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Chair: Chris Bittle





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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 11 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), the committee is meeting, for the first hour, on its study of challenges regarding special ballot voting, and for the second hour, on the study of forms and procedural and interpretative guidelines from the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner—very exciting—and we'll provide drafting instructions to our analysts.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before I continue, I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the back of the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents, and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. There's a QR code with a video; please take time to review it.

I have a few comments for the benefit of the members.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, raise your hand. For members on Zoom, you know the drill. Raise your hand please.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for today's meeting.

As an individual, we have Daniel Scuka.

Representing Grits Abroad is Dr. Timothy Veale, director.

You each have five minutes.

Dr. Veale, I understand that you're going first.

**Timothy Veale (Director, Grits Abroad):** Good evening from Hong Kong and good morning to each of you.

First of all, thank you for this opportunity. My name is Timothy Veale.

I'm going to describe a problem facing our country and our citizens.

Let me give you some numbers for context. Nearly five million Canadians live outside the country as part of the Canadian diaspora. That makes our diaspora the size of Canada's fifth-largest province, or over 10% of the national population. There are almost 400,000 Canadians just where I am now in Hong Kong alone.

If 72% of the Canadian citizens abroad are eligible to vote—that is, the same as resident Canadians—then almost 3.5 million Canadian expatriates were eligible to vote this past federal election, but only 100,000 voting kits were applied for, with just over half—or 57%—returned. That's a really low conversion rate.

One hundred thousand people wanted to vote but couldn't. That shows a technical problem. With only 57,000 voters out of the entire amount, it's just over a 1% turnout. That's not okay. That's a 1.7% voter participation rate, to be precise, and that is just not acceptable. This shows a structural problem.

By comparison, Americans abroad outvote us by eight to one. Imagine that as a score in the Stanley Cup finals or in a game in the recent World Series or at the Olympics. The French, the Italians and the Portuguese overseas, by comparison, also outvote us, but this time by up to 35 to one.

However, the diaspora of Canadian citizens is growing and is already larger than that of the French, the Italians and the Portuguese. In fact, it's almost as big as the American diaspora, yet they all outvote us by a wide margin, so we have a problem.

There are three main barriers causing this problem. The first is technical, the second is structural and, finally, the third is political. Not fixing them is causing damage to our nation.

First are the technical barriers. We have limited voting mechanisms. Non-resident Canadians must vote by mail only, with no electronic or official in-person voting options. Voting kits can be mailed out only after the writ has been issued. Now, a 38-day campaign was not designed for voters abroad to achieve better than—as we've seen recently—a 57% conversion rate. It just wasn't designed for this. We voters—Daniel and I—must do three things.

We have to apply to register to vote. We have to wait for that approval to be posted back to us with a voting pack sent via the postal system of any one of 200 countries on the planet. As I'm sure everybody can appreciate, not all countries have effective postal systems. That's getting the packet to us. Then we have to have our vote posted back by the same challenged postal systems to Elections Canada by the deadline in time for it to be counted. A 38-day campaign, again, was just not designed for this.

I hope my vote was counted. I actually don't have that certainty. I hope that I was one of the 57% whose votes were counted. I applied for mine early. I just don't know. We lack the modern infrastructure—digital, regional and logistical—needed to accommodate a global electorate.

Second are the structural barriers. We have no direct representation in Parliament. Unlike France, Italy and Portugal, which have dedicated overseas MPs, Canada provides no parliamentary seats for non-resident citizens.

No one contacts us seeking our vote, not once, not ever, yet decisions impacting us, like, for example, the citizenship of our future family members, are being made by elected politicians: nothing about us without us, please.

This has impacts, including, of course, exclusion from the political process. Many non-resident Canadians are in effect disenfranchised by what could be considered unintended yet structural gerrymandering. It has led to the erosion of democratic legitimacy. The effect weakens Canada's claim to democratic inclusivity and equality, especially given our self-image as a global defender of democratic norms.

This creates missed opportunities for engagement, investment and nation building among a large and talented diaspora. Solutions, in fact, can also have geopolitical implications benefiting Canada.

I will wrap up with some solutions.

**The Chair:** Can you wrap it up in the next few seconds? You are over time. You'll have plenty of opportunity to answer questions as well.

**Timothy Veale:** Okay.

The third problem is political barriers. The solution, I hope, is that dialogue right now, like this, will help us begin to overcome these.

I will wrap it up right there. I'd be happy to take any questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

I appreciate that it's either midnight or 1 a.m. in Hong Kong. The committee does appreciate your testimony.

Mr. Scuka, you have five minutes, please.

• (1110)

**Daniel Scuka (As an Individual):** Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear and provide my thoughts on problems related to special ballot voting, as well as on the challenges faced by Canadian voters living abroad.

My name is Daniel Scuka. I am dialling in to you from Germany. I was born and grew up in Toronto. Following my service in the Canadian Forces, I have lived outside of Canada since 1994—in Japan and now in Germany, near Frankfurt.

I presently work for the European Space Agency at the mission control centre, where I am one of only two Canadians and the only one who was miserable on Monday, as my compatriot is inexplicably not a Blue Jays fan.

I mention my baseball gloom partly as part of my post-defeat therapy and, more importantly, to highlight the fact that today the flow of news, the connections between Canada and the rest of the world, and between we Canadians wherever we are, are broad, deep and instantaneous. Those of us outside of Canada used to live an ocean or two away. Now we live a mouse click away.

In 2019 we could all celebrate the Supreme Court ruling that Canadians living abroad have the same right to vote in federal elections as those living in Canada. In my opinion, this established and reconfirmed the right to vote. It's a profound and fundamental element of Canadian citizenship, as well as identity.

Thanks to subsequent enabling legislation—and I think a lot of work by Elections Canada—first steps to implement overseas voting have been put into place. Since 2019, as my friend, Dr. Veale, has mentioned, we have been some of the almost 3.5 million Canadians outside Canada who have been able to vote.

There is now a register of international electors. There is routine email and telephone contact with Elections Canada. The mechanism to vote by postal mail has been strengthened and made more robust, but a right permitted is not automatically a right that is fully exercised, as Dr. Veale has so clearly pointed out with his numbers.

Overseas voters constitute sufficient numbers to sway the outcome of elections in any number of constituencies across our country, reminding all of us that in a healthy democracy, every vote counts.

In addition to Dr. Veale's comments on structural and technical barriers, I would like to emphasize the following points.

As far as I can see, few, if any, candidates commit time or resources during election campaigns to communicating their platform, ideas or messaging, or to engaging with voters outside of their constituencies. You, as election winners, will know better than I do, but I believe that no candidate in the heat of a campaign—particularly a 30-day or 40-day campaign—automatically thinks about voters outside of the geographical boundaries of their riding. Traditionally, there was no need to. Today there is.

As a result, any candidate who has a strong digital presence on social media, on their own website or via the party's website—whether it be a podcast, virtual town halls or what have you—has an inherent advantage over a candidate who does not. This is a very strong argument, as Dr. Veale mentioned, for the creation of dedicated seats in the House of Commons to represent overseas voters where the candidates will be fully focused on the overseas communities.

I can find no confirmation in public sources as to whether, when it provides candidates with a list of electors in each constituency, Elections Canada identifies to the candidates which of those or how many of those are overseas voters. This should be done automatically.

The current mail-only ballot system places the risk of ensuring timely return on the voter. I have paid the equivalent of \$60 Canadian in the past to make sure my ballot got back in time because it took so long for it to get to me.

I fully endorse and urge the committee to consider amendments to existing legislation that would enable Elections Canada to offer any mix of in-person voting or ballot drop-off at consulates or embassies, ballot return via tracked courier envelopes that are potentially prepaid, and the issuance of ballots and returned material via a digital platform.

Elections Canada should also support overseas voting as digitally as possible. A minimum would be to enable voters overseas to log in and track the status of their ballots. Like Dr. Veale, I have no idea if my ballot in the April election was, in fact, counted or even received.

I'll sum up.

- (1115)

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today, and thank you especially to the technical and administrative team who set this up.

I wish to thank all members of the committee for your attention to this vital and foundational question related to voting by Canadians overseas. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much. I appreciate you bringing up our collective Blue Jays trauma. I also have not gotten over it, but I'm glad there are also people overseas suffering from the same fate.

We'll now turn to Mr. Cooper from the Conservatives for six minutes please.

**Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Scuka, I'll ask a question to pick up from where you left off at the conclusion of your statement. You suggested amendments to the Canada Elections Act in terms of voting by means other than mail, including at embassies. I'm looking at section 228 of the Canada Elections Act, and that's already there.

**Daniel Scuka:** Thank you for pointing that out. I could not find that confirmation that you found, but, moreover, that's just one channel. That it can be allowed and that it is allowed is great. There

is also ballot drop-off and, for those of us Canadians who are not in the proximity of an embassy or consulate, even if it would be allowed but I couldn't get there, being able to send my ballot back via a tracked courier, again, potentially prepaid; that would be extremely helpful. What I'm arguing for is to broaden the channels by which the voters can return their ballots.

**Michael Cooper:** Thank you for that.

Reference has been made to barriers. I take your point, Mr. Scuka, that you've spent \$60 to return a ballot. That could be a barrier.

The process of signing up to vote as a Canadian abroad couldn't be much easier. It's a one-page form. You sign it, you provide proof of the fact that you were born in Canada and that you're a Canadian citizen. You can provide a copy of your passport, a citizenship certificate or card, or a birth certificate, and then you send it to Elections Canada. How much easier could it be?

**Daniel Scuka:** It isn't that there is any one specific element that is a barrier. It's the full process that is not encouraging a significant number of Canadian voters to vote, and as Dr. Veale has pointed out, the numbers speak for themselves.

Yes, as you say, it's that one form, but I have two dozen emails with Elections Canada from the last couple of years to pin down what my final address was. This is a big issue, because Elections Canada ties you to the constituency in which you last resided, but that is not a clear thing, surprisingly. Furthermore, after 20-some odd years outside of a country, that relation, for me or for any particular voter, becomes a little bit fuzzy.

It isn't one specific thing; it's the entire process of getting the kit into my mailbox in front of my street and then getting it back in a timely fashion, and then having faith in what Elections Canada does. It's solid, but I don't know; did my vote arrive? I get nothing back from Elections Canada. Again, it isn't any one thing, as you point out; it's the full process, and I think Dr. Veale's numbers really speak to that.

**Michael Cooper:** Just to clarify, once you fill out the application and your name is added to the international register of electors, a ballot kit will be issued to you at the time of each writ period, and you would not need to apply again and again. Am I correct in that?

**Daniel Scuka:** You are correct.

**Michael Cooper:** Therefore, I presume you're receiving a ballot kit fairly early on during the writ period. Is that fair? Is that happening?

• (1120)

**Daniel Scuka:** In the most recent campaign where the writ was announced, it was a total of 37 to 39 days for the campaign—please don't quote me on the numbers—and it took several weeks to get it into my mailbox. It took me some time. I'm a voter. I want to consider all the candidates. I have to spend time looking up who is running in my riding. I want to find out about them. As I mentioned, the candidates who have a stronger digital presence really get my attention quicker, regardless of party and regardless of affiliation.

I had to make my decision, fill out my ballot, and send it back with tracking, because I wanted to know whether it got there. In the end, the tracking failed. Again, as Dr. Veale mentioned, the timing of our campaign seems to be getting tighter and tighter, and yet the traditional postal mail system....

Why can't Elections Canada simply have a platform where I can log in, and then, 24 hours after the writ is issued, download—as my wife, who is an American voter, can—the PDF of the ballot? I could simply print it here, fill it out and mail it back right away. Why do I have to wait for a piece of paper to come from Canada?

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Ms. Brière, please go ahead.

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. I will ask my questions in French, so make sure you have selected the right channel, please.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Veale, you talked about technical problems, structural problems and political problems, but you didn't have time to elaborate on your thoughts on political problems.

I'd like to give you the time to finish what you had to say on that subject.

[*English*]

**Timothy Veale:** Thank you very much for this opportunity to further extend what I wish to share. I appreciate this question.

I didn't get a chance to finish some points about what we view as solutions. Fixing the technical problems, fixing inefficient voting methods, might get us to voting rates comparable to the Americans, let's say, who are outvoting us eight to one. But even those results are still in the single digits, so I'm not totally convinced that this is simply a technical issue. I think it has to do more with the structural issue.

As we see in the European nations I referenced, the voting turnout is up to 35 times what ours is. I believe that's due to the representation they experience in their respective parliaments. Fixing a lack of representation and giving us members of Parliament to represent us directly modernizes our democracy and can add untapped strength—financial strength, geopolitical strength—to our nation building.

The first two problems, technical and structural, I think can be relatively easily overcome. It's the political barriers, which, as I quickly referenced earlier, I hope our dialogue right now can help us to begin to overcome. It's just a matter of will. We have seen that. The data supports this. There is a need for change. I think Canada will only be better for this. Our country will be better for it if we care.

You know, a precedent has been set. It's not that we have to reinvent the wheel here. More than a dozen countries from around the world already do this. I've just cited three. There is a precedent.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière:** Thank you very much.

Dr. Veale and Mr. Scuka, you both mentioned that voter turnout among people of other nationalities, such as French, Italian and Portuguese, was much higher than ours.

Do you think there are reasons other than technical and structural ones for that? Do you think people of those nationalities are more willing to exercise their right to vote even if they are abroad?

• (1125)

[*English*]

**Timothy Veale:** Daniel, would you like to go ahead?

**Daniel Scuka:** Sure.

Just to take one step back, we're still in the early days of Canadians overseas having an unfettered right to vote and being able to exercise that right. It's just been a few years and a few election cycles since 2019. I'm willing to bet that a large number of Canadians living overseas—and that number's only growing because of Canada's engagement in the world, and it's a much-needed engagement—are actually unaware and, indeed, don't have the confidence that their vote makes a difference. We see that, in Canada itself, many voters feel that their vote doesn't make a difference, and they're living right in their home constituency.

I think it's going to take some time. It will take some efforts from Elections Canada and from politicians of all stripes, all parties and candidates, to campaign towards those Canadians outside of the country. It will take a success, a candidate winning in an election, who stands up and says, "I won my election because I got votes from those Canadians outside. It really made a difference." That full cycle is going to have to play out.

What I think we're arguing for here today is that we begin that process, we strengthen what Elections Canada can do and we educate. Both Dr. Veale and I are committed to educating our fellow Canadians—we're just voters ourselves, we're nobody special—and people do have to take a bit of responsibility for their own voting, to exercise their right.

Really, I was very impressed, in the last election, with how one candidate in my constituency had a very strong digital presence that was already in place when the writ dropped. That candidate did not have to build up a new channel to reach overseas voters. I knew who that candidate was in a few days. The other candidates didn't have that.

We also have to educate candidates by saying, "Hey, you have significant numbers of voters living outside of the country. You have to reach them somehow, just like you have to reach everybody else in your constituency."

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

**Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank both witnesses for being with us, especially Dr. Veale, who is joining us from Hong Kong, where it's late.

My first question is for Mr. Scuka.

You said that, in some cases, it has been difficult to establish the last residential address of a Canadian citizen. I'd like you to tell us more about what kind of evidence is required to establish a citizen's last address and last riding of residence.

[*English*]

**Daniel Scuka:** In principle, it's a straightforward process, and Dr. Veale will know this as well. On the form mentioned earlier that you file with Elections Canada, you simply state what your last address was.

For a Canadian who has recently moved out of Canada, that's a black and white, very straightforward position. I've not lived in Canada since 1994. My last address in Canada was for the two years that I lived in Ottawa, when I was a member of the Canadian Forces and was stationed in National Defence headquarters. My address was in Ottawa Centre.

That was the only time in my life, for two years, that I was connected to Ottawa Centre. For those two years, I was stationed in Ottawa. I moved out. I don't have any friends in Ottawa. I probably have some classmates or somebody I could find.

I grew up in Beaches—East York. That's where I go. That's the centre of Toronto. My family lives there. My friends live there. I know the candidates. I know some of the issues on the ground. I don't know what the voters of Ottawa Centre are concerned about. It must be something, but I have no idea what.

I was able to contact Elections Canada, and on the basis that I only lived in Ottawa Centre for two years, I wrote them a long letter. They agreed that I could state the last address where I lived in Beaches—East York. That was the house where my mother...where I grew up. She has since passed away, many years ago. The house has long since been sold. I have no connection to that house. I went for a run in May, when I was back in Canada, and I ran down the street to look at it. It looks weird to me these days.

The house where I have a connection is where my uncle lives. That's where I stay when I come to Toronto, so I asked Elections Canada if I could switch to that address, within the same riding. There were a dozen emails. They became very confused and asked me why I wanted to change the address. I said that if they were going to send me anything, I didn't even know anybody who lived at my old address.

My point is—and I don't want to go into arcana here—that tying my vote to a location where I have zero connection and where there is no mechanism to change.... In the United States, my wife is a U.S. voter, and once a year, she can change her district within her state because things change.

If you want me to be interested in the candidates, as a voter, and if you want me to take an interest in some part of Canada because I'm tied to that, please let it be the riding in which I do have a connection.

Thank you.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** I have a follow-up question for you, if I may.

You mentioned that your wife can change her district once a year. Do you think there's a risk that we'll start choosing the ridings that suit us? As we saw in the last election, every vote counts. One vote can make a difference.

In your opinion, what protection mechanism could prevent that kind of choice when the vote is close?

[*English*]

**Daniel Scuka:** May I pass that question to my friend, Dr. Veale?

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Sure.

[*English*]

**Timothy Veale:** Absolutely. I think there's ample opportunity to establish effective guardrails to prevent such an issue as you've described.

In fact, I think the guardrails that are in place to prevent that for resident Canadians should work for non-resident Canadians. I don't know what is currently preventing resident Canadians from doing the same. I would expect that something comparable should work equally as well.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** The address of a Canadian resident is generally recorded in government systems. That is the address where they receive documents related to various benefits, for example. The home address is therefore much easier to establish than the last address or address of interest of a non-resident citizen.

I'm trying to see how there could be similar safeguards between the two. What might the safeguards be for people living abroad, since they can't be the same?

[English]

**Timothy Veale:** I appreciate that additional aspect to your question. Thanks.

I still don't see it being a difficult challenge to overcome. If there is a most recent address that registers resident Canadians, I think something comparable could be established for those who most recently lived in Canada or who are about to leave. It can't be too great a challenge for Elections Canada—if that's the authority—or for a governmental agency to establish a set of criteria that could be made based on some recommendations by a committee like yourselves to say, "We'd like to establish these following guardrails. It has to be demonstrated by physical proof of a recent address. That could be a bill for some sort of payment tied to a residential address." I think mechanisms like that work for resident Canadians. I think for somebody in today's increasingly globalized world where there's a greater amount of mobility, a greater number of Canadians moving abroad, coming back.... I don't think it would be difficult for them to be able to establish a most recent address with physical proof. I think that would not be a very difficult challenge to overcome, but it's an important one.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Ms. Normandin.

[English]

We will now go to the Conservatives.

Mr. Van Popta, you have five minutes, please.

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses for being here at a time that is inconvenient to you. We really do appreciate your participation, particularly given the apparently low interest amongst Canadians overseas in participating in our electoral system.

Dr. Veale, I scribbled down as quickly as I could the statistics that you were giving us about voter turnout amongst overseas Canadians. I think you said that there are five million overseas Canadians and that 72% have eligibility. I don't argue with that number. That's probably reliable. That translates into 3.6 million potential voters, and only 100,000 actually bothered to take any steps at all in getting involved in the election system. You're comparing that to other countries, but I want to make sure, when we're comparing to other countries, that we're comparing apples to apples.

I'm going to turn to a recent Supreme Court of Canada case that one of you referenced. It was the Frank decision of 2019, where the Supreme Court of Canada struck down as unconstitutional that provision in the Canada Elections Act that prohibited Canadians who've been overseas for more than five years from being able to vote. That was considered to be unconstitutional. With the stroke of a pen, there were a million additional voters added to the voters list. It doesn't mean that there are one million overseas Canadians who were engaged in our political system.

Dr. Veale, when you're comparing Canadian statistics to, let's say, American statistics or those of some of the European countries that you mentioned, what are those countries' rules about overseas citizens being engaged in the electoral system? Is it open to everybody, or are there some limitations? Do you know?

**Timothy Veale:** I wish I could tell you with great precision. Thanks for this question; it's a great one. I don't have a precise answer to give you on what their actual rules are. In reference to what Daniel was sharing before, I have observed that their participation has increased over time—over decades—and we are just having initial conversations about this. It's an idea that's talked about very little.

As far as who exactly can and cannot vote among the diaspora of the countries named, regrettably I'm uncertain. I wish I could say.

**Tako Van Popta:** Thank you for that.

I'm going to pass the mic over to my colleague, Mr. Calkins, who has a related question.

Thank you.

**Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC):** Most Canadians know that when they file their taxes they have an option to share their residency and allow the CRA to share that information with Elections Canada. I'm assuming that both of you are aware of that?

**Timothy Veale:** Yes.

**Daniel Scuka:** Yes.

**Blaine Calkins:** That's largely replaced the notion of enumerating people for elections for the last significant number of years.

I can't remember which one of you brought up the notion that the United States of America has a much higher voter turnout from its citizens living abroad. In fairness to the question that my colleague Mr. Van Popta just asked, the United States of America taxes citizenship, not residency. While I'm not going to ask you when we will pay taxes for the last time in Canada, if we're going to be comparing voter participation in countries, perhaps we shouldn't be comparing a country that taxes citizenship versus a country that taxes residency, which is what Canada does.

I guess I'm curious. Is there any other country that does what Canada does that has a better voter turnout? You did reference Portugal. I think you said that Portugal, and I think France as well, have some different systems. I would be curious on your position in choosing to use the United States of America when citizens living abroad actually pay taxes to the United States federal government and Canadians living abroad do not.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Before we answer that, you are at five minutes. I was going to add a minute at the end of the round, so if that works for you, I can add that minute now. I'll ask the witnesses if one of you wants to take the full minute or split it to 30 seconds. I would appreciate it.

**Daniel Scuka:** Do you want to go ahead, Timothy?

**Timothy Veale:** Yes, I do. I'm happy to take that question.

On apples to apples, I completely agree. I can confirm to you that in France, French citizens are taxed on residency, not on citizenship, just as in Canada, and yet they have this history of representation abroad. As a result, I believe, they have much higher voter participation rates.

At the same time, I think there's an indirect reference to a topic that needs to be brought up about representation without taxation. Is that fair? Does that need to be looked at? It does, absolutely.

The French pull it off. The Americans have higher representation and participation than we do. I think Canada should explore fair models of taxation for non-resident Canadians as well. I think that needs to be considered as part and parcel of the broader conversation.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We will turn to Madam Kayabaga. The same offer I gave to the Conservatives applies if you want to use the extra minute. If not, I can apply it to the next Liberal who speaks.

Please go ahead.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I would also like to thank our witnesses for being here and making the necessary arrangements to participate in this discussion.

I'm going to pick up on the conversation around taxation and the requirements that are on Canadian citizens to participate in taxes versus Canadians who are part of the diaspora abroad. What would be the logic or the reason to make that investment if the requirements are not the same for all Canadians?

Either one of you can take that question.

**Daniel Scuka:** Could I jump in with a reply?

Thank you for the question. It's a great one, and this topic is a very important one.

I will preface my remarks by pointing that that in Canada, forever, taxation has occurred when a taxable event occurs. You or I will pay GST or HST when we purchase a good or a service. If we don't purchase a good or a service, we don't pay GST or HST, and so on and so forth. All taxes are tied to a taxable event.

The challenge in making Canada more like the U.S., if that would be the right way to go, is to define what the taxable event is when a Canadian expatriates himself or herself because of their job, because of their family, because of engagement overseas. I think we can assume that this was a good thing without going into too much detail. Define the taxable event that has occurred. It's different, as

you have just mentioned, from a Canadian who stays in their home riding or constituency.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** I can rephrase my question this way.

I think it was Mr. Veale who talked about representation without that tax fairness and the taxation on Canadians live abroad. Help me understand how that's a fair system for Canadians who have representation because they're paying the taxes.

**Daniel Scuka:** I can answer that in two ways.

First of all, we have to respect the SCC decision. It was very clear. Residency has zero bearing on the right to vote.

That decision, as was previously explained by one of the committee members, was an extremely powerful decision. The decision left no doubt in anyone's mind as to how there is a separation between the right to vote and.... As I mentioned in my comments, it's a fundamental element of Canadian citizenship and, I think, of Canadian identity.

Back to your question, though, take my sister. She recently passed away. In her life, she was living in Peterborough, Ontario. She did not have a job. She was handicapped. She received the Ontario disability assistance. She paid no taxes. She had no income. She did not pay taxes to anybody anywhere in Canada, other than the GST if she bought a coffee at Tim Hortons. That's a detail. My point is, she could vote. What is the taxable event that she has to do or would have had to do to demonstrate that she was eligible to vote that I don't...? Do you see what I mean?

Again, this is a classic argument: You have to have skin in the game to be a voter. Hang on for a second. What is it that you want me to pay tax for? You might say, well, all Canadians should pay tax because they're Canadians and they benefit from all levels of government and all the things the governments do for them. That's fantastic, and now you're into the territory of poll tax, and this is nowhere that any of us in the room, I think, want to go.

It's important, as Dr. Veale mentioned. I would definitely refer to his comments. It's a very important question, but it's a difficult one, and I don't have a clear answer for you.

• (1145)

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Yes. Thank you for that.

If I could go back to the question around an attachment to where you cast your vote, you did share that you lived in Ottawa during your last posting but that you're attached to some parts of Toronto Centre. That's where you think that connection is identified, because you have family there, friends there and I imagine even parents. What happens if your parents are no longer in Toronto Centre? How do you cast a vote based off attachment versus where your actual...?

What other tools could we use to determine where you cast your ballot and based off what issues you vote? How many Canadians who are living abroad pay attention to the current issues in Canada, especially when it comes to local, detailed issues? Do Canadians living abroad want to participate only in federal elections or do they also want to participate in much more local issues, such as municipal elections?

**The Chair:** That was a very lengthy question—

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** —but I'll grant a very brief answer because we're at time now.

**Daniel Scuka:** I will give a one-minute answer and then I will pass it to my friend Dr. Veale.

**The Chair:** Just you, and then we'll move on, but thank you.

Go ahead.

**Daniel Scuka:** Very briefly, I will point to Dr. Veale. He's proposing the creation of seats in the House of Commons that are dedicated to the overseas voters, precisely to eliminate and to account for the issues you've just mentioned of attachment, geographical representation, and then engagement or involvement in those local or even hyperlocal issues.

**The Chair:** We're well over time.

Thank you so much.

Madam Normandin, you have three and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for Dr. Veale, but I would appreciate it if Mr. Scuka could add to the answers afterwards.

Mr. Veale, you discussed the possibility of having a representative model based on the model used in France for citizens living abroad. I know that, in France, it's often grouped by region. For example, French people living in the greater Asia-Pacific region have a representative.

I'd like you to tell us about a specific aspect of the model that you would tend to recommend.

If four million Canadian citizens live abroad and if the ridings were to be the same size as the ones we have here, about 90,000 voters per riding, that would mean there would be 45 more ridings. The participation rate of Canadians living abroad is only 1%, which is a far cry from what's happening here. That would mean that an electoral candidate could win a riding with only a handful of votes.

I would like you to tell us about the distribution of ridings for citizens who live outside the country. Would it be distributed according to the major geographic regions? Would the number of voters there be much higher than 90,000? What did you have in mind?

• (1150)

[*English*]

**Timothy Veale:** Thank you, first, for the question. It's a very practical question and an important one.

I would initially look at geography over population, although they both have to be factored in and a balance has to be struck.

For example, in the city where I am right now in Hong Kong, as I mentioned, there are almost 400,000 Canadians living here. If ridings were based purely on population relative to other regions in the world, there might be a disproportionate number of seats coming from here, and that would create advantages and disadvantages, depending on a person's perspective.

I think, initially at least, that would be better looked at if that were not the case—if it were divided up geographically, not necessarily with an equal number of population per riding but through an approach established collaboratively through various sets of stakeholders—committees like this one, for example, or one like it—so that there is geographic representation.

The idea of Canadians abroad conjures ideas that we're talking about the entire planet, and there needs to be representation within a range of populations across a relatively equal number of regions across the planet.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Mr. Scuka, would you like to add anything?

[*English*]

**Daniel Scuka:** I would simply say that I fully endorse that at first look. Geography is probably the right way to go. Other countries, such as France, have solved it. My cousin in Toronto is married to a dual national who is a French Canadian citizen. He and his daughters in downtown Toronto go to the French consulate every time there's an election and vote. If France can solve the problem, so can we.

**The Chair:** Mr. Jackson, you have five minutes, please.

**Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the two witnesses for being here today.

I have to admit that I did a little Google search about France myself, because this is not what I thought we would be talking about today—the potential for MPs to be representing Canadians living abroad.

I understand that France has 11 MPs, or whatever the equivalent title is, and they're elected based on regions around the globe. I'm fascinated by what exactly you envision this looking like in the Canadian context.

You've mentioned 400,000 Canadians living in Hong Kong. Do you have a number of foreign MPs that you would suggest if the government were to undertake that work, and how would you divide them around the globe? I'm just really curious to know exactly how many there would be and where you think these folks should be representing.

**Timothy Veale:** That's another great practical question. I think initially there would have to be a reliable census of Canadians taken abroad, with different models looked at. In terms of the French approach, without knowing off the top of my head how many seats they have in the equivalent of their parliament, I think there needs to be some consideration of what kind of percentage any additional seats would add to the House of Commons in Ottawa.

As I mentioned, the number of Canadians abroad would be equivalent to the fifth-largest province in Canada. I'm not suggesting that we have the number of seats to represent that in proportion. I'm not suggesting that at all. But as a fair step, we should have some representation. We have none. Nobody solicits our votes. Decisions are made for us and about us, impacting us and impacting our children—impacting my children. We need to have some voices at the table, at tables like the one you're sitting at. We just don't have that.

We don't need to have an overly ambitious number of seats to represent overseas constituencies. I just think a minimally fair number would be appropriate.

• (1155)

**Grant Jackson:** Sure.

Mr. Scuka, do you have any comment on that as well?

**Daniel Scuka:** I would fully endorse what Dr. Veale has said. I would add that the 400,000 in Hong Kong make up probably one of the biggest concentrations of Canadians in one geographical region. Yes, that group of Canadians might have two or three seats assigned to them. I don't know what Elections Canada does on the average number of voters per constituency in geographical Canada today.

Going around the world, including western Europe and Africa, you have a huge number of Canadians working in aid in Africa and Southeast Asia. You could go around and probably come up with groupings that would somehow equate, as Dr. Veale said, to a fair coherency with what the population per riding is in Canada. There would be a dozen or 14 new seats in the House of Commons. This is not a bad thing at all.

**Grant Jackson:** I understand that the makeup of the House of Commons is outlined within the Constitution itself. Do you think this would require a constitutional amendment?

**Timothy Veale:** I don't think it necessarily would. Of course, it has to be considered. You've raised the question. It has to be considered. My reading is that it isn't a certainty.

**Grant Jackson:** Mr. Scuka, do you have any comment on that?

**Daniel Scuka:** I have no idea, so I can't comment, but you've raised the important point that voting for overseas Canadians is tightly tied to democracy itself in Canada. It is not something to be dismissed. It is something that relates to all the public and national debate that there has been in the past few years on first past the post versus other methods. It relates to all of it. It is simple on the surface but suddenly very complex underneath.

But no, I'm sorry, I don't know how that would affect it. I do know that to change how Elections Canada would receive votes, in terms of a mechanical change, would require a legislative change

for sure. As for a constitutional change for the number of seats in the House, I'm not sure.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Louis, you have five minutes, please.

**Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.):** Thank you to both witnesses.

I think we're hearing today that voting is how Canadians' voices are heard and every vote deserves to be counted. Voters deserve a fair and accessible opportunity to participate in our democracy. We're seeing that this is true for Canadians living abroad. We have people who are serving our country, studying, working or maybe even caring for family overseas. As we're seeing today, they still have strong connections to Canada and I believe this is an important discussion about their ability to vote and the accessibility of voting.

We want to make sure that voting is secure, reliable and inclusive. That is part of the logistics and it's a matter of democratic integrity.

I appreciate the witnesses, Dr. Veale and Mr. Scuka, being here from different parts of the world. We're having the discussion between Ottawa, Hong Kong and Germany right now. I appreciate your time and advocacy.

Just to recap those numbers, you're saying that five million Canadians are living outside of Canada, about 100,000 kits were applied for and then about half of those were returned. That's about a 1.7% voter participation rate.

I appreciate us talking about those barriers. To go from five million down to 100,000 kits applied for, half returned and that low participation rate....

I was looking at a way to start this, so I'll start with Dr. Veale.

I know you've been encouraging early registration. You're saying not to wait until an election is called.

Are there any improvements that can be made when Canadians leave Canada, so they can ensure they're registered to vote even before an election is called?

**Timothy Veale:** That's a great question.

As part of the process of registering as a non-resident, there could very easily be an aspect on the questionnaire or the survey that's issued to give Canadians moving abroad the opportunity to provide Elections Canada with any and all information that would help increase participation rates at future elections. I think that's a very small and easy technical solution. It should contribute to increased voter participation.

• (1200)

**Tim Louis:** I appreciate that. That's what I'm looking for—these small, technical solutions that can just start building the percentages.

Would it help then, if someone were registered, if the embassy or Elections Canada could keep in touch with that person as an election's coming or on an ongoing basis, so people know they are still on the registration list?

**Timothy Veale:** Yes, absolutely. That's another great question.

I don't see why there couldn't be improved technical coordination, let's say between the Canada Revenue Agency learning that I'm a non-resident for taxation purposes and Elections Canada. This coordination between agencies, where one is learning that I'm moving abroad.... That information is shared across agencies. That makes it easier to be automatically contacted when an election is called.

Again, that's just technical coordination. It's a small but important step forward.

**Tim Louis:** That's what I'm looking for.

Mr. Scuka, you mentioned that you had to physically mail a piece of paper to get a piece of paper from Canada. Can you see how that could be tightened up?

You said it's possible that submitting information and then getting it back digitally could save some time as well.

**Daniel Scuka:** Sure, absolutely. I have an account with the Royal Bank. I can log in right now, and I can move money, pay bills and borrow money. I have an account with Service Canada. I can log in right now to see what my CPP estimate is. I have an account with Revenue Canada.

Why can I not have an account with Elections Canada where I can log in, make sure my information is up to date and that there's a green check mark so I know I'm on the international voters list?

When the next election is called, I'll get an email or something will pop up, and I will get sent that ballot electronically, which I will print on my printer right over there, name the candidate of my choice and mail—we've now devolved to the moving dead trees aspect—that back plenty in advance.

Elections Canada could do a lot, I think, within the current legislative framework or maybe with only minor legislative changes.

Furthermore, I would really want to see Elections Canada informing all candidates in all constituencies of the number of voters who are living overseas and how to contact them electronically. That is something Elections Canada does now. Many people in this room have been candidates, and you know better than I do. You get that list of voters, your campaign gets that list of voters, and you are enabled by law to contact them because you are candidating yourself and sharing your vision, your messaging and your policies. That absolutely should be done for overseas voters as well.

Again, as I said earlier, we'll kick-start this probably lengthy virtuous circle of getting more and more Canadians contacted by candidates, getting more and more to engage, getting candidates to pay more and more attention to votes that could sway the election in their constituency, and we get a virtuous cycle.

There are some concrete things that Elections Canada could do right now. The technical experts will know whether that requires regulatory change or legislative change.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

That ends our session.

I'd like to thank both of our witnesses for being here.

I will suspend the meeting for us to go in camera for the next portion of our meeting.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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