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Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 14 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), the committee is meeting for its study of challenges regarding special ballot voting.

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

Before we continue, I'd ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the back of the cards on the tables. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants involved, especially our interpreters. There's a QR code and a video you can watch. I would recommend that you do that, please.

I have a few comments for the benefit of members. All comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, as always, if you wish to speak, raise your hand. If you end up on Zoom at some point, use the "raise hand" feature.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for today's first panel. From the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, we have Monsieur Perrault, who is the Chief Electoral Officer. Welcome back.

We also have Michel Roussel, deputy chief electoral officer, electoral events and innovation; and Danielle Duquette, special voting rules administrator.

We received a message that your opening may be a bit longer than usual. I am using my prerogative to grant that.

Please go ahead, Monsieur Perrault.

[Translation]

Stéphane Perrault (Chief Electoral Officer, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will try to give my remarks in less than five minutes.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee today about its study on special ballot voting.

I would first like to give a brief overview of the evolution of special ballots since the repeal of proxy voting and the expansion of the special voting rules in 1993 and then speak to special ballot voting during the 45th general election.

The Canada Elections Act divides electors into five categories for the purposes of administering the special voting rules: Canadian Forces electors, international electors, incarcerated electors, national electors and local electors. Each category has its own set of rules to administer, which can result in some complexity.

Prior to 1993, Canadians living or travelling outside the country could not cast a ballot. Only military personnel and diplomats were allowed to do so.

In 1993, special ballot voting was expanded to allow for voting by anyone, including Canadians living or travelling abroad. These legislative changes also provided for certain electors who are homebound to be served by special ballot by an election officer.

Further legislative changes were adopted in 2018 to implement two Supreme Court decisions. One decision expanded the vote to all incarcerated electors. The other removed the five-year limit for Canadians living abroad. Until then, Canadians living abroad for more than five years were not allowed to vote unless they were serving in the military or in the federal civil service.

[English]

Over the years, Elections Canada has also expanded the use of the special ballot regime to address the needs of electors facing barriers.

In the 1990s, Elections Canada began to use special ballots to serve electors in hospitals, and in 2004, special ballots were used to allow workers in remote work locations, such as mines, to vote outside of their electoral districts. In 2015, Elections Canada launched a vote on campus pilot project to open external service points at post-secondary institutions. Vote on campus also took place in 2019 and 2025.

In 2019, Elections Canada offered special voting kiosks as part of an action plan to accommodate electors observing Jewish holidays. In total, there were 27 kiosks open to all eligible electors in 15 electoral districts, and more than 7,000 electors took advantage of this offering.

In 2021, to ensure the safe delivery of the election during the COVID pandemic, we promoted the use of special ballots, allowing electors to vote by mail from the safety of their homes. We also improved the local vote-by-mail service by allowing local electors to apply online and provided the means to track ballots. In addition, long-term care facilities that were under quarantine were offered special ballot voting.

Finally, during the last few elections, in response to exceptional circumstances where incidents such as a severe storm or flooding impacted electors' opportunities to vote, we were able to offer replacement voting options through additional service points and the use of special ballots.

The use of special ballots in all of these cases allowed us to provide flexibility and remove barriers for electors.

During the last election, over 1.2 million electors voted using a special ballot—more than ever before and almost double the number in 2019.

Special ballots were integral to expanding services to electors, including through the vote on campus program that was offered for the first time in a non-fixed date election, and to accommodating some indigenous communities. The largest increase in voting was among voters who chose to vote by special ballot within their local communities. The number of national and international electors also doubled.

Overall, the rate of ballots returned late has decreased compared to previous elections, despite the fact that the Easter weekend interrupted mail delivery at a critical point in the electoral calendar. However, late ballots from international electors remained high, and I'd be happy to speak to that later through questions.

While the use of special ballots contributed to making the electoral process more accessible during the last election, the high volume and complexity of special ballots resulted in administrative errors, which I've reported to this committee. To make sure that special ballot voting services are adapted to this increased use by Canadians, following the election, I launched an internal review of Elections Canada's training program, control mechanisms and processes related to special ballot voting. The review is being finalized as we speak, and my team has produced a number of recommendations for improvements, which I will be happy to share with the committee very shortly.

• (1105)

Thank you. I would be happy to answer questions.

If it is appropriate, Mr. Chair, I would invite members to direct their questions to me, and of course, my officials will intervene as appropriate or as required.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome back to committee, Mr. Perrault.

The riding in which a Canadian living abroad votes is determined by their last address in Canada. The Elections Canada application for registration to vote abroad requires a prospective elector to provide proof of Canadian citizenship. However, the application does not require that a prospective elector provide proof of their last place of residence in Canada.

Without such proof, how does Elections Canada verify that a prospective elector is providing their actual last place of residence in Canada and is voting in the appropriate riding?

Stéphane Perrault: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

The regime is designed in recognition of the fact that people living abroad, who may have lived abroad for a long time, often will not have documentary proof of residence. Their application serves as the means to determine where they will vote. The critical point is that once they have registered on the international register at a particular location, they cannot change it until they come back to Canada to reside, so there is no opportunity to further change electoral districts for perhaps political considerations.

Michael Cooper: I take your point that that's once they are on the register, but what proof or verification is there before they get onto the register to vote in a specific riding?

Stéphane Perrault: As I indicated, there is no verification. There is an offence for making a false and misleading statement in the application. If evidence comes up that the statement made by the applicant was wrong, of course there may be consequences, but that regime is designed in recognition of the fact that there may be no such evidence to produce for verification.

Michael Cooper: Just so I'm crystal clear, Elections Canada takes the prospective elector at their word, subject to there being evidence that in fact they are voting in the wrong riding.

• (1110)

Stéphane Perrault: That's correct. That is the regime designed by Parliament, for the reasons I indicated.

Michael Cooper: As you noted, once someone is registered, they remain registered. As I understand it, that means a special ballot kit will be sent to that address at the time the writ is issued. Do I have that right?

Stéphane Perrault: That's correct.

Michael Cooper: What steps are taken to ensure the special ballot kit actually makes its way into the hands of the prospective elector, given that it could have been several years since they applied to be listed on the register at that particular address?

Stéphane Perrault: That's a very good question.

Every 12 to 18 months, we issue a confirmation process. We write to all the people on the register to confirm their address. If they do not reply, we take it that they have moved, and we remove them from the register. It is regularly verified, so there will not be several years before that occurs.

The other thing that is important to know is that if a kit is issued to the wrong address—for example because a person no longer resides there—a number of elements of information need to be completed on the outer envelope, which are then matched with the information we have in the register to make sure that only the right person is using the kit.

Michael Cooper: I have two things.

First, with regard to the verification that is sent out, you said that about every 18 months—

Stéphane Perrault: It's 12 to 18 months.

Michael Cooper: Every 12 to 18 months, is it an email that is sent?

Stéphane Perrault: That's correct.

Michael Cooper: If you don't hear back, just to clarify, what happens?

Stéphane Perrault: We would remove the elector from the register. They can apply again to register.

Michael Cooper: Does that happen fairly often?

Stéphane Perrault: They have a month to reply, but yes, we have people who are removed from the register.

Michael Cooper: Okay.

You then spoke about the special ballot kit. Once an elector fills out their ballot, puts it in the inner envelope, puts that in the outer envelope and sends that back to Elections Canada headquarters in Ottawa, you spoke of there being some verification measures. Can you elaborate on what exactly those are?

Stéphane Perrault: That's correct. These are the measures that are prescribed in legislation. We have to verify that there is a signature on the outer envelope, that the name of the elector is there.

We do a bar code scan to make sure the return envelope matches the kit that was issued. That, of course, is of critical importance. It ensures that a kit that may have been issued in a previous election will never be used in a subsequent election if it was not used in that election, because the bar code ensures there is a proper match.

Michael Cooper: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will move on to Madame Kayabaga for six minutes, please.

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

[*Translation*]

Good morning, Mr. Perrault. Welcome back to our committee.

[*English*]

I'm going to ask my questions in English.

I wanted to ask you a few questions about Bill C-3. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the bill. It is the lost Canadians bill, which has now been passed and received royal assent. I want to drive the conversation about Canadians who are born of Canadians abroad and may not necessarily have their Canadian citizenship yet, but will be provided one.

Can you give us an idea of how that process is going to go for Canadians who become Canadians through Bill C-3 and do not live in Canada? What is the plan? What are the requirements or any legal procedures they may have to go through? The requirement to be added to the register to vote is that you must have lived in Canada for a specific amount of time. I'm curious to know about that. I see you're already shaking your head, so let's hear you on it.

Stéphane Perrault: Following the Supreme Court decision in the case of Frank and Duong, Parliament amended the legislation. Any person who has Canadian citizenship and who lives abroad may register.

The act provides that the place in which they vote, the place in which they register in Canada, is their “last place of ordinary residence”. However, the act also states that every person is deemed to have a place of ordinary residence in Canada, and section 9 says that if we are unable to determine by the normal rules what is the “place of ordinary residence”, then the relevant election officer—which in this case would be Madame Duquette and her team—would come to a determination of what that place is. It could be where the family members in Canada are or last were. It could be a place of work. Even though they are abroad, they may have worked in Canada. It would be some place of connection.

At the end of the day, we are required to find the most appropriate location for that elector. As I indicated earlier, once that location is identified, the person stays with that location until and if they come to Canada to reside again—not just to visit but to actually reside in Canada.

• (1115)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Okay. That covers a multitude of questions I had for you on that front.

The last time I was here and was asking questions on this specific question, we were talking about taxation—Canadians who pay taxes versus those who don't and whether or not they have the right to vote.

I'd like to hear you on that. Are there any rules around Canadians who pay taxes and those who don't?

Stéphane Perrault: The Supreme Court was very clear in the case of Frank and Duong. All Canadian citizens, wherever they live, wherever they pay taxes, if they pay taxes, have the same constitutional right to vote, and there is no flexibility there. The ruling was very firm on that.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: There were a couple of questions from colleagues in the room who are concerned about what is considered a home riding for someone who has never resided in Canada. Can you expand a bit on that? Maybe both of you can decide who answers this question.

We're just curious to know, for a Canadian who may become a Canadian citizen through Bill C-3, how they choose the riding. Do they decide what riding they pick? Let's say they have different sides of their families. A family member may come from Alberta and another one may come from southwestern Ontario. Who decides where they vote, and how do they make that decision?

Stéphane Perrault: It will be for the elector to make that decision transparently in conversation with our team. The choice has to reflect some connection. As you indicated in your question—it's a very good example—there may be more than one legitimate place to anchor, if I can use that term, the elector for the purpose of the electoral process. However, again, once that is determined, no movement is allowed, so it's a one-time determination.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: There have also been discussions around the fact that many ballots were requested in the last election, in the 2025 general election, but not many were returned. Is this something that we want to keep doing if the request is being made but the return is really low? Maybe there's a lack of interest among Canadians who live abroad in voting in Canada.

Stéphane Perrault: That's a very rich question. I don't know that I'll be able to answer all of it in the time allowed.

There was double the number of international voters. There was a high interest in this election. However, not being a fixed-date election, more than half of those electors applied during the election period. What you see if you divide the calendar for the election into four blocks.... The first block is right off at the issuance of the writs. Those who are already registered are sent a kit. There the return rate is very high. Then there's the first third of people who apply—time-wise the first third—and the return rate is good. However, as you progress in the calendar, it dramatically declines. Those who apply in the last segment have, if I'm not mistaken, an 8% return rate.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: I have 30 seconds left, so I'm going to ask you this question really quickly.

Our last witness talked about paying a fee of \$124 to return her ballot in a fast manner. Is that fair, given that other Canadians are not paying that kind of fee? How can the process be better for them.

You have 20 seconds.

Stéphane Perrault: We offer all Canadians the opportunity, if they have access to a consulate or embassy, to return their ballots through it. Elections Canada pays the delivery service through the embassy, so there is an expedited process.

The Chair: Thank you so much. You're over time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Mr. Perrault, thank you once again for your great availability.

I'd like to start with a general knowledge question, because I don't know how to vote from abroad.

In terms of the kit that voters receive, is it a white ballot on which they have to write the candidate's name?

It has to be said that the candidates aren't necessarily known from the start of the election. Is that an obstacle or, on the contrary, is it a way to ensure that voters abroad keep up a bit with what's going on in local politics and take some interest in the election campaign, since they have to consult the Elections Canada website to see who the candidates are? Are there pros and cons? I'd like to hear your opinion on that.

● (1120)

Stéphane Perrault: I'm going to add to what you're saying. Yes, there are pros and cons to that. It isn't an easy question.

We know that ballots can take an average of 12 days before getting back to us, but that varies greatly depending on where in the world the voter is. The data isn't the same for Cincinnati as for Asia, for example. We also know that, on average, voters wait six days before returning their ballots to us in the mail. However, those figures have to be taken with a grain of salt. They come from surveys we've done in the past.

It's likely that if voters receive a kit at the beginning of the election campaign, they'll wait until the end of the nominations, which is 21 days before the election, to return their ballots to us. As a result, the return of the ballots is delayed to some extent, at least up to day 21, based on the countdown.

That means that where voters are in the world can have an effect on the success rate of returning the ballots. That's a possibility, but there's usually enough time.

Certainly, if the Canada Elections Act made it possible to put the name of the party on the special ballot, which isn't currently the case, it would speed up the process, but there would be other disadvantages related to that. It's a public policy decision.

Christine Normandin: I'd like to hear your opinion on how potential voters are contacted.

I understand that they have to register on a list. Those who are registered may have already established some form of voting habit. I imagine they're fairly regular voters.

However, how do you contact the others? Do you know if there are any initiatives in place? Are there parallel forums for Canadians voting abroad? Should the government focus more on contacting potential voters rather than broadening the ways in which they can vote?

Stéphane Perrault: Yes, I think that if there were a project to launch, it would be in communications. That doesn't mean it's easy. We're talking about a diaspora here, people who are all over the world. The main mode of communication is our website.

We also work with the Department of Foreign Affairs to give them information, which they then distribute to all the embassies and consulates. In a way, that means there's a mechanism for disseminating information, but it requires voters to take a certain amount of interest in the first place.

We also have social media campaigns, content that spreads naturally and paid advertising that gets shown. There are strategic targets. I'm not an expert on social media targeting, but there's advertising that targets those communities.

It would be a good idea, then, to see whether that can be improved in some way, to better educate voters not only on the opportunity to vote, but also on the importance of returning their ballots on time, and to inform them of how to do so.

Christine Normandin: I have a sub-question. I had already touched on the subject a bit.

Do voters who are already registered have established voting habits? Is that something you see, or is that not necessarily the case?

Stéphane Perrault: I would say that voters who are already registered internationally have a higher voter turnout than the general population. There are a number of reasons for that. First, the fact that they have registered shows an interest. Second, the fact that they receive a kit at home can spark or heighten an interest. I won't get lost in explanations, but the data shows that there's a slightly higher voter turnout among those voters.

Christine Normandin: In terms of the various ways to vote from abroad, you talked about the possibility of going to a consulate or an embassy. Some countries offer other options, such as proxy voting.

Has your organization ever studied that option? That approach could be offered, for example, to someone who lives in a very remote region, who would like to vote but doesn't have access to good postal services and would have to drive hours to get to the consulate to vote. They could then ask a family member or a loved one who lives closer to the consulate to do it for them. Is that something that has been studied?

Stéphane Perrault: That has been studied. In fact, it used to exist in the act, but not for international voters. Before 1993, there was proxy voting, but it was decided that it would be best to get rid of it.

I'm going to posit two reasons for that decision: first, the notion of the secrecy of the vote; and second, the leap of faith that voters make when they entrust their vote to someone else. Those are probably the two main flaws of proxy voting.

That said, there's also an administrative burden that comes with confirming that the proxy does indeed have the mandate from the voter, which can take time. The debate could be reopened, but at the time, it was decided that as long as there were administrative steps, it was preferable to expand the special ballot rather than pursue proxy voting and expand it internationally.

• (1125)

Christine Normandin: Have any studies been done on electronic voting?

Stéphane Perrault: There have been all kinds of studies on electronic voting. I'm not a fan of it when it comes to national elections. It's an option to explore in other contexts. I'm not aware of any G7 country that uses electronic voting. Most of the countries that have considered it have backed away from the cybersecurity challenges it poses. It's also a matter of trust. It's all well and good to have security, but people have to believe in it and trust the system.

I don't think it's feasible at the moment. That was also the unanimous conclusion reached by the parliamentary committee that studied this issue a few years ago.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Van Popta, you have five minutes.

Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC): Thank you to the witnesses for being here. For Mr. Perrault, it's the second or third time.

I have a question about the integrity of the balloting process and where the ballots go, where they end up.

First, I want to clarify one thing, following up on the questions from my colleague Mr. Cooper, about who receives voting kits abroad. My understanding is that once a person is registered and on the international electors list, whatever it's called, that person is there permanently, subject to confirmation every 18 months or so that they're still on it.

Stéphane Perrault: That's correct.

Tako Van Popta: The ballot kit then goes to all of the people who are on that list and have reaffirmed within the last 18 months. Is that correct?

Stéphane Perrault: That is correct.

Tako Van Popta: Good. Thank you.

Looking at your report—this is just for my understanding—on page 21, in table 4, you note that the number of electors living outside of Canada voting by mail is 101,000 plus. Let's call it 102,000. Of those, only 57,000 returned a ballot, which is 56.5%. That is a very low percentage compared to the other forms of voting.

Just to be clear, the 102,000 ballots issued were not ballots that were recently requested; they were sent out automatically to anybody who was on your voters list.

Stéphane Perrault: The majority of those were recently requested during the writ period. There were 48,000 electors on the register at the issuing of the writ—

Danielle Duquette (Special Voting Rules Administrator, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer): There were 43,000.

Stéphane Perrault: There were 43,000, and they were sent a kit right at the writ-drop. The remainder were people who registered during the writ period.

Of course, depending on the time, they may have received the kit in a timely way, but in some cases, it was after election day. These late registrations explain that in non-fixed-date elections, we have lower return rates.

Tako Van Popta: I'm just surprised by those numbers. There were 48,000 are on your electors list—

Stéphane Perrault: There were 43,000. I was corrected.

Tako Van Popta: There were 43,000, sorry.

How many Canadians live abroad? I understand there might be three million.

Stéphane Perrault: It's a good question. I've seen estimates of between two million and four million. I've read different estimates.

Tako Van Popta: That's a very low percentage of Canadians—

Stéphane Perrault: It is.

Tako Van Popta: —living abroad who are interested enough to get on the voters list. Is that your understanding?

Stéphane Perrault: It is a very low percentage. No matter whether its two million or four million, it remains low.

Tako Van Popta: Do you see that as a problem, or is it just the natural way of things that people who live abroad might not be very interested in what's going on in Canada?

Stéphane Perrault: That is my perspective. Those who are interested have the right to exercise their right to vote, but they're not compelled to. I'm not entirely surprised by the fact that there are so few.

Tako Van Popta: I wasn't going to ask this question. My colleague Ms. Normandin already asked about electronic voting.

Do you think those numbers would improve if we had electronic voting?

Stéphane Perrault: It raises an interesting question. It would make it easier. Whether they would want to vote is another matter. It also raises the question of whether Parliament would want to make voting easier for Canadians abroad than it is for Canadians living in Canada.

Tako Van Popta: Yes. That's a very good point.

Now I'm going to get to what I was really going to ask, which is about the security of the ballots once they've been received and mailed back to Ottawa's centre. The last time you were here, I asked you a question about the ballots in Port Coquitlam that went missing.

Stéphane Perrault: That's correct.

Tako Van Popta: There's room for human error.

Stéphane Perrault: There is.

Tako Van Popta: What happens with ballots once they arrive at the central place in Ottawa? How secure is it? Is it camera-monitored? Who's in charge?

Stéphane Perrault: This is a good question for Madame Duquette. I'll let her speak to it, rather than correct me.

• (1130)

Danielle Duquette: Thank you.

Of course the location is very secure. There's restricted access, and the ballots or the outer envelopes are always under lock and key.

Also, before we start the count, a verification process happens with the outer envelopes where we do some integrity checks. First of all, we check if the outer envelope has been signed by the elector. If there's a bar code on it, is the bar code associated to the application we got or the record we have on file for the elector? Is it the same ED? Can we match the ED for the purposes of voting? Once those checks are done, the ballots are sorted by ED and then sent to the count.

It's a very secure location. Access is restricted to people who deal with the outer envelopes.

Tako Van Popta: That's fair enough.

To what extent do you check ID to make sure the person on your voters list is actually the person casting the ballot, filling it in or doing check marks or whatever they do?

The Chair: Please give a very quick answer.

Danielle Duquette: We do at the application level, absolutely.

Stéphane Perrault: Once it's verified at the application level, there's a match with the bar code, and we know it's the same envelope. There's a signature and a name. If members would be interested in visiting the premises at Coventry, I would be very happy to host a visit. It's all under cage and chain.

The Chair: We do love field trips, but we have to get House approval. That's something we can discuss during our next committee business.

Thank you, Mr. Van Popta.

I am arbitrarily giving everyone an extra minute, including Mr. Van Popta, who had six minutes.

Madame Brière is next.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank the three witnesses for being here. I'd also like to thank them for their availability, since they have appeared as witnesses in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs a few times recently.

In the "Report on the 45th General Election of April 28, 2025", which you sent to us, you indicate that only 56.5% of international voters' ballots were received on time and counted. I have three more specific questions about that.

Do you know how many ballots were received on the same day but after 6 p.m.?

Do you know how many ballots were received the day after election day?

Do you know how many ballots were received in the following five days?

Stéphane Perrault: We have that data. It would be my pleasure to send it to the committee. It shows that, for international voters, the receipt of ballots follows a downward curve that extends over a little more than a week. For domestic voters who vote outside the riding by mailing their ballots to headquarters, that curve extends really over three or four days.

That means that there's a difference between the two, and we have that data.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Thank you for sending it to us.

Some witnesses have suggested allowing more time for international ballots to reach you. That would obviously delay the announcement of the election results. I'd like to know what you think of that suggestion.

Stéphane Perrault: It would indeed delay the announcement of the results. A number of countries do that. Here in Canada, British Columbia does that. However, in cases where the votes are close, it can increase tensions about the election results, concerns and sometimes even conspiracy theories. As a result, it isn't something I have recommended in the past.

However, I have recommended giving an extra week at the start of the election, when the election doesn't have a fixed date. That would have the same effect. There's less of a problem in a fixed-date election, because voters are better able to plan their vote. When there isn't a fixed date, if the idea is to add time, I would put it at the beginning of the election period, not at the end.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: The fact that there aren't fixed election dates has indeed been brought up regularly, as has the issue of the reliability of our postal system. On that matter, witnesses from other countries have said that there were a number of ways to vote. A few were listed earlier. There's proxy voting and electronic voting, for example. There's also a hybrid method whereby a person can receive their ballot by email, print it out at home, write the name of the person they're voting for and return the ballot by mail.

I have worked a lot with people who were no longer able to take care of their own affairs, so I have a question from that perspective. Say I live in France with my mother, who is no longer all there. I ask for a ballot for her. I write down the name I want and return it. I wonder how the government would go about ensuring that a person abroad is still of sound mind to vote, especially since the Elections Act no longer stipulates that someone unfit can't be represented.

• (1135)

Stéphane Perrault: In fact, unfit people, like everyone else, have the right to vote. They have to express that desire. When it comes to the special ballot, they still have to sign the outside envelope. There's an indication of action on the part of the person voting. Obviously, signatures can be forged. No system is bulletproof.

We explored the hybrid system some years ago. We started looking into it in 2018. Technically, it's possible to do. We would have to change our systems to do it, but it would be possible. There are still challenges. To keep voters from having to buy three different sizes of envelopes to make the insertions, which is very difficult, we designed a model, a folding system, which can be a bit complex

for the voter. The voter would also need to have a printer, but fewer and fewer people have printers at home.

Given the number of voters abroad, which was lower than it is now, and the complexity of all that, we didn't find this system to be a promising avenue when we looked into it at the time.

If the government wants to explore other mechanisms, if it's prepared to go further, there are more modern versions of telephone voting, if I may say so. I'm thinking of teleconferencing, where you see the person showing their ID and then being brought into a separate virtual room to vote anonymously. That wouldn't be allowed under the current legal framework, but it seems to me that it's more rooted in the future than methods such as folding, different envelopes formats and postal returns.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: You may say that I watch too much TV, but when I think about fake news and holograms, I think that we might see fake people showing up.

Stéphane Perrault: They would also have fake I.D.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: In addition, someone told us that it was sometimes hard to have to look everywhere for all the information about an election in the country. He suggested creating a website that would put all the information in one place.

Stéphane Perrault: All the information is in one tab on our website, so it would really be a variation on the same theme. These days, I think people who want to vote and are able to use the Internet can find all the information on our website during an election period. Our website is pretty well designed.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Madame Normandin, you have three and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

There's been a lot of talk about voter turnout among Canadians living abroad, which is estimated to be about 0.9%, if I'm not mistaken. One might question the relevance of the process if the turnout rate was about 1%, but a really small portion of the ballots sent to those individuals were returned to you. However, even if that doesn't represent a very high number of ballots, I understand that about 57% of the ballots sent to those people are returned to you afterwards. In the best of all possible worlds, the fact remains that less than 2% of the diaspora seem to be voting in elections.

I'd like your opinion on that. They seem to be saying that it's a bad thing that the rate is so low. That's more or less what we've heard from our colleagues. Perhaps it's a matter of interest or attachment. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that. Is it always a bad thing that voter turnout isn't higher than that?

Stéphane Perrault: That's more of a philosophical question than a technical one, and it may not be my primary role to answer it.

That said, I think you had the answer in your question. It's partly a matter of interest on the part of voters. There are some Canadian voters abroad who remain interested and want to vote in elections. Our job is to facilitate that and to ensure the integrity of the process.

However, it's not Elections Canada's job to engage people who are no longer in the country and sometimes haven't been for decades. Maybe the political parties will want to do that. Maybe there are other interests and other groups that want to engage them, but I don't think it's Elections Canada's job to engage people. I mean people in general, but especially those who left the country several years ago.

• (1140)

Christine Normandin: You mentioned that about 2 million to 4 million people make up the diaspora. We can agree that's quite a broad range. Isn't that an indication that the various Canadian authorities don't know our people living abroad very well?

If we wanted to better communicate to voters abroad that they can vote, could we have better coordination between departments? For example, when a Canadian abroad files their tax return, we could also send them information on how to register to get their name on the voter list, rather than making the Chief Electoral Officer solely responsible for that.

Stéphane Perrault: I'm open to all suggestions. That might be a good suggestion. I don't know how many people living abroad pay taxes in Canada. Perhaps a certain number of them do.

However, I'd like to point out that when their name is on the International Register of Electors, voters really need to live abroad if they want to vote. Some Canadians go abroad temporarily in the winter: We call them snowbirds. They're considered to be national voters. They vote using a special ballot, but they're not in the same category. They use a different mechanism.

Christine Normandin: How about sending those voters election campaign content or the issues raised during a campaign? Should the Chief Electoral Officer do that? Should it be someone else's responsibility, so the Chief Electoral Officer can maintain a sense of neutrality and impartiality? We tend to sometimes confuse things a little in the questions we ask during this study.

You said that your basic role was to facilitate voting. Do you think that's all you should be asked to do?

Stéphane Perrault: I think so.

Obviously, our website contains information on candidates and registered parties. Other than that, it's very easy for voters to consult the political parties' websites. However, I wouldn't want to go a step further and post partisan content on the Elections Canada web-

site. In my opinion, there's a line that mustn't be crossed in order to preserve people's trust in Elections Canada's impartiality.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We'll move on to Mr. Jackson, please, for six minutes.

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

I may split my time, if my colleague has some questions as well, so I'm going to be very quick and efficient.

Gentlemen, it's nice to see you again.

Madam Duquette, it's nice to meet you.

I voted by special ballot, which was a strange phenomenon. Can you tell me what protocols are in place to ensure the security of special ballots at Elections Canada offices in each constituency? Are they stored at each returning office in a camera-monitored storage area?

Danielle Duquette: I can take that.

All returning officers who secure an office—who rent out an office for the purposes of the general election—need to have a security system, and all ballots must be under lock and key. They have filing cabinets or things like that.

Grant Jackson: Does the security system include cameras, or is there just an alarm system?

Danielle Duquette: We can check on that, but it depends on the type of set-up, because as you probably know, all offices are not created equal. It's not the Tim Hortons model. It really depends on the landlord and what's available at the location.

Grant Jackson: Who would have access to the storage area? Would it be just the returning officer, or would other officials at each returning office have access as well?

Danielle Duquette: In terms of the ballots and special ballots, it's probably who we refer to as the service point supervisor. This is a role that oversees what we call the service centre, where we have service agents who facilitate voting by special ballot. Ultimately, they are responsible for overseeing the planning and deployment of all services that leverage special ballots.

Grant Jackson: This is my final question. At some point in the process, other ballot boxes go home to a private residence to be secured. That's my understanding. Does that ever happen with special ballot boxes? They never leave returning offices.

Danielle Duquette: No.

Stéphane Perrault: That's unless they are national ballots. Then they need to be shipped to headquarters ahead of day zero.

Grant Jackson: Those would never go to a private residence.

• (1145)

Stéphane Perrault: No, they would not.

Grant Jackson: Thank you.

I yield the rest of my time to Mr. Calkins.

Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC): Thank you very much.

The last federal election was \$570 million. Do I have that about right? If you factor that out over 37 days, that's \$15.4 million a day. Granted, some days in the election are more expensive than others for Elections Canada to prosecute the election.

Does it make sense, from a fiscal capacity, to extend the length of the election period to let a few hundred or maybe a few thousand more electors participate overseas? What's the cost-benefit analysis on that, if you've done one?

Stéphane Perrault: We can easily provide the numbers, because we've had longer election periods. We had one in 2015, for example, that was 78 days.

The costs are largely identical. The difference could be an additional month of rent, depending on the date and the timing, for the RO offices. Also, there would be one week of additional salary for the limited staff in the office of a returning officer, but that would not have a significant impact.

Blaine Calkins: What percentage of the staff get paid for the entire duration of an election, compared with the number of staff brought on just for election day and advanced polling days?

Stéphane Perrault: I'll guess a number, and my friend here will correct me. For one-day workers or workers working a few days, during the advanced polls and polling day, we're probably at around 200,000. For office staff, it's around 30,000, but that's probably an overstatement on my part.

Blaine Calkins: Okay. That gives me the ratios I need.

How did the 43,000 people overseas on the list at the start of the last election show up on the voters list?

Stéphane Perrault: They show up on the international register.

Blaine Calkins: They're registered in an electoral district, are they not?

Stéphane Perrault: My friend will correct me. They do not show up on the list.

Michel Roussel (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer): They do not show up on the list that is used during the election. They are on the permanent voters list, but they are not released on the list that we provide to returning officers, candidates and political parties.

Blaine Calkins: Why not?

Michel Roussel: It's because they are registered to vote by special ballot, and they are not expected to vote at their polling location.

Stéphane Perrault: That list is available through the portal to candidates and parties, so it's not a secret list somewhere, but the list that is used to administer in-person voting does not include international electors.

Blaine Calkins: That's fair enough.

This is the last question I have.

Madame Duquette, you were talking about the things you check when a ballot is returned. It doesn't really matter where you do it; the integrity of the process is what matters to me.

We have the bar code. You do the check at the time of the application. We have no idea if the person who filled in the ballot was the actual person. I understand that would be difficult to administer.

When that ballot is returned, is the envelope also checked for integrity?

Danielle Duquette: Absolutely. We use a standard set of envelopes, and they have particular markings and a specific colour on them.

Blaine Calkins: If an envelope looks like it's been opened or tampered with, what do you do?

Danielle Duquette: We set it aside.

Blaine Calkins: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Louis, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'll be splitting my time with Madame O'Rourke.

Thank you, Ms. Duquette, Monsieur Perrault and Monsieur Roussel for this important study.

We're studying the challenges that Canadians living abroad face in exercising their democratic right to vote, and we're looking at the operational and logistic barriers behind them. I appreciate your advice and practical solutions. We're talking about ballot delivery times and the modernization, in any way, of special voting, and I appreciate your expertise.

Monsieur Perrault, I believe you said that roughly half of the people who sent in ballots were already on the list, and that when the writ dropped, the kits were given, and then the other half applied for them. Is that roughly correct?

Stéphane Perrault: Fewer than half were already on the register. The majority were not. This is somewhat exceptional, I would say. Typically, fewer people register during the writ period. It explains, perhaps, the large number of unreturned ballots—because people received them so late that they didn't dare return them—or late returned ballots.

The fact that it was not a fixed-date election and that it was a high-turnout election, so people were interested in participating, re-sulted, presumably, in the late demand for international ballots.

Tim Louis: The biggest challenge is, as you said, that it was not a fixed election date, so kudos to you and everyone who had to work with that.

When people ask for a ballot, they're sent a ballot. I know there's a website, but do you end up getting an increase in inquiries from people saying, "I'm trying to fill this out. Can I have some help?" Is there tech support?

• (1150)

Danielle Duquette: Absolutely. In my directorate, for example, we have what we call a service centre, which is a support centre that electors can contact. They can ask us a variety of questions related to special ballot voting. It could be something about their particular kit, such as, "I registered on such-and-such a date, but I haven't gotten a kit yet." It's all kinds of information.

For the last event, we received well over 10,000 inquiries just by phone.

Tim Louis: Those inquiries, I'm assuming, become a bit of a study after the election to see what kinds of improvements can be made.

Danielle Duquette: Yes. We look to see if there are complaints, if there are trends and if there are areas we can focus on for future improvements. We take that into consideration.

Tim Louis: Is it too early to ask for that from this election?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Danielle Duquette: Yes.

Tim Louis: I do appreciate that.

I'll cede my time to Madame O'Rourke.

Dominique O'Rourke (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you so much.

Twice, I was a trainer for Elections Canada in my riding, and I'm also very familiar with municipal voting. I was a trainer for Elections Ontario as well. I really appreciate the challenge of having to gather people and train them, because the people being trained are in those offices as well. It's like assembling a corporation immediately, as soon as the writ drops, and then seeing it through. Kudos to you and your team.

I'm curious with respect to international voting.

You see the distribution of who's registering. Is there any riding where there's potential for a material difference in the outcome if everybody votes and you think that could potentially influence an election? That's a question.

Do you see any trends around which countries have the most registered electors outside of Canada? Also, then, did the redistribution have any kind of impact on foreign voters this year?

Stéphane Perrault: We do look at the patterns. We want to see, after an election, whether there are indicia of some anomaly, like unexpectedly high numbers of internationals showing up in one particular part of the country that does not seem plausible.

We haven't seen any kind of trend that's worrisome. Of course, they are sprinkled across the country. If the result is close enough, by definition it can make a difference. I guess that's the whole point of it. It's to be able to make that difference. We don't see any unexpected distribution.

Dominique O'Rourke: Just to come back to the closeness, would it be helpful to count the votes that are postmarked for the appropriate date and time? Are there ever circumstances where flights are cancelled or there's a massive storm and the ballots just can't get back in time? Are there considerations for that given that every vote matters?

Stéphane Perrault: Yes. That's an important point. The regime has been designed with that in mind, with a certain strictness that says they have to be in no matter what. If you start doing exceptions for one, because it's a few hours or a few days, or there's a storm, a flood, a strike.... You have to be strict. We have to administer the rules as they are laid out.

We do see kits coming in later. Of course, some kits are lost in the mail and come in later or are delayed for all kinds of reasons, but there has to be strictness. I may be mistaken, but I was informed that Canada Post has stopped date-marking the envelopes they process, so this would not be a reliable marker.

In any event, it raises all kinds of policy questions that are legitimate. We see countries that allow votes to be counted if they come in after the election, but then you want to make sure the system they use for delivery marks the time the vote was cast.

There's a variety of means by which mail returns to us at the international and national levels. Somebody can bring it in. Somebody can send it by courier or by regular mail. We'd have to look at all the circumstances to make sure there is a clear marker for the date. I don't know that Canada Post still does that.

• (1155)

Dominique O'Rourke: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you to our witnesses.

We're going to suspend for a bit. We have a witness who is stuck at security, though they are in the building, so our short break may be a couple of minutes longer than usual.

We are suspended.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: I'd like to welcome everyone to our second panel.

From the Canadian Armed Forces, we have Captain James Salt, coordinating officer of special voting rules at National Defence. From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Kati Csaba, director general of the consular affairs bureau.

Ms. Csaba, you have five minutes, please.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

Kati Csaba (Director General, Consular Affairs Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

I'm pleased to share an overview of how Global Affairs Canada supports Canadians voting from abroad during federal elections.

Let me start by clarifying our role. Global Affairs Canada has a very specific and limited mandate when it comes to overseas voting. Our responsibilities are outlined in a co-operation agreement with Elections Canada, first signed in 1993 and updated in 2019.

[*English*]

Under this agreement, Elections Canada is fully responsible for determining who is eligible to vote and for registering electors on the international register of electors. Our role is simply to provide logistical support through Canada's network of diplomatic missions abroad. It is also important to note what we do not do. We don't support provincial elections, and we don't assist foreign governments in organizing voting in Canada for their own citizens.

What does our support look like in practice? In the lead-up to an election, our missions assist Canadians living abroad by answering general questions, by phone or email, about how to vote using a special mail-in ballot. For more complex inquiries, we refer them directly to Elections Canada. Missions post information on their websites and share updates through social media channels to ensure that Canadians abroad have timely and accurate information.

Before Canadians can vote from abroad, they must submit an application to be included in the international register of electors. This process is typically done online. However, missions can assist electors who require accommodation by sending the application on their behalf to Elections Canada by fax or email.

We also assist electors who choose to use a mission as their mailing address for receiving their ballots. When the mission receives the ballot, they contact the client—assuming the client has provided their contact details to the mission—informing them that their ballot has arrived and to return the completed ballot by a specific date.

Regardless of whether a Canadian received their ballot directly or through the mission, they have the option of bringing the completed ballots to the mission by a specific date for onward delivery to Elections Canada. Typically, ballots are sent through regular shipments via DHL.

[*Translation*]

Again, to be clear: We do not determine eligibility, process applications, provide voting kits or organize in-person voting.

Now, let me share a snapshot from the 45th general election in April 2025.

Approximately 102,000 special ballots were issued upon request to Canadians living abroad. Of these, just over 57,000 ballots—56.5%—were returned on time and counted, an improvement from the previous election return rate of 48.5%.

[*English*]

Of the remaining 43.5% of special ballots that were sent out by Elections Canada, 19% were returned late and had to be set aside. Late returns were due mainly to a number of factors, including international postal challenges and, in some cases, electors not receiving their ballots in time or not delivering their completed ballots to missions early enough for onward shipment to Elections Canada before the deadline. In total, 164 Canadian diplomatic offices submitted ballots on behalf of electors.

Although we've seen some progress in return rates, challenges remain. Some Canadians abroad expect to vote in person at missions, which is not possible. Sometimes Canadian voters request that ballots be sent to missions but fail to notify staff or to provide contact details, complicating pickup of the ballots. Also, of course, resource constraints at missions can be an issue during peak periods.

In closing, we continue to work closely with our partners at Elections Canada to address these issues, whether it's by improving communications with Canadians abroad, streamlining logistics or finding ways to mitigate delays in international mail. Together, we're committed to making the process as clear and accessible as possible for Canadians voting outside the country.

● (1210)

Thanks for your attention. I will be happy to respond to any questions.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Captain Salt, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

James Salt (Coordinating Officer, Special Voting Rules at National Defence, Canadian Armed Forces): Good day, and thank you very much for the opportunity to appear today.

As you mentioned, one of my official duties within the Canadian Armed Forces is to act as the coordinating officer for special voting rules for National Defence. The role was assigned to me in 2023 by our minister via a designation order per the Canada Elections Act, and it was again formalized in 2025 by our current minister.

My main role is to maintain the CAF's ability and readiness to administer military polling stations during federal general elections. As the committee is aware, in accordance with the CEA, qualified CAF electors, whether in Canada or abroad, are allowed to vote at military polling stations via special ballot. The special operating procedures have been in place since the early 20th century.

I, along with a team of designated liaison officers, assist our military commanding officers in the discharge of this duty. I work with the Chief Electoral Officer through the special voting rules administrator and the military vote coordinator in the administration of this.

Our liaison officers and their alternates, who are also formally assigned by our minister, are then assigned specific regional responsibilities over 10 regions. These regions cover all the provinces and territories, with specific ones dedicated to the NCR, OUTCAN—outside of Canada—and deployed operations.

Our members are permitted to cast their votes in a number of ways. They may choose to vote in the same manner as all Canadian citizens, such as at a polling station on election day or through an advanced poll. They may also choose to vote via special ballot. The only caveat to this is for those who are not of legal age within the CAF or who hold permanent resident status. I can further expand on how we manage this, if desired.

The concept and process for how we do this isn't overly complicated, although implementation of it can be a little tricky, as you can well imagine. Prior to an election being announced, initial training of our liaison officers is provided by officials from Elections Canada. The teams coordinate with the unit commanding officers and their assigned unit election officers, who are basically the boots on the ground to help implement voting activity.

Once a writ has been issued, the liaison officers begin preparations in their assigned regions. A list of eligible CAF electors is compiled via our personnel database, which is called Guardian. Elections Canada begins distributing voting material to the liaison officers. Polling material is typically received by units one week prior to our planned military polling period.

Here is a bit about Guardian. This is a real-time database that provides our polling stations and Elections Canada with the designated voting districts of our members. Residency is drawn from their home address in the system. For those who are posted outside of Canada, it's the last Canadian address we have on record for them.

Our polling stations could be in Canada, could be at a unit overseas or could be mobile in nature. For small missions or where our OUTCAN footprint is very small, such as three to five members, for example, the designated liaison officer coordinates directly with members. They use the standard Elections Canada mail-in voting options, similar to other Canadians abroad.

The CAF typically operate on a 36-day election calendar once the writ has been issued. Within that 36-day period, commanding officers are mandated to provide their members with a six-day polling window, typically the week prior to the national polling day. During that window, polling stations need to be open for a minimum of three days and at least three hours on those days.

The CAF polling stations aren't all that dissimilar to the civilian ones. Members arrive, their eligibility is verified and their ballots are cast. Those ballots are properly sealed and secured in accordance with Elections Canada protocols. Completed ballots are returned that evening, and when that's not possible—for a ship at sea, for example—they're returned no later than 6 p.m. on the national polling day. Any adaptations to this process need to be pre-approved by Elections Canada.

While some CAF polling stations resemble a more typical civilian station, they've also been set up in the field during exercises out of country, as I mentioned, on ships at sea. During the last election, we even saw Canadians casting their votes from the back of a pickup truck at our station in Alert while the aircraft sat on the tarmac waiting to depart before bad weather rolled in. In that instance, voting was also allowed to non-CAF members from Environment and Climate Change Canada in Alert and at the Eureka station, so about 50 people in total.

Single ballot kits were also provided to our special operations members outside of Canada. The voting period for our troops in Latvia was extended due to operational requirements to ensure that all members had the opportunity to vote.

Of the nearly 104,000 eligible CAF electors, over 52,000 took advantage of the civilian polling options, and close to 25,000 of our members cast a special ballot at the last election. All told, over 76,000, or 73.5%, of our members voted this year. Nearly a quarter of those used one of the 230 polling stations that were set up across the world, including the mobile one mentioned earlier in the rear cab of a pickup in the Far North.

• (1215)

Thank you again for this opportunity. I welcome any questions the committee might have regarding special voting rules as they pertain to the Canadian Armed Forces.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll start with Mr. Ruff.

Welcome back. You have six minutes, please.

Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the people who are appearing today.

I especially want to thank you, Captain Salt. Thank you for your service. I'm not sure, considering your trade, that this job is the same as being out at sea. I had a great conversation with Vice-Admiral Topshee on the weekend down in Halifax. The navy is in great hands.

Look, things have changed a bit, obviously, in the last six years. When I was in, I could vote, as you've laid out, but I've never voted in any riding federally since I was eligible to vote other than in the riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, which I now have the privilege of representing. It never changed in my career of 25-plus years in the military.

My understanding is that current CAF members could always vote from their home riding, where they originated, if they never changed it, or they have to vote from their latest residence here in Canada. That's where their ballot gets cast. Has that changed? Can you explain that, please?

James Salt: Thank you very much for your question, sir.

Yes, it has changed a bit. As the vice-chair is aware, previously, members would fill out what was called a statement of ordinary residence. This was captured within our systems, and that data was provided to Elections Canada. For example, I as a member could indicate that I would like to vote in the Ottawa district, or, because I spent the majority of my time in the navy in Victoria, that might be where I wanted to vote. I believe about 10 years ago a bill was passed that removed the requirement for a statement of ordinary residence. We now use, as I mentioned, Guardian, so it's their current residence in the system.

I would have to verify this with Elections Canada, but as I understand it, all CAF members, like all Canadians, are still permitted to register through Elections Canada and choose the voting district they wish. That would be recorded in our system. When the CAF elector lists are put out, the individuals would vote based on that information.

Alex Ruff: I appreciate that. I'm fascinated by this, and I'd like to get a bit more detail to see how it has changed. Obviously, 10 years ago, I wasn't in a position to analyze it closely as a parliamentarian. I believe our CAF members should be able to vote and stay voting wherever they enrolled from.

I want to get into the challenges we face. I know GAC is incredibly supportive, especially with some of the smaller missions we have deployed around the world, of getting ballots back. When timing is of the essence in the 36-day window, can you explain a bit...?

I'll stay focused on you, Captain Salt, although if Ms. Csaba has something to add, she can. This is with respect to candidate lists.

With special ballots, those who want to vote at the start of a writ period have to know how to spell the name of their candidate. It's a bit more complicated when there are distances of sometimes tens of thousands of kilometres.

How does that work? Are you providing the list of candidates, or is it on the individual Canadians abroad to know who they're voting for? If you can, please explain some of the challenges for the smaller missions in getting the ballots back.

James Salt: In answer to your first question, the electoral list is provided to us by Elections Canada once it's been finalized. Whether the individuals are voting through National Defence headquarters here in Ottawa or through a single ballot because they're deployed in Lebanon, the lists are provided to them at that time. They have full access to the individuals they are able to vote for within their particular riding.

With regard to logistics, we're in a very unique position, as you're well aware. We have a lot of resources available to us that we can bring to bear if there's a need for them. Typically, just like Global Affairs, we make use of couriers like DHL to get our votes back whenever possible—specifically for those who are in Canada, such as an individual voting in Victoria—to Elections Canada headquarters here in Ottawa.

We also have the ability to move votes if it's required. The Alert example was a perfect case. This flight was not set up specifically for the voting period; it was coincidental that it was going up there for a supply run. In fact, the flight had been cancelled twice prior to that due to bad weather during the election period, and this was our last opportunity to get up there. That's the reason I said it was sitting on the tarmac waiting for poor weather to roll in so it could get off the ground and head back to Ottawa with those ballots.

Similarly, for overseas voters, we have the ability to utilize the embassies overseas if we need to, through collaboration with Global Affairs, to help move our votes. There's a lot of collaboration in that sense.

• (1220)

Alex Ruff: Are there any special conditions with Elections Canada? If the signed and sealed ballots have been transferred either to GAC or to the CAF's leadership, are the timelines very strict? Do they need to be back in Elections Canada's hands by voting night?

James Salt: In our case, they have to be back no later than 6 p.m. I'm proud to say that we had every single CAF ballot, out of those 25,000 that I spoke to, make it back to Elections Canada on time this year.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Madame Kayabaga, you have six minutes.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to welcome our distinguished guests today.

It's very nice to see you again, Ms. Csaba. I had the opportunity to meet Ms. Csaba in Ghana when she was the high commissioner for Ghana. It's very nice to see you.

Welcome, Mr. Salt, as well.

You mentioned a list of things that you guys are not able to provide for Canadians living abroad. Can you mention what you can provide?

As I was listening to the questioning by colleagues opposite, I was very intrigued to know how some of the resources the CAF is using could also be extended to smaller missions that may not have the services needed to bring in ballots on time.

Kati Csaba: I'm happy to respond to that.

There are a number of things that Global Affairs, through its missions, can provide, both to electors and to Elections Canada.

First of all, we start by providing an up-to-date list of all of Canada's diplomatic missions and consular posts so that Elections Canada knows from where we are working. We respond directly to general inquiries from Canadian electors abroad on the process of voting through special ballot, but we will respond only with general information. Any specific cases will be referred to Elections Canada.

We post information on our embassy websites, and we share updates through social media to ensure Canadians abroad have timely and accurate information. Whether they see it or not is another question, but we do our best to get that information out to the public.

We can assist electors who need special help, who need accommodation, to submit their application to Elections Canada to get on to the international register of electors. We can serve as a post office, in a sense, for people who wish to have their ballots sent to the mission abroad, or for Canadians to drop off their completed ballots. We will send them back to Canada on their behalf. We also do our very best to get them back to Canada in time for election day. We normally use courier services that are paid for by Elections Canada.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you for clarifying all the things you offer as options.

I'll ask you a few more questions, but first, I want to say how impressed I am by the number of members who are voting, which is very good. That's a really high number.

Mr. Salt, are those options extended to families of CAF members?

James Salt: The special ballot vote is extended to family members who are deployed overseas in an OUTCAN situation, but not those within Canada. We actually had approximately 175 civilian votes that were transported with military votes. They were separate but transported with them and delivered to Elections Canada. A spouse, or a sibling of legal age who is on an OUTCAN deployment with their father or mother, would be allowed to vote, and we would transport those votes to Elections Canada alongside ours.

• (1225)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: In your numbers, do you include some of the CAF members who are stationed at different embassies for different reasons, or is it specifically deployments that are in groups?

James Salt: No. In this particular case, we would have a liaison officer assigned to OUTCAN—out of Canada—and assigned to rest of world. Rest-of-world individuals are those who are deployed. OUTCAN is for those who are posted overseas. For example, they might be at Global Affairs or they might be posted to NATO headquarters in Brussels, etc. That is how they're divided up.

That list is provided to Elections Canada, and then Elections Canada ensures that those votes, the special ballots, are transported to the individuals using the liaison officers as required to help facilitate that.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you so much.

Ms. Csaba, can you comment on whether there could be a collaboration of resources in situations where you can do so? If CAF members at Global Affairs Canada, some of whom I've met, are able to vote through the CAF, would this effort allow more ballots to be returned to Canada?

You mentioned the ballots that for this general election, let's say, did not make it back because of the timing issue. Can you comment on whether these votes could be returned in that manner?

Kati Csaba: We certainly have excellent collaboration between Global Affairs Canada and Elections Canada, but also with the armed forces. In the example that was given, someone who is deployed to a mission abroad—for example, as the defence attaché—would be welcome to include their ballot and their family's ballots in the courier bag that is coming back to headquarters in time.

Where we have missions, we are pleased to collaborate in whatever ways make it fastest and easiest to get ballots back, but of course there will be situations where the CAF may have a presence on the ground where we don't have a diplomatic mission. In those cases, it's more logical for them to manage that.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: With less than 10 seconds left, I want to know about the general procedure. Once the names go on, they're certified by Elections Canada, and it takes them a bit of time to make it to the website. What is the procedure and tracking time if there are special allocations for people abroad to cast a vote after the period?

The Chair: I'll have to be a bit of a jerk. You had 10 seconds left, and that was a 30-second question. We will come back to that; we will have a lot of time.

We will now go to Madame Normandin.

[Translation]

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you very much to both witnesses for being with us.

My first question is for you, Captain Salt.

I'd like to hear your comments on how complex it is set up polling stations for missions abroad. I'm thinking in particular of the fact that rotations can happen in the middle of an election. I know that the Canadian Armed Forces are particularly good at logistics. That's why they're so valuable. However, certain circumstances must pose an exceptional challenge for you.

How do you manage to set up polling stations if there's a rotation, for example? I'm thinking in particular of Operation Reassurance, in which many Canadians are deployed, and rotations take place every six months. If that happens in the middle of an election, what do you do, particularly when it comes to establishing voters lists?

[English]

James Salt: Thank you for your question.

[Translation]

I'll answer in English, given the subject at hand.

[English]

In the cases of individuals who are deployed, thankfully we generally know well in advance when they're going to be deployed, so we have an opportunity to do some advanced collaboration with Elections Canada to ensure that individuals who are going to be on the ground during a designated polling window, if they have not been able to take advantage of civilian election opportunities, are counted towards that.

There has been—and there would be, no doubt—the occasional situation where an individual might get deployed on very short notice. In those situations, because of the daily interactions with our Elections Canada representatives, we have the ability to, on very short notice, pull together a special ballot and make sure that the individual has that ballot and is able to vote prior to deploying or even while deployed.

We have processes in place, and thankfully we haven't, that I am aware of, run into a situation where an individual wanted to vote and was unable to.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Ms. Csaba, I have questions for you as well.

At the beginning of your opening remarks, you explained your role and the agreement you have with Elections Canada. I'm curious to hear more about that.

It seems that voting abroad really hangs on getting information to voters so they can register and have their name put on the list. From what I understand, you can post information online, but unlike national voters, who receive the election card, potential voters abroad don't receive personalized communications.

Could that be part of your mandate one day, if the agreement with Elections Canada is reviewed? If so, would it be complicated? Would you be in the best position to handle it? For example, do you know the geographic distribution of Canadians abroad? It seems unclear how big the diaspora is.

I know there a few parts to that question. Can you give me a run-down?

Kati Csaba: Yes, that question covers a number of aspects.

At the moment, we're unable to contact Canadians abroad directly, in part because we don't know who they are. Some of them register with Global Affairs Canada, but many Canadians living abroad aren't in contact with us. We don't even know if they're in the country or not, so it would be very hard to contact them directly.

What we post on the embassy website or social media is written in such a way as to encourage Canadians to vote and to register on the voters list. We do everything we can with the resources we have to communicate when there's an upcoming election and provide instructions for registering to vote.

Christine Normandin: To your knowledge, would any department be able to get a little more information? I'm thinking in particular of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, when passports are issued, or the Canada Revenue Agency, for those who file tax returns. Is there a place where this information is more accessible to Canadians residing abroad?

Kati Csaba: I don't think any one department has all of that information.

At Global Affairs Canada, we have a list of people who register as travellers or who live in another country. Canadians pay their taxes, but they're not necessarily the same people. It's the same with passports. Some Canadians may apply for a passport abroad, but not necessarily because they live there; it may be because they had a problem with their passport during their trip.

So there's no way of knowing where all Canadians residing abroad live.

Christine Normandin: Mr. Chair, I'll save my remaining 30 seconds for the next round.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes, please.

Blaine Calkins: I appreciate that we can bank our time now, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have some time.

Blaine Calkins: I have a few questions. I may have some time left over, in which case I think one of my colleagues will step in, Mr. Chair.

Captain Salt, thank you very much for being here. I'll start with a line of questions for you.

I see that you're in the navy, on that side of the equation, so I guess I'll ask this question. I don't know of any airplanes that can stay airborne for 37 days. I don't know of anybody on the ground who can't get to a polling station, but there are sailors at sea for more than 37 days.

Explain to me how a sailor who is at sea can vote in a general election. How does that process work?

• (1235)

James Salt: As the committee member rightly points out, ships can be and often are at sea for long periods. In cases where ships at sea might be transiting long distances, we have the ability to get ballots out to the ships in advance when they're within range of certain areas. Although a ship might be at sea for 35 days, it wouldn't necessarily be so far away from the nearest port that we wouldn't be able to put a helicopter ashore and arrange for a pickup of ballots to bring them back. There is also the potential to utilize other navies to help with transport.

I know of no situation where we've done that before, but the potential is there. Ships, even though they're at sea for 35 days and can stay at sea for longer than 35 days, have the ability to get within transportation distance to transport ballots as need be.

Blaine Calkins: Are you satisfied, Captain, that every CAF member on deployment who wants to vote is able to vote?

James Salt: What I can tell you, sir, is that every CAF member who was deployed or was not available to vote and wished to was provided that opportunity.

We had approximately 3,200 ballots shipped overseas. These were special ballots outside of the Canadian AOR that were shipped to CAF members who were deployed on ships, on exercises, on special missions or to embassies. That was the total number that Elections Canada managed to get out and have returned prior to 6 p.m. on election day.

Blaine Calkins: Sir, are you satisfied that every ballot cast by a member who's deployed gets back to Elections Canada in a timely fashion and gets counted and that there is scrutiny, oversight and security of those ballots as they're being transferred from the voting facility back to Elections Canada?

James Salt: I can only speak to what I have seen personally within the process. As you can imagine, at the Canadian Armed Forces, we're all about procedures, so there's a way of doing things for everything. While we may transport completed ballots through couriers in the same manner that Global Affairs or other government departments do, our internal process ensures that our liaison officers and the unit election officers are fully trained to take those ballots, make sure they're sealed properly and make sure they get back on time.

As I mentioned, this year, out of the 25,000 ballots sent out, every single ballot was received. We did have, I believe—I can count on one hand—four spoiled ballots. That was due to improper procedures conducted by the unit election officer on site. There were four CAF members who cast a vote, but it did not count because it was considered a spoiled ballot. Those procedures were reviewed. We will tighten things up as need be to make sure that our liaison offi-

cers and election officers ensure that those types of small errors don't happen.

Blaine Calkins: Can the CAF member vote in the riding in which they were born and raised for the duration of their career?

James Salt: Thank you for the follow-up question. As mentioned to the vice-chair, I will need to verify with Elections Canada on this one. As far as I'm aware, every CAF member, like every Canadian, is permitted to register in whatever riding they wish. That information would then be placed in our system. That said, I would need to follow up with Elections Canada to verify that.

Blaine Calkins: Elections Canada would then be the arbiter of whether or not they're allowed to register in that riding. Is that what you're saying, sir?

James Salt: As I understand the process, that is correct, sir.

Blaine Calkins: Okay.

Ms. Csaba, are you satisfied that all our diplomats who are deployed and serving around the world are able to vote in a secure and safe way, and that their ballots are returned in time to be counted?

Kati Csaba: I am, yes. As someone who served for 18 years at missions abroad, I can tell you that there is a robust process for ensuring that Canadian diplomats going out on a posting are informed of the process for registering with the international register of electors. The onus is on the individual, of course, to choose to register, but we do have rigorous processes in place to ensure that we are collecting the ballots in a safe way and are returning them to Canada in time for election day.

• (1240)

Blaine Calkins: You said in your opening remarks that you help Canadians living abroad. You make sure they have the information, and you work in basically a liaison capacity or an educational capacity. Where situations are more difficult or complex, you hand them over directly to Elections Canada.

Could you give this committee any insights you have on any of the frustrations? They might be anecdotal. I don't know how you capture this information, or if you do, but we seem to have very low interest from Canadians living abroad in participating in elections. Can you give us any examples or any anecdotal evidence to suggest that Canadians are by and large not voting because of their frustration with the process? What would you say are the complaints? If you're getting complaints from Canadians living abroad, what do they complain about in the administration of elections?

The Chair: Let me interrupt you there. That was an outstanding question, but we are well over time.

I was going to add a minute at the end for each member, so I'll give another minute to Madame Brière, who will have six minutes. Then I will give another minute, in addition to her 30 seconds, to Madame Normandin. After that, we'll do five minutes and five minutes.

The bank works, I guess.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mrs. Brière, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be splitting my time with my colleague Dominique.

Thank you to both of you for being here.

Captain Salt, you said during your opening remarks that you could expand on the people with PR, or permanent residence, and those under 18 years old.

James Salt: Yes, ma'am. As mentioned, all eligible CAF electors are permitted to vote, but as the committee may or may not be aware, we can enrol individuals within the Canadian Armed Forces prior to them turning 18. More recently, over the last year and a half, we have allowed for the enrolment of permanent residents within the Canadian Armed Forces. Of course, those two groups of individuals are not permitted to vote.

The CAF elector list, when it's provided to Elections Canada, basically would not include individuals who have permanent resident status or who are under 18 years of age. If individuals from one of those two groups tried to approach a CAF polling station, their names wouldn't be on the list. Of course, if individuals are not on the list, as with a regular civilian polling station, they are permitted to register at that time. When that vote is counted by Elections Canada, it would be picked up then.

Because it is early stages and we have only just started this, we had a very small number of permanent residents in the CAF when the general election was called. I think it was about 130. We expect in the next election to have a much larger number. Processes will be put in place to request verification by CAF members that they hold Canadian citizenship and that they are not a permanent resident, which would allow them to vote.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Csaba, we understand that it's not easy to find out exactly how many Canadians live abroad. However, do you know how many Canadians are registered on your diplomatic lists at Global Affairs Canada?

Kati Csaba: I don't have that data with me right now. Many Canadians are registered, but normally only a fairly small percentage of Canadians living in the country register. I can provide you with the data after this meeting, but keep in mind that the numbers never really reflect reality, because many Canadians don't choose to register with the embassy.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: At a previous meeting, a witness told us that she saw voting abroad as a great opportunity for international co-operation between countries. I'd like to hear your comments on that.

Kati Csaba: It kind of depends on the laws and procedures for voting abroad. For example, some countries offer the option to vote in person, but we don't. We might tell them how to arrange it in Canada. However, as I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, we're not responsible for helping other countries that want to offer in-person voting here in Canada.

• (1245)

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Thank you.

[*English*]

Dominique O'Rourke: Captain Salt, thank you very much for your service.

I've been involved in elections. I love that Elections Canada and our democracy seek to enable any qualified, eligible voter to cast a ballot. The examples you provided about how we go the limit to make sure that everybody who is eligible can vote are just extraordinary.

I'm curious as to whether you received any feedback from military members on any possible improvements to their voting process.

James Salt: In typical military fashion, we always look to try to improve things. At the end of the election, we spent quite a bit of time with liaison officers, with commanding officers, with unit election officers and with Elections Canada representatives to examine what went right or anything that went wrong and to develop lessons learned for future elections. That is a continuing process. It's iterative, and we're always looking for ways to improve upon our existing process.

Dominique O'Rourke: That's great.

To either one of you, I'm curious as to whether there would be any benefit to counting votes at the mission or at a military base? The more steps there are, the more room there is for error or delay. Have we ever looked at whether the embassy could be a polling station where the votes could be tabulated by people who have been properly trained?

Kati Csaba: Based on the Canada Elections Act, the current legislation sets out that voters abroad can only vote through special ballot, which is returned to Canada. I think it would require significant resources and training to offer that kind of service.

First of all, I believe we would have to amend the legislation, and it would require a fairly high degree of resources, for that period, to play the role of receiving the votes. Of course, an embassy would be receiving votes from Canadians from across the country, so getting those votes back to the appropriate riding would also be a challenge. I think it's more efficient to collect the ballots and then ship them back to be further distributed within Canada.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for four minutes.

Christine Normandin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That's more or less the question I was going to ask you. I wanted to know what the logistical needs would be if we wanted to have polling stations in embassies. I understand that it would take an amendment to the agreements and the act, but wouldn't that be a middle ground? For example, instead of mailing voting kits to Canadians abroad, embassies could give out the kits as needed. The embassy could then verify the identity of the voter, who has to confirm it on the envelope in any case. Could that be a good middle ground? I should add that the delay in receiving the voting kit also has an impact. If it were organized in advance in embassies, perhaps, in some cases, it would save time.

Kati Csaba: Right now, under the act and the agreement between Elections Canada and Global Affairs Canada, only Elections Canada has the right to do that work, namely to verify whether a person really has the right to vote and to put them on the list.

So it would require changes and it would involve a lot of resources. Our embassies and consulates have teams to deal with consular cases. We have to keep in mind the standards and the percentages of consular cases that might occur in a certain country. That would involve a lot of work over and above our teams' regular consular duties. Therefore, we need to find ways to add more embassy staff during election periods.

That would involve a lot of resources, as well as amendments to the act and revised procedures.

• (1250)

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Ms. Csaba.

Captain Salt, I have a fairly specific question for you.

My riding is home to the Royal Military College Saint-Jean. Two elections ago, a problem arose. Civilians can usually vote at the college. However, the civilian polling station for officer cadets attending the college was located off the college grounds. Some had trouble getting out. They couldn't leave the Royal Military College Saint-Jean grounds to vote outside.

Would it be a good idea to always have polling stations at military colleges and on bases reserved for Canadian soldiers in Canada?

[*English*]

James Salt: In the case of CAF electors, the regulations require that we permit all of our CAF members the opportunity to vote during working hours. Everybody is given that opportunity and everybody is given that right. In this particular case, if members of the military college were not able to make their way to a CAF polling station, that would definitely be something I would have to look into.

Separating the polling stations is a reasonable approach, because these are special voting ballots and need to be treated differently than they would be at a civilian polling station. As I mentioned, RMC students would have been permitted to vote in the civilian

station that was set up at the college at that particular time. I suspect many of them took advantage of that.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you.

[*English*]

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

Grant Jackson: Thanks, Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses.

I'd like to quickly discuss a couple of topics, and then, Chair, I wonder if we have time at the end to discuss the work plan from now until Christmas. It's a bit up in the air.

Is there no time for that today?

The Chair: I'm happy to speak with Mr. Cooper and Madame Normandin to set out what the notice.... It is planned. We will be starting our next study with respect to foreign interference on Thursday.

Grant Jackson: I think there's some concern, specifically with the foreign interference piece, about the public safety minister's response to this committee's request to come here and testify.

A conversation between you and the vice-chairs would be appreciated, Mr. Chair. I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: We'll leave it at that.

Grant Jackson: To the witnesses, Global Affairs' policy, as I understand it.... We had a discussion recently about the French model of how—I hate to use the term “foreign”—members of Parliament represent citizens abroad and whether a similar system should be created here in Canada.

My understanding is that right now, despite the request of those individuals to have elections for members of Parliament abroad conducted on Canadian soil, as well as in other countries around the world where they provide representation, our foreign policy is that we do not allow that to happen.

If we created a system in this country where we have members of Parliament represent citizens abroad, would that not, in your opinion, be counter to our current foreign policy as it exists with respect to the other countries that already have such a system in place?

Kati Csaba: It is ultimately a political decision whether we want to have members of Parliament who represent communities abroad. It is not really a Global Affairs question, or it's not within Global Affairs' prerogative to determine whether—

Grant Jackson: No, and forgive me if I didn't word it correctly. I wasn't asking Global Affairs' opinion on whether we should or shouldn't do that. I'm just saying that right now, Global Affairs' policy is that the French member of Parliament representing French citizens living in Canada cannot conduct elections here other than at their embassy or consulate locations. Is that, in fact, our foreign policy?

Kati Csaba: That is a very good question to which I do not have the answer, so I will have to follow up and get back to you. I'm not 100% sure. That question I think falls within our protocol office's responsibility.

Grant Jackson: Okay. If you would commit to bringing that back to the committee, I think that would be very interesting, because we've heard from lots of individuals who think this is the way Canada should be going, and it would be ludicrous, in my opinion, for us to create a system where we don't support other countries within our borders in doing the same thing we're hoping to have them do for us. I'm just trying to understand what our foreign policy is. That would be very much appreciated.

In terms of confirmation of representation for Canadian citizens living abroad, I would like your position, if possible, on enabling voting in provincial elections. An expert not long ago said to this committee with respect to this study that it's only important for Canadians abroad to vote in national elections because identity is determined by the nation. That was the wording they used. I think my colleague from Quebec may feel quite differently about that, as well as individuals who are born in other provinces that have distinct identities within our Canadian framework.

I would like to understand why Global Affairs doesn't allow voting in provincial elections to be conducted for citizens living abroad and, if that's something that could be changed, what the impact of that might be on our foreign policy.

• (1255)

Kati Csaba: I would go back to the Canada Elections Act, which specifies the process for Canadians voting abroad to be provided with special ballots for voting in federal elections. As the situation stands, and based on that legislation and the agreement between Global Affairs and Elections Canada, we are not permitted to provide that type of support for provincial elections. I think it's a question that can be explored.

I would go back to the question on resources. Missions abroad are not resourced to provide additional federal election support and election support for all the provinces and territories of Canada, so they would require increased resources to do so.

Grant Jackson: That means legislative change at the federal level. I'm assuming the provincial elections acts would also have to be amended in each province in order to have a relationship with Global Affairs. Would that be your understanding?

Kati Csaba: That would be my understanding, but I would have to check with our lawyers as to what the situation would be.

Grant Jackson: Thank you.

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

Mr. Louis, you have five minutes, please.

Tim Louis: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank both our guests for appearing here today. Thank you for your service, Captain Salt and Ms. Csaba. For Canadians serving abroad in the armed forces or just living overseas, everyone we're talking about deserves a voting process that's accessible, secure and reliable, and you're showing us how Canada is the envy of the world in doing that.

We're having this study to talk about timeliness and equitable access, so I'll start with you, Madam Csaba.

Typically, how long does it take for a ballot, once it's received at an embassy, consulate or high commission, to be sent to Ottawa? What I'm asking is, does a mission wait until a certain date and then send all of the ballots in, or are they sent in in a rolling fashion?

Kati Csaba: The answer depends a bit on the location of the embassy or mission abroad and the expected number of voters.

In large missions, where we know there will be a large number of Canadians voting—I'm thinking of western Europe, for example—we would normally send the ballots in batches. We'll count backwards from the date of the election to know the last day we can send a shipment via courier, but if we are expecting large numbers of ballots, we will send multiple shipments back to headquarters.

For missions in more distant locations—smaller missions or remote locations—we might not see the same volume, but we would go through the same process of working backwards from the election date to know how much time we need to allow for the courier company to deliver the ballots back to Canada in time.

Tim Louis: I think that answered my next question. It sounds like you're saying a specific mission would work backward and different countries would then set a different date. Global Affairs doesn't say, "Here is the date that something must be done by."

Kati Csaba: Absolutely. We know that for some very distant locations and more remote locations, it could take quite a while for a package to get back.

Tim Louis: I understand.

You mentioned that specific consulates have higher proportions. Are there stats available as to how many ballots are received and transmitted, let's say, by each embassy? Do you see patterns that we can work with to improve voter turnout?

Kati Csaba: I don't have such statistics available with me now, but I'm happy to look into that question and get back to the committee on whether we can provide specific stats. I know that 164 of our missions abroad sent ballots back to Canada, but I can see if we can find the numbers.

• (1300)

Tim Louis: I'm just looking to see if there's a way of allocating resources.

With my remaining time, I'll go to Captain Salt.

You talked about those inside Canada, OUTCAN and those deployed. Do you have percentages of votes that come from each, roughly? I'm not looking for stats, but I imagine there's also a sliding scale of complication.

James Salt: I don't have the stats on me. I can say that of the 25,000 special votes that were distributed to Canadians and returned, approximately 3,200 came in from either OUTCAN or deployed operations. I do not believe we have the detail of where they came from specifically. I would have to refer back to Elections Canada on that.

Tim Louis: I'm just looking for patterns to see how we can help. There would also be polling stations versus mail-in ballots in general. Do you have a general proportion of...?

James Salt: Again, I would have to go back to Elections Canada to see if that data exists. The 3,200 were all the special ballots that.... The 25,000 and the 3,200 were a combination of ballots that were struck during polling stations and individual ballot kits that were handed out to our members overseas.

Tim Louis: With about 30 seconds left, maybe I can ask you two to split this.

Is there a final ask you'd have of the committee? I'll go to Captain Salt first and then to Ms. Csaba for a quick item to ask for.

James Salt: We run a pretty tight ship—pardon the pun—with the uniform. At this time, there's nothing I can think of from the committee.

Kati Csaba: There is nothing to add on my side.

The Chair: Excellent. It was answered in 25 seconds. The chair appreciates that.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their testimony.

Seeing no further business, we are adjourned.

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