election day. The idea behind these measures is that they reduce some of the time and cognitive costs of voting for the general population. However, the reality is that convenience voting measures are sometimes less convenient than voting at a polling place on election day. Voting by special ballot here in Canada allows you to vote from the comfort of your own home, but it requires an additional point of interaction with Elections Canada to get a special ballot within a specific time frame, more effort to fill it out by figuring out your candidates to write in, getting the envelopes correct to ensure privacy, and getting it in the post on time.

Across the board, we don't see increases in voter turnout when more convenience measures are used. There's a lot of American research on this, showing that, in some cases, there's no increase in turnout when these measures are applied. Some show no effect at all. Other research has considered who uses these mechanisms and has found that those who take advantage of convenience measures are in population groups that tend to vote already: older, more educated and higher-income voters. My own research in the Canadian context shows the same.

Bill C-65 is designed to increase the actual convenience of these types of voting measures among population groups that are already the most vulnerable to being deterred from voting due to administrative procedures. My colleague Toby James and I would reframe these innovations. They're not "convenience voting measures" but rather "inclusive voting practices".

We can consider a few examples.

Under the new provisions in this bill, an adult with social anxiety who would not normally go to an unfamiliar polling station could benefit from signing up for a special ballot before a fixed-date election and receiving it when the election rolls around. They could avoid confusion by writing in the party name, rather than the candidate. If they run out of time or change their mind about their preferred voting method, they could reach out to a returning officer to amend their voting method or attend a regular polling station to drop off their ballot.

Consider, for example, a post-secondary student voting for the first time, one who must use a special ballot to vote in their home riding while away at school. Under the new provisions, they would be given additional support through an on-campus voting office to guide them through their first voting experience using that more complicated special voting procedure.

In another example, an individual has recently moved into a care home. They no longer drive and do not readily have identification with their new address on it. Under the new provisions, they could take advantage of a poll at their residence and not need to show identification regarding residence by virtue of the fact that they live at their polling station.

In each of these cases, these individuals could vote without the additional measures proposed in this bill. There are legal ways to sort out these situations, but their circumstances could easily lead them to being dissuaded from even trying. Without additional support, the end effect could be the same as if they weren't able to vote—what we call their "effective disenfranchisement". Beyond this, research suggests that a voter's experience of elections is impacted by how accessible they find the process. For potential voters who may find the voting process extra burdensome, inclusive voting procedures like these can enhance their sense of inclusion and their ability to meaningfully participate in civic life.

For all voters, the use of convenience measures can lead to a more positive experience of elections, something that has been empirically demonstrated in the American context. This is due to the additional convenience and to a less stressed workforce greeting them at the polls. Having more opportunities available to electors spreads out the burden on administrators, who are already short-staffed on election day. Positive experiences influence future behaviour and opinions about elections in an era in which trust in elections cannot be taken for granted.

For this reason, the inclusive voting procedures proposed in this bill—which may not increase turnout across the board for people like us, who have a stable address and identification readily in our wallets—will have a positive impact on some of the population groups most likely to already feel left out of the voting process.

That reason alone makes those provisions worthwhile amendments to the Canada Elections Act.

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Campbell, there are five minutes for you.

Mr. Ryan Campbell (Board Member, Fair Vote Canada): Thank you very much.

First of all, I want to acknowledge that I am on the traditional unceded territory of the Kwantlen, Katzie, Kwikwetlem and Semiahmoo first nations.

Thank you also for inviting me.

Fair Vote Canada is the largest electoral reform advocacy group in Canada. Our primary mission is not only to promote the adoption of proportional representation, but also more broadly to promote fair and meaningful participation in Canadian politics.

In general, we support this bill, with some reservations and some provisos there.

First of all, in this are the provisions for more voting opportunities, whether those are on campuses, in long-term care or for special ballots. That is what a previous witness was calling the "inclusive voting". We absolutely support that. Anything that makes it easier for people to vote, whether it boosts turnout or not, I think is worthwhile, just in saving people time.

I'll also mention my personal experience. In 2017, my mother cast a special ballot for the provincial election from a leukemia ward. I know that it gave her a sense of agency and normalcy that she was lacking at the time, so it's worthwhile for people to vote, not only for the sake of government but also for the sake of their own sense of well-being, so I think it's very valuable from that perspective.

On the "vote anywhere" provisions, which are, I know, a work in progress, I can say, as someone who has done get out the vote on a lot of campaigns for a lot of parties, that it would be very appreciated. There's nothing more horrifying than realizing you sent your supporters to the wrong polling station, so just from the standpoint of not having accidents happen, it's quite nice, and it's very convenient. Anyone who voted in B.C. a couple of weeks ago would tell you that. The turnout wasn't great here necessarily, but that was also in the face of a torrential downpour that actually caused a mudslide that killed someone on election day in Vancouver, so take that as you will.

With the provisions around personal information, we are a little more concerned about that, echoing some of the previous comments. We certainly support any efforts to safeguard Canadians' personal information, but we note that the provisions here fall far short of the standards that we're held to as an advocacy group. I think if Canadians understood how much data and information political parties have on them, then a lot of people would not be very happy with that knowledge. Also, we feel that the right to have the knowledge, to know your data, to be forgotten and to have it removed would be quite worthwhile, as well as maybe some more robust standards on which third parties can access that data.

The foreign interference provisions are worthwhile too, but it was noted that they do not apply to nomination contests and leadership contests, and I think that's a major gap. Some of the personal information provisions do apply to those contests, but not including nomination contests, leadership contests and internal party contests in this legislation can actually come across as an invitation to foreign interference. I don't think that is the intention, but it's something I really strongly feel should be addressed.

The election timing seems to be the big elephant in the room. We certainly don't object to shifting the election by a week. The pension provisions and the cynicism associated with that are definitely a concern, but we also have, in case members of the committee aren't aware, some of the lowest incumbency rates in the entire developed world for our Parliament, and there are complex reasons for that. Part of that is first-past-the-post voting and an electorate that's very willing to shift its preferences. The consequence of that is that you tend to not last very long in office. There are a lot of people in swing ridings. You can imagine that if you were an MP from Quebec elected in 2008, most of those MPs were members of the Bloc. In 2011, most of those MPs were members of the NDP. In 2015, most of those MPs were members of the Liberal Party. There was not a lot of continuity across those three elections in who actually survived.

I don't think it's inappropriate that there be some kind of security and pension available. Maybe a solution to this would be to look at the vesting schedule of the pension and to be more gradual about it, instead of a more—I know it's not entirely all or nothing, but it's pretty close—all or nothing at the six-year mark.

In general, we want to note that the process here is one that we're encouraged by, and that most countries reform their democratic processes by multi-party agreements. A minority government means that's a necessity here, but it's something that we think should be followed in majority governments as well.

Thank you.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you very much to all of our witnesses for your opening remarks.

We're going to turn to our first round of questioning here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Daoust, I heard your message, which is very clear on the negative effects that postponing the date of the 2025 general election for the reasons put forward by the Liberals and the NDP could have on the population and voter turnout.

You've talked about the impact of this postponement at the municipal level, but what do you think the impact might be at the federal level, in terms of all the cynicism that this date change might generate?

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: In this case, it's difficult to quantify. The impact may be short-term, medium-term or long-term, but the academic literature clearly indicates that people who have less confidence in democratic institutions and who are more cynical are less likely to vote. Certainly, if a bill fuels this cynicism and decreases trust in politics and satisfaction with democracy, we can expect voter turnout to decline.

Would this be the case in the next federal election? Perhaps a little. We know that when people don't vote the first time, they tend to do it again. So there are medium- and long-term consequences too. It's extremely difficult to quantify, but the academic literature clearly indicates that there's a negative relationship here.

Mr. Luc Berthold: The fact that politicians change laws apparently to favour their own interests, such as benefiting from a pension, generates cynicism, which can be quite significant, among people who are going to vote for the first time or who already find politics a little repulsive.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Yes. First of all, I don't assume that it's for the pension that these elements are in the bill, that's obvious.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Daoust, I'm talking about people's current perception.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Yes, it will be framed as a measure that is probably opportunistic, strategic and in the service of personal interests. Yes, I'm of the opinion that it can fan the flames of cynicism and diminish confidence in politics and satisfaction with democracy, which, as I mentioned, has consequences for all sorts of democratic attitudes, but also behaviours, including voter turnout.

• (1235)

Mr. Luc Berthold: You talked about adding advance voting days. I'd like to ask you some questions, because it's very interesting to hear you talk about this subject.

I was very surprised, when I first ran for federal office: you can vote from the moment the election is called.

Are there many places where you can vote practically from day 1? Are there a lot of places that do this? I know we can't do that everywhere in Quebec in municipal elections.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Spontaneously, I don't have a definitive answer, but I think that's not the case in the UK and that, in most cases, you can't do that. I can't quantify it further at the moment.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You could say that the system here is very open and very permissive so that people can exercise their right to vote in Canada.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Yes, at the federal level, there are several measures. There's advance polling, which used to last four days, but will now last two more. As you mentioned, you can also vote by going to the polling station any day. There are also other measures, such as mobile voting in long-term care facilities and schools. So there are still a number of measures for people who can't vote on polling day.

Mr. Luc Berthold: What do you think about the fact that this bill would allow voters to vote based solely on a party's name?

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Luc Berthold: There is an article in Bill C-65 that will allow voters to vote for a political party, and not for a candidate in the election, if the candidate is not known.

What do you think of this option? It's a little contrary to everything we've experienced so far, when we send a representative to Ottawa, not a party.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: I have some research that talks about the effect of local candidacies, but this is beyond my expertise. I prefer not to comment on it.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

I have one last question on what we learned from a senior Privy Council Office official during the first hour of our meeting today: an electoral reform bill was prepared jointly and secretly by two political parties, which was supported by senior Privy Council Office officials. Isn't this just one more element to fuel public cynicism about the electoral system?

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Unfortunately, there was a fire alarm and I wasn't able to attend the entire first hour.

That said, it's obvious that anything to do with reforming the Canada Elections Act should ideally enjoy a broader bipartisan consensus than other bills, for democratic reasons. I'm not talking about the process upstream, but rather at the end.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I would be pleased, Mr. Daoust, to send you the exchanges we had with the Privy Council Office. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

[English]

Mrs. Romanado, go ahead for six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

I want to address the previous comments.

I want to let the witnesses know that, regarding the whole question of whether or not the date of the election was moved to benefit Liberal and NDP MPs' pensions, there are actually 32 Conserva-

tives who would benefit and only a total of 28 Liberal and NDP members. I just wanted to clarify that and put it on the record.

My first question is for Dr. Garnett.

One of your statements was about participation. I know you're working at Royal Military College. One of the areas I want to talk about and get your feedback on is this: What would the impact of Bill C-65 be on students at RMC? We're talking about students, but we're also talking about military. You may have been one of my son's professors when he was at RMC, so I have some interest in this. I'm curious.

Have you heard about any impact on students coming from across Canada to study at RMC during their degree program? What would the impact on them be, and what would the impact be on serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are deployed?

Dr. Holly Ann Garnett: Thank you for that.

I didn't prepare specific comments on how it would affect military electors, but I know that, in this current moment in time, there are already procedures in place that allow military electors to vote in their home ridings. For example, colleagues have said that when they were deployed, wherever they were, the military worked closely with Elections Canada to ensure that procedures were put in place to allow these electors to effectively cast a ballot.

What I'm most excited about regarding the new bill is the expansion of these sorts of additional supports to regular undergraduate and graduate students at any Canadian university. The supports that already exist for our military electors would be a benefit to any student at any post-secondary institution with an on-campus voting office, guiding them through the special ballot process. It's almost counterintuitive that the first time a lot of people vote is potentially using one of the most difficult ways to go about casting a ballot. I often say that, for someone like me, who lives at a stable address and gets a "you vote at" card, it's quite easy to go to a polling station down the street and show my driver's licence with my address on it and cast a ballot. The reality is that post-secondary students—many of whom are voting for the first time—might not have the correct address on their driver's licence. They might have to go through a more complicated process to vote in their home riding.

Therefore, having additional supports available and people walking them through the process is absolutely crucial, especially because we know voting is habit-forming. If they have a positive experience when they're in that educational institution, it's going to set them up for future voting.

• (1240)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I was hoping you'd go into on-campus voting. I'm happy that you went there, but I think my colleague will pick up on that, so I will stop there on that question.

My next question is for Mr. Campbell from Fair Vote.

First of all, I hope your mom is better. If not, I'm terribly sorry to hear that.

You were talking a bit about the “vote anywhere” aspect and mentioning people being disengaged from the voting process. I was part of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, so I got to spend quite a lot of time learning about proportional representation as well.

What would you recommend for us in terms of this bill, other than, of course, changing the way we vote, which I'm sure you would like to put in there?

Mr. Ryan Campbell: Yes, I would.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Do you have any other recommendations for us, regarding this?

Mr. Ryan Campbell: I think the provisions around foreign interference are very timely and should be expanded quite a bit. There are real weaknesses on our nomination side and in internal party offices. It's not something on people's radars, but the people who make the decision on whether someone can run at all is a vulnerability, as well. In a lot of places, unfortunately, we don't get to vote on who the nominee is. There's only one person and they just get approved. That's something I would pay a lot of attention to.

One thing you might also want to consider, which I think is dangerous, however, and would have to be done very carefully, is “truth in political advertising” legislation. South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory have legislation in that regard. Obviously, there are a lot of downsides to that, in terms of how it could be perceived in one party if it isn't done with a very high degree of consensus.

Those would be two provisions.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Professor Daoust, you mentioned the conflict between municipal and federal elections. During the last federal general election, I went door to door, at the same time as the municipal candidates. Honestly, I never heard anyone say they didn't vote because they were mixed up.

Do you have any data from the last election indicating that people didn't vote because they were confused?

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: No, such data doesn't exist, because, from a methodological point of view, it would be very difficult to isolate the causal effect. On the other hand, there is documentation that proves the notion of electoral fatigue beyond a doubt.

It seems reasonable to me that some people would be confused about the date of the poll and the location of the polling station. My work with Élections Montréal confirms that too much overlap prevents certain things from happening. For example, if institutions like Élections Montréal wanted to run major advertising campaigns to remind people of the importance of voting in municipal elections, they would probably refrain from doing so, or would wait to do so until only municipal elections were underway, to make sure there was no confusion. There may be no direct effect, but many indirect effects can accumulate.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

• (1245)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the witnesses, Mr. Campbell, Ms. Garnett, Ms. Bannerman and Mr. Daoust. I'm happy to see that organizations are interested in elections, as well as the scientific community, whose opinion we also need.

By the way, Professor Daoust, I welcome your answers and thank you for telling us that, if something doesn't fall within your expertise, we need to look elsewhere for the answer.

On the other hand, you mentioned a subject that interests you in the context of your research, electoral fatigue. According to you, there's a whole body of scientific literature on the subject. Could you tell us more about what election fatigue is, for those of us who aren't necessarily as involved in the field as you are, and show us the effects of this fatigue that can already be felt in the Canadian or Quebec population?

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Election fatigue is a concept raised in several works in electoral studies. I'm thinking, for example, of my work with André Blais, but also André Blais' work with Filip Kostelka, and a more recent article by Alex B. Rivard and other colleagues on the Canadian code.

Election fatigue refers to the fact that the number of elections and their proximity to each other make citizens less inclined to participate. All sorts of political attitudes may be affected, but interest in politics is less likely. This interest in politics is crucial because it's one of the best predictors of why people vote, but also other things like a sense of civic duty.

I conceive of voting as being a duty before being a right or a choice. I do my civic duty by voting in federal elections, and I vote in municipal elections because I still see it as a civic duty. On the other hand, if I've already voted a few days ago at the federal level, and now it's time to vote at the municipal level, perhaps I'll be a little lenient with myself and tell myself that I've done my civic duty and that I'll pass this time for the municipal level in Quebec.

Election fatigue therefore has an undeniable negative effect on voter turnout, an effect that is reflected in various political attitudes, including interest in politics. People become less interested, more tired. They have less energy to engage politically in discussions or to go out and vote.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

You mentioned democratic attitudes, the organizing of elections and turnout. I imagine they're all interconnected, but if the federal and municipal election periods overlap in 2025, how might it affect voter turnout, the organizing of elections and people's democratic attitudes on a practical level?

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: It's extremely difficult to measure, as I said earlier, but we are quite sure that it would have a negative impact. Would the impact be mild or moderate? We don't know, but we are sure that it would be negative, so in that respect, I see it as a problem. In terms of people's attitudes, voter fatigue results in a decline in voter turnout.

As far as organizing the elections is concerned, I can say that it will be very difficult. If Elections Canada is on the ground, which it necessarily will be, it's going to rent space for its polling stations. That will make it much harder for institutions like Élections Montréal to rent locations for advance polling, which would take place during the federal election campaign. From an organizational point of view, it would probably be a nightmare for municipal election authorities.

In addition—and Ms. Garnett mentioned this—elections administrators are often short-staffed. That's pretty typical. Finding election workers is tough nowadays and has been for a few years, actually. The retention rate among those who have previously worked a federal election is significant, since it tends to be the same people who want to be deputy returning officers. That may make it even harder for municipal election authorities to find the necessary staff to ensure that voting runs smoothly both for advance polling and on election day. In terms of organizing elections, that would be the impact.

The effects could be felt in various ways, but they would all be negative.

• (1250)

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I have a question about the people who run in an election, which is another form of voter turnout. If the two election periods overlap, could it affect the involvement of those who choose to be federal or municipal candidates?

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: In this case, it would affect those running in the federal election, which would prevent them from participating at the municipal level—so probably not very many people. Unfortunately, I don't have enough detailed information to give you an explanation or ideas I would consider satisfactory, so I will leave it there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

[English]

Ms. Barron, you have six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. There was a lot of valuable information provided.

My question is for Mr. Campbell, but before I ask it, I want to point out what's happening here today and what we saw with the previous panel. What we saw was the Conservative Party continuing to spread misinformation and division intended to inflame anger, further disenfranchising Canadians from elections. This is what we're seeing over and over again.

Conservatives know they benefit from the electoral system remaining the way it is. The Conservatives benefit from the lack of representation that we see in the House of Commons, where there

are barriers to full participation, and from keeping the systems the same. We know there are corporate elites who have a lot at stake, and through the Conservatives they are trying to maintain the electoral system the way it is instead of seeing improvements to our electoral systems, seeing improvements to our democracy and seeing a House of Commons that's representative of our communities.

The Conservatives are going to do all they can to disenfranchise Canadians and inflame anger so that Canadians do not show up at the polls and do not see themselves through those who are elected in the House of Commons.

I want to highlight that this is exactly what we're seeing today. I hope the Conservatives will take a moment to reflect on their duty to represent their constituents, not the corporate elites.

With that, I want to ask my question of Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Campbell, I put forward a motion recently, M-86, calling for a national citizens' assembly on electoral reform. We saw, yet again, all but two Conservatives voting against this. This very much ties into Bill C-65, which we are talking about today.

Can you highlight for us what you feel is missing from this bill to see, as you stated, elections that are fair and proportional, and for which Canadians are engaged in the electoral system?

Mr. Ryan Campbell: Thank you.

Well, yes, a proportional electoral system would definitely be a big boon here. I think it ties into some of the other issues that are at play. For example, the incumbency—

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I don't mean to interrupt Mr. Campbell, but this is the second time the interpreter has indicated that the sound quality is poor and that it's difficult, if not impossible, to interpret his remarks.

The Chair: All right. We'll take a moment to check with the technicians.

[English]

Mr. Campbell, if you wouldn't mind, just try to raise the microphone arm a bit. That should probably do the trick.

We'll continue.

Ms. Barron, there are still three minutes and 30 seconds remaining.

Mr. Campbell, the floor is yours.

Mr. Ryan Campbell: How is this? Is this better?

Well, we'll find out.

A more proportional electoral system... We don't want excessive incumbency either, like the United States. I think they have 85% of their representatives getting returned at each election, whereas Canada is at 54%. Somewhere in between would probably be healthier.

The concern when we don't have experienced parliamentarians is that the civil service ends up filling that gap, and that's not the most.... That's technocratic government rather than democratic government.

It would also deal with the foreign interference aspect to an extent. If you have a choice—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Chair, my apologies again, but it's the same thing.

• (1255)

The Chair: All right. Hold on everyone.

[*English*]

Just give us a moment here, please, everyone. We'll try to figure out what's happening.

Mr. Campbell, can you confirm for us if you selected the Jabra microphone on your device?

Mr. Ryan Campbell: Yes.

The Chair: You did? Okay. Just give us another moment.

Colleagues, we're quite tight on time.

Unfortunately, Ms. Barron, what I'm going to ask is whether you would be comfortable maybe posing that question to another panelist.

Unfortunately, Mr. Campbell, I'm sorry. We can't continue without proper translation. At the same time, if I suspend right now to fix this, it's going to take away from our ability to get other questions in.

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Could we get a written response?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Campbell, we could get a written response from you, certainly, and that satisfies both your ability to respond and Ms. Barron.

Ms. Barron, there are still two minutes and 50 seconds. If you want to pose that question to another panellist or continue in a different line of questioning, we're going to keep going. If you're comfortable with that, I think it's going to save us some valuable time.

The clock is ticking again for you.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair. I'm sorry to hear that Mr. Campbell won't be able to continue, but I look forward to seeing the written notes. I'm happy with what was being provided already in this meeting, so that's good news.

I will continue my questions, through you, Chair, for Dr. Bannerman.

Dr. Bannerman, could you clarify what you feel could be done to improve some of the concerns you were bringing forward around the necessary privacy that needs to be put in place? What changes could be made to this bill to make those improvements and eliminate those concerns?

Dr. Sara Bannerman: I guess I see two potential ways forward in the big picture. One is to incorporate all 10 principles fully into this bill, probably by working with the Privacy Commissioner, including adding oversight of the Privacy Commissioner in partnership with the elections head.

Another possibility would be to amend Bill C-27, if it's still possible to do that, to incorporate applicability to political parties under that bill. In other words, bring political parties under the ambit of commercial privacy law or privacy law that applies to the private sector, which is what is done in British Columbia.

There are two broad avenues there. I could also speak specifically to the 10 points if you would like me to go into more detail about that.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I think that's enough information, but I would love to be able to see the more fulsome information provided in writing if you're able to do that, if you haven't actually provided that.

Mr. Chair, because my time was split up, can you clarify how much time I have left?

The Chair: Yes, I'm going to give you the two minutes or so that's remaining, Ms. Barron, because we did lose that as a result of the technical difficulties.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Okay, that's great. Thank you so much.

My next question is for Dr. Garnett.

Dr. Garnett, I don't remember if you actually used the word, but you were speaking about the disenfranchisement that results from many of the barriers to people's full participation in the electoral system. I apologize if this is a poorly interpreted version of what you were saying, but can you speak a bit more about how important it is today, with the many challenges that we are experiencing as Canadians, that disenfranchisement is reduced and that Canadians feel they are fully invested and involved in our electoral systems?

• (1300)

Dr. Holly Ann Garnett: Yes, of course.

I think there was a stream of thought for many years that if you build it, they will come. You know, if you make it legally possible, then people will be able to vote, and they will be able to exercise their political rights. However, the reality is that there are many different ways the system can be more difficult for certain population groups. The reality is that those population groups are generally the ones that are already more vulnerable. They're already not being represented in our political system. Think of those who are younger, who have a lower income or who have a lower educational background. These population groups may already be less likely to participate in other forums, and making the electoral system a little more difficult to participate in effectively then further alienates them from the political system.

It's having more inclusive voting procedures whereby, rather than just saying, "Okay, it's possible now. You have to go figure it out, and you have to go jump through the hoops to be able to vote," we instead make it more inclusive insofar as the state takes some responsibility for helping to facilitate that process. It would be through things like on-campus voting offices to help facilitate special voting, as well as changes in what identification is required for those who are living in long-term care facilities. If you live there, I think we have pretty good proof of your residence in that specific spot.

It's essentially eliminating some of these barriers that really don't have to be there, so that people who have already been, you know, less likely to participate and less likely to be able to be involved in politics are starting on an equal footing to those of us who have a

more stable address, perhaps, or more readily accepted forms of identification. It's really about putting everybody on equal footing and making sure that, rather than just ensuring that citizens have to kind of figure everything out themselves, additional supports are in place to help them participate and to help them exercise their vote.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Barron.

Colleagues, we are running out of time on our resources here, partly because of some of the technicalities.

I'm going to adjourn, and we'll continue our conversation moving forward.

Thank you, colleagues.

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