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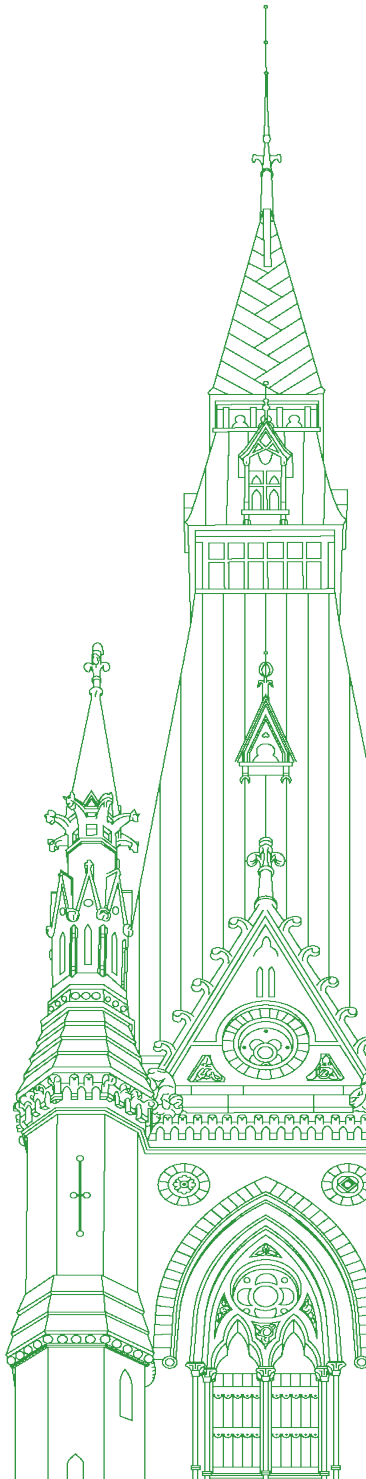

Chair: Chris Bittle

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● (1100)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 25 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), the committee is meeting today on its study of the main estimates 2026-27 and the current state of civic resilience in Canada.

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

I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters. There is a QR code. Please watch the video.

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room and on Zoom, if you wish to speak, raise your hand.

I would now like to welcome our first witness on the study of the main estimates 2026-27. From the Leaders' Debates Commission, we have Michel Cormier, executive director and acting commissioner.

You have five minutes, Monsieur Cormier.

Michel Cormier (Executive Director and Acting Commissioner, Leaders' Debates Commission): Good morning, Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting the Leaders' Debates Commission to review our 2026-27 main estimates.

The commission, as you know, is seeking a total of $3 million in funding for the 2026-27 fiscal year. It's important to note that most of that money, $2.3 million, is available to the commission only if an election is called. The rest, $739,000, is for the salaries and operational costs of the commission during that time.

[*Translation*]

We're not going to spend the majority of that money unless an election is called. The bulk of that amount—$2.3 million—is a reserve fund that is accessible only if an election takes place. This amount is used to cover the costs of preparing for and producing the debates.

The remaining $739,000 will be used to pay the commission's salaries and operating expenses for the next fiscal year.

[*English*]

In accordance with our mandate, cost-effectiveness continues to be a driving principle of the commission. We succeeded in reducing the costs of the debates in 2025. They amounted to just below $1.1 million, which is substantially less than the 2019 and 2021 debates and well below the $1.8-million production budget ceiling.

Most of the work of the secretariat is done remotely, including meetings with stakeholders and its advisory board, in order to reduce travel expenses.

[*Translation*]

The election of a third consecutive minority government also requires the commission to be ready to organize debates as soon as the next election is called.

This work includes preparing a contract for the production of the debates, as well as consulting with political parties, various experts and television networks. It also involves liaising with security agencies, and identifying and evaluating potential venues for the debates. We also work with the team of academics from the Canadian Election Study to develop public opinion polls that are used to improve the quality of the debates.

[*English*]

As I remarked before this committee last December, we are constantly working to improve the debates. In 2025, the commission adopted a simple format with only one moderator, instead of the traditional panel of journalists. The results were telling. Leaders had more time to exchange views, and voters were better served in gaining information crucial to their choice at the ballot box. Reviews and ratings were also up. A record 19.4 million people tuned in to the debates.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

To address issues related to the 2025 debates, the commission is proposing a number of improvements. These are set out in the report we published last fall.

[*English*]

With respect to participation criteria, the recommendation is to use the final list of confirmed candidates published by Elections Canada for political parties, relying on the criterion of endorsing candidates in at least 90% of federal ridings. As for media accreditation, the commission recommends continuing to provide on-site accreditation but to no longer be responsible for the leaders' press conferences, which have traditionally taken place after the debates, or provide a venue for that purpose.

In closing, let me return to the $3 million we are seeking for 2026-27. Again, that is the planned spending if there is an election in that period. Otherwise, our projected operating budget for the year will be $739,000.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

I'd be pleased to answer your questions now.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

First up is Mr. Van Popta from the Conservatives for six minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Mr. Cormier, for being here. It nice to see you again. It seems like it was not that long ago that you were here, being grilled by this committee. Thank you for the work that you do.

Just so that I'm clear on this, you're saying that you're seeking roughly $3.5 million. I'm sorry I don't have the exact number.

Michel Cormier: It's $3 million this year.

Tako Van Popta: It's $3 million, but if there's no election in the next fiscal year, your expenditure will be only $739,000.

Michel Cormier: That's right.

Tako Van Popta: Okay, so, what happened in the year that has almost passed now? I understand we're at the end of our fiscal year. There was no election. Well, there was one in April 2025.

Michel Cormier: Yes.

Tako Van Popta: Was that within this fiscal year?

Here's my question: Have you spent all of the money that was budgeted for you?

Michel Cormier: No, actually. Over the four-year cycle of the last election, we spent about $4.3 million or $4.4 million—we're waiting for the end results—out of $5.5 million. We're returning to the government $1 million or $1.1 million at the end of this fiscal year. It's been that way for the first three cycles. We don't spend the whole allotted money over four years—ever.

Tako Van Popta: Okay. Now you're saying that the expenditures have been dropping over the last couple of years. To what do you credit that?

Michel Cormier: We have reduced the staffing. We have two employees at the commission now. I work part time. We have a full-time administrator who deals with contracts, financial reporting to the government and all of these issues, which do take a lot of work. Then we hire contract employees on a needs basis for special projects, whether it's communications or to develop the production criteria for the next debates. We are mindful about that.

As I said, for the debates themselves, we've reduced the cost of the production of the debates from $1.7 million for the first two cycles of 2019 and 2021 to $1.1 million. It's a saving of about $600,000. Basically, the main difference is that we held the debates in the CBC/Radio-Canada building in Montreal, which has all of the equipment to produce such programs already built into the infrastructure. Before, the first two debates were held at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, so of course we had travel costs for the teams who came here, had to build a set and also had to rent production equipment to actually broadcast the debates.

We've managed to save a lot by having the debates in a place that is a production facility already. We have also tightened up the translation costs for the debates. We offer the debates in 13 different languages, including five indigenous languages, so that takes a lot of interpretation. We managed to bring those costs down by a good number, I think.

This explains why the full amount is not being used for the full political cycle.

● (1110)

Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

I want to return to something that came up for discussion the last time you were here, and you made mention of it: the postdebate media scrum. I think a lot of Canadians would agree with the statement that that's the best part. It became a—

Michel Cormier: It depends for who—

Tako Van Popta: Well, maybe it's not for the participants, but it certainly is for Canadians tuning in. Maybe it's because that's when they really see the rough and tumble of the media and how the prospective leaders stand up to the scrutiny.

Michel Cormier: Although ratings are not—

Tako Van Popta: However, now you're cancelling it altogether, I understand. Why would you do that? It seems a bit defeatist.

Michel Cormier: At this point, it's a recommendation for the next commissioner. It's not official policy now.

Yes, we are recommending that the commission not organize scrums. This is because we're in a media environment where we have a lot of different media actors that don't fit into any categories. That has caused some tension and confusion in the accreditation process and in the scrums afterward—in the management of the scrums.

Tako Van Popta: Just so I have clarity on this, are you saying that you don't want to manage the scrum? Does that mean there will be no scrum, or will it still go ahead?

Michel Cormier: We will not organize the scrum. If the parties want to actually scrum after the debates, they're free to do it. Our position is that the campaign begins again after the debates are over, but then it would be the responsibility of the campaigns to actually organize that.

We feel that's the best solution to make sure the attention is on the debates and not on the peripheral issues, and it's not in the mandate of the commission to do so.

Tako Van Popta: I'm sorry to interrupt, but the scrum isn't peripheral issues. Those are the issues that the media think are important.

Michel Cormier: They are important issues, but I think the commission is in a position where it's difficult to ensure that there's an environment that works well for everybody in that case.

We've made that recommendation, and we'll see whether the next commissioner agrees with it or not.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll turn now to Mr. Wilkinson for six minutes, please.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (North Vancouver—Capilano, Lib.): Thank you for coming today.

I think a lot of this is actually pretty straightforward, and I assume the answer to this question just has to do with categorization. In the comparison of the main estimates, I noticed that in 2024-25, information was $190,000. Then it jumps to $2 million, and then it goes to $1.8 million. Professional services was at $2.5 million, and then it goes to $750,000 and then $535,000.

Can you explain those numbers to me and why they're changing so much?

Michel Cormier: It's because when there's an election year, that's when most of the money is spent. Otherwise, the operating budget is around $700,000 for all those years. In 2022-23, for example, it was $699,000.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I understand the total in terms of spending, but in terms of what's allocated in the main estimates, it's $3.5 million, $3.5 million, and $3 million, yet the way the funds are categorized is very different, as I say.

Michel Cormier: Information is at $1.8 million, and that's the debates. That's the cost of producing the debates.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Okay, so why would professional and special services go from $2.5 million in 2024-25 to $750,000 in 2025-26?

Michel Cormier: It's because we have to hire additional staff for the debates to run the press room and manage relationships with some stakeholders. That's the difference, and the commission staff also works full time during that period, once the election is called, to prepare for the debates.

That increases the professional services costs, and there are miscellaneous costs for printing the press passes for the journalists and mundane stuff like that. That is tagged on to the cost of the debates.

● (1115)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I understand that, but I still don't really understand why the numbers flip between professional services and special services in the estimates. I'm not talking about the actual costs during the year.

Michel Cormier: I can check that and get back to you. It's kind of granular for me right now.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Okay.

You said that in terms of staff in years when there's not an election, it's just one and a half. It's basically one full-time person and one part-time person.

Michel Cormier: Yes, plus on a needs basis, we do hire—

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Right. There's that, and then the questions I have are these: First, how do you determine that's sufficient, and second, how many people does it then grow to during an election year?

Michel Cormier: It grows to three people, plus three or four people who are hired; we hired them last time from the press gallery to run the press room, but they're not on staff for the whole year.

We hire somebody: When we get closer to the debates and we negotiate the contracts with the producers to make sure that the technical aspects are followed, we hire that person, who also helps with communications. That's also a part-time job.

Usually, the core staff, when there's no election, consists of myself and a full-time person. I'm part time, and for the past two years I've also taken on the role of the acting commissioner at no further cost.

When a new commissioner is named, that person will also get a salary, but that's also a part-time job, usually one day a week. That's the difference.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Can you just walk us through the main chunks of work that are done in years between elections?

Michel Cormier: First, after the election, we have to produce a final report on the debates, which is quite extensive, because we do extensive consultations with stakeholders. We consult the parties, the producers and some experts in the media on issues of media management and accreditation.

We also have a survey done by the Canadian Election Study. These are public opinion polls plus focus groups with citizens on what they got out of the debates. We peruse all that and produce a report with recommendations on how to increase the quality of the debates, or all aspects of them.

Then, of course, there's the regular administrative relationship with the government departments, whether it's Treasury Board, Finance or other departments, and democratic institutions. We have to produce reports. We have to produce budgets. There's a whole reporting that is quite extensive. That takes part of the work.

We also have to be mindful of developments in terms of the democratic environment. For example, what are the security concerns in terms of cybersecurity for the next election, with the development of artificial intelligence? That is a very present problem that we have to address.

Then, of course, we produce the report, and then we have to act on, in this case, recommendations or conclusions. Do we have to make changes to the participation criteria? Do we have to make changes to other policy aspects like press accreditation? On that question, we do consult extensively with people, not just here but also abroad, to see what the best practices are elsewhere. That's kind of the gist of it.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Cormier, for being with us again.

I'd just like to make sure of one thing.

In one of your recommendations, you propose that the Leaders' Debates Commission no longer be responsible for organizing press conferences.

However, if I understand correctly, you still want the commission to be responsible for accrediting journalists.

Is that correct?

Michel Cormier: Yes, that's exactly it. We will continue to accredit journalists.

Christine Normandin: That does raise a few questions.

As I recall, what led to the problems we encountered last time with the press conference was that the commission authorized five journalists from Rebel News to take part. That was, in a way, the trigger for the security-related issues.

If the commission is responsible for accrediting journalists, some of them, such as those five journalists from Rebel News, could then legitimately request access to a press conference. That conference would be organized by someone else, and security will be handled by someone else.

Isn't that an indirect way of shifting the burden onto someone else?

● (1120)

Michel Cormier: Political parties have to deal with this during every election campaign. They receive accreditation requests for journalists, which are granted or denied based on criteria established by the political parties themselves. This creates an issue that falls outside the commission's scope of authority and raises the question of what constitutes a journalist.

According to two Federal Court rulings, we don't have the authority to decide this. As a result, we have had to adopt a very broad definition of the term “journalist”, which leaves the door open to many new forms of journalism.

As I mentioned, during the last election, this created a problematic work environment for most journalists. It also meant that press conferences were counterproductive, if you will. They didn't result in productive press conferences for anyone.

This is what we are doing, but we take no pleasure in doing so. Personally, I was a journalist for a large part of my career. It's not that we don't want journalists to have access to the party leaders. However, we believe that access to party leaders will be of better quality if campaign managers take responsibility for organizing the subsequent press conferences. They will be able to accredit the journalists they want. As for us, we are required to let in just about anyone who claims to be a journalist and who works on public-interest issues.

The definition is very broad, and it leaves the door open to all kinds of actors who are not necessarily journalists in the traditional sense. That causes tension and situations that are not optimal for the debates.

Christine Normandin: I'd like some things to be clarified, because there are parts I'm not quite following.

During election campaigns, politicians accredit journalists themselves and choose who travels them on the buses. Based on the answers you gave my colleague Mr. Wilkinson, I understand that there is money involved when it comes to accreditation, press credentials and so on.

If journalists then don't have access to the party leaders under your authority, what's the added value of accrediting journalists who will only be able to watch the debates like anyone else at home?

Michel Cormier: That's the nature of the event, of the debates.

What we're saying is that political parties simply need to organize press conferences the same way they do for all the other events during an election campaign.

Christine Normandin: If I may, at that point they would be able to accredit journalists themselves.

What is the added value for the commission of accrediting journalists if they don't have access to press scrums organized by the commission following the debates?

Michel Cormier: There are many journalists who don't follow election campaigns and who still want to attend the debates.

We had 60 media organizations last time, including 200 journalists. So there's a great deal of interest in attending the debates, in any case.

We give journalists the opportunity to obtain clips from the debates, to record them, to broadcast information and to have access to a working media room, as at other political events.

Christine Normandin: Again, I'm missing something.

With accreditation, what more do journalists on site have access to than someone who watches the debates on television?

Michel Cormier: People who watch the debates on television don't have physical access to the debates. They can't—

Christine Normandin: What is the added value of having physical access to the debates?

Michel Cormier: First, there is the technical advantage of having a high-quality recording to process the information, as well as access to editing suites and work rooms. Journalists also have access to the staff of the political parties in the debate environment, which allows them to conduct interviews or hold meetings.

I think that access to the debate environment is interesting and useful for journalists. Otherwise, we wouldn't receive so many accreditation requests to attend the event in person.

● (1125)

Christine Normandin: Do you think there were accreditation requests at the time because journalists were expecting to have access to a press conference following the debates, which was cancelled at the last minute?

Michel Cormier: I don't think so.

In 2019 and 2021, when the debates were held here in Ottawa, very few journalists showed up for the press conferences that followed. They were already writing their articles or reports. That's a fact.

I still think there's an advantage to having journalists cover the debates in person.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes.

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

It's good to see you again, Mr. Cormier.

I want to follow up a bit more on this accreditation, but I want to get through something on the budget. Mr. Wilkinson asked some fairly solid questions on this.

You have an operating budget in a non-election year that appears to be, over time, around $700,000 plus. You said you have two people working. Does that include you, sir?

Michel Cormier: Yes, it does.

Blaine Calkins: Okay, so that's you. In previous testimony, when you were here in December, you said you only work a couple of days a week. Of course, the salary reflects the fact that you work 0.4, or whatever that happens to be.

The other person who works is a full-time equivalent. Is that correct?

Michel Cormier: Yes.

Blaine Calkins: That leaves a significant amount of money—I'm guessing it's around a half a million dollars—for other contracts, as you've described them, to do.... What is it? Is it to produce reports?

Could you give us a brief summary of exactly what you have to provide by law? Are these reports to the Treasury Board? What exactly is the other half a million dollars paying for?

Michel Cormier: The government charges us between $150,000 and $195,000 a year, actually, for those accounting services, so that's a big chunk of it. We also have legal costs—

Blaine Calkins: You pay $200,000 a year for accounting services for an expenditure of $700,000...?

Michel Cormier: For the interaction between us and the different departments in an election year, which is more intense, we had to give the government $195,000. I think that was the upper echelon. Usually we pay the government around $150,000 to have work done on the accounting side. We interact with a number of agencies—

Blaine Calkins: This is the government paying other government agencies. It just sounds like a shell game of money to me, but I'm not here to criticize you. I'm guessing that this is how government works. It seems odd to me.

In the time I have left, I do want to move over to this debate commission. In response to a question from Mr. Van Popta, you talked about “peripheral issues”. I got the sense, when you answered that question about peripheral issues, that you didn't want the debate commission to be the issue and the handling of the accreditation of media to be the issue. You wanted to focus it on the debates. Did I interpret that answer correctly?

Michel Cormier: Yes. That's true. We will do the accreditation of the media.

Blaine Calkins: Okay.

How many people are typically asking for this from a particular media outlet? I would assume that a larger media outlet would want to have numerous people accredited as opposed to a smaller outlet. What is typical? As you said, some journalists would immediately try to go to press. Others would stick around and want to ask questions for further and follow-up stories.

What's a typical number of people from a press or media outlet who would apply for accreditation?

Michel Cormier: If it's a major newspaper, it's maybe one or two. If it's a major network like CTV, Radio-Canada or Global, it can be up to 20 people. They have technicians and reporters. They have radio reporters. They have different services.

Blaine Calkins: In terms of the interpreters you hire, are they on site for the debate, or do they do that virtually?

Michel Cormier: They do that remotely.

Blaine Calkins: They do it virtually. Okay.

Michel Cormier: It depends, though. The big networks who file for an all-news network, who file for radio, who file for the web, or who file for national television, such as *The National* or *CTV News*, need more people to actually be at the debate. They can't do that job with one or two people.

● (1130)

Blaine Calkins: Is there a public audience at the debate? I don't see what's behind the camera in the other direction. I see only what the camera is pointing at.

Michel Cormier: We did have an audience at the first debate in 2019, but we didn't have an audience at the last two debates.

Blaine Calkins: Okay.

Michel Cormier: That's also partly to save money, because to manage—

Blaine Calkins: If I may, then, Mr. Cormier, the audience is basically the press who are accredited to be there. Is that correct?

Michel Cormier: Yes, and the 19 million people who actually watch the debates.

Blaine Calkins: No, no, but they're not there. I'm talking about people who are physically there.

Michel Cormier: Yes.

Blaine Calkins: It's basically just your staff, the leaders, the political staff with the leaders, and the press. Along with the technical people delivering it, that's who is in the room—that's it.

Michel Cormier: That's right. Plus, you have networks that organize studios to broadcast live from the venue. They are not in the press room, but they are close to the press room.

Blaine Calkins: That's—

The Chair: You're over time.

Blaine Calkins: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Louis, you have five minutes, please.

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

Mr. Cormier, thank you for appearing once again before this committee.

Our review of the main estimates is an important opportunity for parliamentarians to examine how public resources are being used to support informed democratic participation. We know that leaders' debates play a key role in helping Canadians understand party platforms and make informed voting decisions.

You mentioned that there is a definite distinction between an election year and an off-election year. You reduce staff and reduce costs. When an election is called, you referred to hiring for “special projects”, when you have to expand quickly. How fast can you expand? How fast can you bring that team up to speed on average, traditionally?

Michel Cormier: We can do it quite quickly. I mean, we have people identified who actually come on board when it's needed, but some of the contracts we do in preparation for an election are not done just when the election starts. It's prior to that. For example, there are all the technical aspects of dealing with security and the different security agencies, whether it's physical security or cybersecurity, which changes every cycle because of the evolution technologically. We have people who start doing this months before the expected election. This is one example.

Tim Louis: Even in off-election years, you're still keeping those channels open.

Michel Cormier: In a minority government situation, it's kind of dicey, because you have to try to anticipate. We have to be “election ready” all the time, in a sense. When there is an obvious move towards an election, then we ramp up quickly for the immediate task of delivering the debates. Otherwise, for the planning phase—for example, the technical aspects of the production of the debates and whether they change, or the contracts you have to sign with the providers—that's done in the year or months before the expected election.

Tim Louis: You mentioned production facilities, and I believe in the opening statement you said it was a cost savings by having the debate inside a production facility that had all the equipment needed. I believe you mentioned CBC. How much notice did they need, or how much notice would they like? Would you consider doing that again as a cost reduction factor?

Michel Cormier: Yes, we are. It did work well for the debates. There's already a set there that's just adjusted. Of course, you have the people who work inside their own facility, so it reduces the cost and all of that.

At the same time, we know that it's also demanding on a lot of the political parties and even the journalists who follow the election, because it would be easier and more convenient for everybody to be in Ottawa, where you can take a pause during the campaign and be at your offices or homes, especially for the leaders who prepare for the debates. We bring everybody to Montreal, and everybody's in hotel rooms and temporary offices. It's not optimal, but we think that the money we save by doing this justifies that. We've talked about this to the parties, and they agree that it's well worth the effort to actually reduce costs.

Tim Louis: It's basically weighing the pros and cons. Okay, that's appreciated.

Your mandate is to organize two leaders' debates, one in each official language. It ensures broad, accessible, high-quality broadcasts and maintains the debate's integrity. In your opening statement, I believe you mentioned there were other languages that the debate was translated into. Can you mention that again? How many languages was it translated into? Does that number change from election to election? If so, what are the criteria for choosing the languages that a debate will be translated into?

● (1135)

Michel Cormier: The criterion is that it reaches communities that, because of language, may not be as keen to watch the debates in French or in English. We partner with OMNI Television, which is a multicultural television network. Through discussions with them, we identify which main languages should be offered. They go from Italian to Punjabi to Mandarin. We also assess the communities that actually would be touched by this. The idea is to offer a service whereby people who may not watch the debates because they're not fluent or fluent enough in French or English, will have access to the debates in their language, and that increases political engagement with these communities. I think that's one of the big parts of our mandate.

Tim Louis: Thank you. I appreciate it.

The Chair: We'll now turn to Madame Normandin for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cormier, I believe the last time you were with us was on December 4. At that time, you were asked about the work you do on a day-to-day basis. I'd like you to speak to that in more detail.

Could you tell me what has been done since December 4, what you've been working on?

I understand that there were most likely two weeks of holidays at Christmas. Aside from that, could you tell us in very concrete terms what has been accomplished in the past three months? You talked about it in broad terms in response to a question from my colleague Mr. Wilkinson.

Michel Cormier: We are working on preparations for the next debates. We need to be ready. The government is still a minority government, and I don't know how long that will last. We're also working on the follow-up to our report. Now we have to look at how we're going to prepare, for example, briefing notes for the next commissioner. These notes will focus on the challenges we identified in the report so that there are decision points. That's one part of the job.

We're also in discussions with the most recent producer of the debates, CBC/Radio-Canada, which is still under contract with us for the next debates, if they take place suddenly. So we're working to see what technical improvements we could make. I'm thinking of the layout of the media rooms or other things that are very trivial, but still important.

We are also in the process of reviewing all the technical language, such as changes to the participation criteria and changes related to the accreditation of journalists to ensure that everything holds up legally. That's always an important consideration. We're always vulnerable to legal challenges. That's not the case for media organizations that organize debates, for example. So we need to make sure everything is legally sound. We're also preparing the year-end financial reports, which have to be submitted shortly.

Those are three examples of what we're doing.

Christine Normandin: Specifically, what's coming up in the next three months?

Michel Cormier: Over the next three months, we will be completing those exercises. Then we're going to finish the work we're doing with the producers—which also isn't finished yet—to reassess the needs of political parties and the media in terms of debate venues. We'll also be reviewing the technical aspects to see whether any improvements can be made.

One of the things we're very interested in is how AI could pose a risk to the debate environment in future elections. We're starting discussions with security agencies and experts to make sure we have contacts. In an emergency, if there is a computer breach or some form of cyber sabotage, for example, how should we react? We're therefore developing scenarios, a kind of role-playing exercise to determine what needs to be done and who needs to act in a given situation. That's the kind of planning we're doing.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

We'll go to Mr. Kram, please, for five minutes.

Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Cormier, for joining us today.

For matters such as this, it's helpful to look at what other countries do and to learn from their best practices. I've looked up what they do in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and France. They all have elections, and they all have leaders' debates, but none of them has a government-run debates commission. The debates are all done by the networks or the private sector, all at no cost to taxpayers.

I'm wondering why Canada needs any of this. Why don't we hand the entire matter over to the private sector and save the taxpayers $3 million?

● (1140)

Michel Cormier: Well, in the case of the United States, there is the Commission on Presidential Debates, which organizes the debate. That is not organized by the networks.

Michael Kram: It's not funded by the government, though.

Michel Cormier: No. It's funded privately and run by the two main parties, the Republicans and the Democrats.

Other G7 countries, the ones you named, don't have a commission, but there was discussion after the British election to the effect that maybe a commission wouldn't be a bad idea. It was also considered in Australia. That's always a project that's there. Mexico has a full-time commission to run debates. There are other, smaller countries that do that.

As I said, maybe you should take up that question with the minister. I was hired to do the job. I do the job. I can't opine on whether this is warranted or not. That's up to Parliament to decide.

Michael Kram: Yes, and that's fair. If you've been hired to do the job, perhaps it's not your place to decide whether the job should exist in the first place, but I was wondering if you've ever studied and made recommendations to the minister about what would happen if the debates commission did not exist in the first place.

Michel Cormier: Well, we have given a lot of thought to that, because in 2015 I was organizing the debates for Radio-Canada, when there was no national English debate. There were small debates. It was very unstable in terms of the environment. That's why the commission was created, to stabilize the environment.

I think we've managed to do that. Debates now are expected. There is no speculation on whether or not they will happen. They're a kind of fixture of the campaigns. They're becoming an even more important event in the campaign, because we see the ratings go up. We also provide the debate experience to communities that may not be touched by network-run debates, because they wouldn't have access to all of these languages, including in indigenous communities. I think that's very important if you want to grow democracy and access to actual political participation.

These are maybe intangibles in your mind, but I think there are important aspects. I think that's also what drives the commission. Plus, we do study the best practices, and we've improved on what is the best format for debates, which is not a panel of journalists, which was the tradition here and ends up being leaders grilled by journalists. What we prefer is one moderator who encourages debate among the leaders, which is the nature of a political debate in the first place.

I think that is very important, and in this world of misinformation, manipulation and AI, it's one of the few occasions—if not the only one—that people have to see their leaders live, in an unedited fashion, and where they can actually believe what they see on the screen. They see them interact and compare positions with each other.

I think those are the general benefits of having a commission.

Michael Kram: Okay. Thank you.

Now that this structure is in place and these best practices are in place, could this all be transitioned to a group of networks and done at no cost to the taxpayers?

Michel Cormier: I don't think it can be done in this format. As you well know, media organizations have very severe financial problems, given the new environment of advertising. Even in Quebec last time, TVA, which organizes a separate French debate, did not manage to put one on, mainly, according to them, for financial reasons.

I'm not sure that the financial environment is conducive to the transfer you're talking about. As I say, maybe it's a question for Parliament to decide.

● (1145)

Michael Kram: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will turn to Mr. Wilkinson.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I just have a couple of questions, and then I may turn it over to my colleague.

You said that it used to cost $1.7 million. It's now down to $1.1 million in terms of putting on the debate. Maybe you could break down for us what the big chunks of cost are in that. Obviously, it's a good thing that it's come down, but what are the big chunks of cost?

Michel Cormier: The big chunk is the production of the debates, the cost to the networks of putting that on. That's labour and equipment. For example, if you take the debates out of the production facilities of CBC/Radio-Canada and do it here in Ottawa, just the truck that is used to do the production costs $100,000 for a few days' rent. These are big numbers; it's big television. There are manpower, equipment, use of the facilities, organization of the press room, of course, and managing that, producing all the documents, the equipment, the liaison and the relationships with the parties. That's part of the work that we do.

The $1.1million is basically labour, equipment and production costs. That's valid whether it's a sports event or a political event of that nature.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I want to flip what Mr. Kram was talking to you about a bit on its head. We did have a period of time when we didn't have this organization. Now we've had it for a number of elections.

If it wasn't in place, if we didn't have the LDC in place, what are the most important things we would lose?

Michel Cormier: I think you would lose the certainty of a debate. People in our surveys show that they want a debate and that they expect leaders to be at the debates. They think it's important for democracy. This is in the upper 80% to 90% of public opinion. I think you would lose the stability and the predictability of having a debate.

Before, the issue about the debates was whether there would be debates or not. You had to negotiate with the parties, and you had to negotiate with the networks. It was always uncertain, and those are not the best conditions in which to produce a debate.

I think, as I said, that it's growing the democratic footprint by offering the debates for people in languages other than French and English, but also offering the signal, because, you know, the signal of the debates, the feed, is free to anyone who wants to stream it. It doesn't belong to the commission. It doesn't belong to the networks, and this would be different.

This is important in the sense that, in the last election, we had 60 smaller digital media who streamed the debates on their YouTube channels or their other platforms and did programming around that on their platforms. I think it also takes it away from big network production and interpretation of the debate to communities who don't necessarily feel impacted or concerned by the debates.

I'll give you an example. There's a small alternative media outlet in Montreal that does reporting for communities who don't see themselves on the big networks, poorer people and people from different neighbourhoods. They streamed the debates. They had 5,000 people log on to their debates, and they also took questions and did analysis from those people's perspectives.

These are things that would be lost if the commission was not there and that we are hoping to grow even more for the next debate.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Thank you.

I'll turn it over to my colleague, Mr. Louis.

The Chair: There's probably time for one question.

Tim Louis: Maybe we'll dovetail this into the next panel.

You talked about emerging technologies and the future of leaders' debates. How can we enhance engagement with younger audiences, including students and first-time voters, with technology?

● (1150)

Michel Cormier: Your question is interesting because, for the debates, we were expecting people to leave traditional television and ask for something different, but it's one of these events, like the Super Bowl or like the big media events, where people actually go to the big broadcasters to watch the debates. That has continued. We were expecting a kind of slide toward new, different media consumption habits. It hasn't happened yet, but we're always searching to make sure we understand when this is going to change, in a sense.

As I said, the fact that, for example, we now partner with some of these new media, which cater to different and younger audiences, is a way to do that. We do provide, for after the debates, packages of clips from the debates, so that people can actually consume this in different formats and not just the usual.

For now, the traditional viewing patterns seem to be holding. We'll see if that changes over time.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank Mr. Cormier for appearing before the committee.

We will suspend for about 10 minutes while we flip over to the next panel.

● (1150)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1200)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

Before we begin with our next panel, we have two supplementary budgets. One is $1,500 for the actions of the longest ballot committee in recent Canadian elections, and the other is $1,000 for challenges regarding special ballot voting.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'd like to welcome our witnesses on the study of the current state of civic resilience in Canada.

From Apathy is Boring, we have Samantha Reusch, executive director.

As an individual, we have Michael Geist, Canada research chair in Internet and e-commerce law, University of Ottawa.

From the Quebec Press Council, we have Philippe Marcoux, information and training director.

Each witness will have five minutes to deliver opening remarks.

Ms. Reusch, you're first.

Samantha Reusch (Executive Director, Apathy is Boring): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Samantha Reusch. I'm the executive director of Apathy is Boring. For more than 20 years, we've worked to connect young Canadians to our democracy. Our work is non-partisan, national and grounded in a simple belief that young people have an equal stake in how our country is governed.

Last month, as part of our Rise program, we sent 100 curious young volunteers from British Columbia and Alberta all the way to Nova Scotia to do something simple. They went out on the street to ask other young people a question: “How do you feel about Canada's democracy?”

Over two weeks, they spoke with close to 1,000 young Canadians from across the political spectrum. Most conversations were not easy to start. Many of the canvassers told us that people initially found the question confusing or even off-putting. When they dug a little deeper, something interesting happened. Many knew government decisions affected their lives, but they were not sure how those decisions connected to the things that kept them up at night. However, when someone sat with them, listened and asked thoughtful questions, they had strong ideas about fairness, about being heard and about what a system that worked for them could look like.

What we saw in those conversations was not apathy but distance from the system. Democracy's greatest vulnerability is the distance that people feel from the institutions meant to represent them. When that distance grows, people become more vulnerable to ideas that those institutions are illegitimate or not worth protecting. We can measure that vulnerability.

The Privy Council Office's “Trust, Information, and Digital Ecosystem Study”, or TIDES, found that one in four Canadians believes our institutions need to be torn down, 15% of Canadians believe political violence can sometimes be necessary, and 7% say they would personally use force to achieve political goals. These attitudes are most concentrated among younger Canadians, among those experiencing financial stress and among those who rely heavily on social media for information. In other words, the people most exposed to foreign information manipulation and interference, and other actors who also benefit from that distrust, are often the same people who already feel most disconnected from democratic institutions.

If we want to strengthen civic resilience, we have to focus our defences on the people those threats are aimed at. That means closing the distance between people and our institutions, because democratic sovereignty and our ability as Canadians to make decisions about our future through institutions that we trust are being both eroded from the outside and hollowed out from within.

So far, much of our response is focused on institutional security, which is obviously extremely important. However, it will not reach the people who have already stopped believing the institution is worth protecting. What reaches them is exactly what our young canvassers were doing last month—people talking to people and meeting Canadians where they are.

The OECD tells us that Canadians who feel they have a say in what government does are nearly three times more likely to trust it. The fundamentals work. We just have not invested in them. However, our allies are. The European Union is investing billions in democratic infrastructure, and NATO has called on member states to invest in democratic resilience.

In the past few years, Canada has committed $30 million to strengthen democracy abroad. It's time to make that same commitment at home. That is why I'm asking this committee to champion the creation of a Canadian democracy fund with at least $20 million per year for five years, delivered through an arm's-length, non-partisan granting mechanism to the civil society organizations already doing this work and to those that have yet to form. Over time, we believe this investment should grow into a permanent Canadian democracy endowment, providing stable funding for democratic infrastructure that outlasts any single government. More than 130 leaders from across Canada have endorsed this proposal.

This fund would support the civic spaces where Canadians can ask questions to learn how the system works and can find their way into participation. It would help people become stewards of their democracy rather than bystanders to its decline. It's the most direct answer to this committee's study on how to strengthen civic resilience in Canada.

The young people we spoke to last month were not disengaged; they were waiting for an on-ramp. I believe that Canada can be a leader in implementing a whole-of-society approach.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll turn now to Professor Geist for five minutes.

Michael Geist (Canada Research Chair in Internet and E-Commerce Law, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon. My name is Michael Geist. I'm a law professor at the University of Ottawa, where I hold the Canada research chair in Internet and e-commerce law. I appear in a personal capacity, representing only my own views.

I'm a law professor who has long believed that the relevance of my research is enhanced by ensuring that it's accessible beyond academia, so that, on policy matters, Canadians can use it to become more actively engaged. That means publishing my research in open access formats, active social media use, regular op-eds and a long-standing podcast. Given that interest, I'm delighted to appear on a study on strengthening social trust and increasing civic engagement.

I'd like to focus on three things in my opening remarks.

First, I think there is an emerging risk for those who actively participate in the public square. Too often, those who speak out run the risk of facing threats, bullying and libellous claims. This can happen on any issue that becomes politicized, which leads to smears or falsehoods designed to undermine or chill that participation. Some of this may just be life in the political arena, but far worse is the hate that certain issues invariably spark. For example, I've been vocal on the issue of the relentless rise of anti-Semitism in Canada. That includes a Globe and Mail piece this week reflecting on the recent synagogue shootings in Toronto. I mention this because whenever I raise the issue, I face an immediate torrent of hate. Some of this comes in direct emails, and some of this is in social media replies that speak of false flags, Holocaust denial or support for genocide.

The chilling effect of this targeted hate is undeniable. We need effective rules on hate speech, but, perhaps even more, we need to ensure that Internet platforms that have pledged to address the issue of awful but lawful speech be held to their word—part of what could constitute a duty to act responsibly.

Second, civil society in Canada is badly underfunded. The area I know best is digital policy, where we have relatively few groups active in the space. Those that are face perpetual funding shortages. This has a huge impact on the quality of evidence before regulators like the CRTC, or on legislation before a committee. Indeed, it creates an imbalanced playing field, where deeper-pocketed interests are able to provide one-sided perspectives with limited counter-evidence.

There is some support—such as the CRTC system for public interest participation, a few grant programs like CIRA's, or the Privacy Commissioner's program—but it's limited, and there is little available for operational funding. By contrast, the U.S. and Europe have a far deeper bench of groups, often supported by a mix of government and charitable foundations. If we're serious about increasing civic engagement, we need to ensure that there is support for the groups that do the engaging.

Third, social trust and engagement are directly correlated to the public perception that one's views and efforts will make a difference. No one should seriously think that a single letter, email or consultation submission will single-handedly sway government policy. However, no one should be left thinking that a consultation or hearing is purely performative and that their submission or the views expressed are of no consequence whatsoever. Unfortunately, too often, this can be what it feels like.

For example, earlier today, the House started the move towards rejecting changes the Senate proposed for Bill C-4 involving a sunset clause on political party privacy rules. I think that largely exempting political parties from the same privacy obligations faced by virtually every other Canadian organization is wrong. For the purpose of public engagement, note that the committee studying the bill refused to hear from any witnesses on the issue and scarcely acknowledged its existence. It devoted literally 30 seconds to this entire part of the bill. You can't encourage engagement by burying provisions in an omnibus bill, acting as if they don't exist and rejecting changes from those who actually studied its impact.

The recent AI consultation is another case in point. Even if we leave aside the 30-day sprint, the exclusion of many voices from the expert group and the use of AI to summarize what Canadians said means that the “what we heard” report we got was actually a “what we want you to think we heard” report, with emphases different from the actual submissions themselves. For those who took the time to participate, it does not inspire confidence.

We have the tools to foster far more public engagement. We have a public that shows real interest in engaging. We need to prioritize making that happen through effective policy, essential support mechanisms and a genuine effort to incorporate the public into the policy process.

I look forward to your questions.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I will now turn to Mr. Marcoux.

[*Translation*]

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

Philippe Marcoux (Information and Training Director, Quebec Press Council): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to say a few words before you today.

My name is Philippe Marcoux. I am the information and training director at the Quebec Press Council. The Press Council is the mechanism for self-regulation of news media in Quebec, which works to protect freedom of the press and to defend the public's right to high-quality information.

In fact, it's the public's right to high-quality information that I want to talk to you about today. More specifically, I would like to say a few words about the dangers of disinformation, which, as you know, has become one of the main threats to the quality of the information provided to the public.

It's important to set out a few definitions here. By “disinformation”, I mean the publication or distribution of information that is false, with the aim of manipulating, misleading or causing harm. I also include what some have referred to as “malinformation”, which involves the dissemination of information that may be true in a strict sense, but that has been altered or exaggerated, again with the aim of manipulating, misleading or causing harm.

This false information is flooding the Internet, particularly on social media, and it has an extremely negative impact on the public. People are first misinformed and then go on to make decisions based on that false information. Ultimately, the public ends up trusting no one. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that disinformation is a threat to our democratic system and democratic institutions. It goes that far. In 2025, the World Economic Forum identified disinformation as the greatest short-term threat to the world. That's what it's come to.

How do we combat this disinformation? As you may imagine, I didn't come here to propose an absolute solution or an easy answer to this problem, but there are some avenues to explore. First and foremost, it's clear that countering disinformation requires trustworthy information. We fight falsehood with facts. It may seem obvious, but I'm probably not telling you anything new when I say that quality journalism has been going through a particularly difficult period for a number of years now. In fact, that's what Michel Cormier, who appeared before you shortly before me, told you. The first front in the war on disinformation, therefore, is to encourage, promote and value, in every possible way, those who produce and defend high-quality information.

There is also another front that must be addressed in this war against disinformation, and that's public awareness. Again, it may seem obvious to say that the public needs to be aware of the dangers of disinformation. However, it's more complex and, above all, more concrete than that.

According to some studies, relatively few people are actively producing disinformation. The Media Ecosystem Observatory recently reported that just 100 online users were responsible for 68% of conspiratorial posts, generating 90% of the views and 86% of the “likes”. In other words, 100 people are producing most of the disinformation. That's quite remarkable. They do produce a great deal of it, that's true, but this malicious false information wouldn't have such an impact on our society if it didn't spread like wildfire because of algorithms and, above all, because of the many shares on social media.

It's the viral nature of this disinformation, which, incidentally, is designed to grab our attention and encourage us to share it, that is its greatest strength. Yes, that means that all of us, as social media users, are part of the problem, because we share information we read in our newsfeeds without checking its accuracy or, at the very least, its source, and without giving any thought to whether it's true.

In a world where we have all become, to some extent, purveyors of information, it is essential to find a way to raise public awareness of the role we all play in spreading information and, as a result, disinformation.

● (1215)

Our young people, in particular, have a very important role to play. In 2025, according to the Reuters Institute, nearly half of them, or 44% of users aged 18 to 24 around the world, identified social media as their main source of news.

The Quebec Press Council made an effort to raise awareness among young adults last week by launching a video game against disinformation called Colonie 404. We created it with financial support from the Government of Quebec through the Program for a Well-Informed Youth, which aims to develop young people’s critical thinking about the news content presented to them.

You can take a look at Colonie 404 on colonie404.com. However, the idea is simply to make players understand that they are responsible for what they share on social media, that sharing even on a small scale can have serious consequences and that there are tools to ensure that the information they share is trustworthy. They include verifying sources, analyzing the terms used and cross-checking media. To be clear, I did not come here to tell you that Colonie 404 is a panacea or that it will solve the entire problem.

I will conclude with that. This is an initiative that I obviously find worthwhile, but we're going to need a thousand other initiatives of this kind to ensure that we all work together to address a very serious societal problem. You can count on the Press Council to ensure the quality of journalism in Quebec. However, the huge challenge of combatting disinformation is a job for all of us.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1220)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will now go to Mr. Calkins from the Conservatives for six minutes, please.

Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Chair. I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

I have a couple of questions.

Mr. Geist, you've been very outspoken in the last decade or so about a lot of things dealing with the Internet, censorship and what's perceived as censorship. You've also been very vocal about the Online Streaming Act. You haven't really mentioned it a whole lot right now. Do you have any concerns about where that's at right now?

Michael Geist: It seems to me that much of the criticism of those two digital bills, Bill C-11 and Bill C-18, was borne out. I know a couple of members who are here were on the heritage committee at the time.

The concern associated with Bill C-18 was that it would very likely lead to the blocking of news links. That would be a cost of the legislation. Much of that concern was dismissed, and ultimately, of course, we have now had two and a half years of blocked news links on Meta platforms. I don't think it helps the misinformation- or disinformation-related concerns. I think there's been a real cost beyond the cost to media entities. There's also been a significant cost in terms of access to reliable information, since some of that continues to be blocked. I think it's worth asking whether it was a price worth paying.

With respect to Bill C-11, it has also played out much as we thought. Virtually no money has been provided. The legislation is before the courts. The CRTC is taking a very long time to deal with those issues. There is also the prospect of pressure from the United States to do away with that legislation altogether. In fact, just last week, the U.S. Trade Representative identified it as one of two issues that are sources of concern as part of the CUSMA negotiations. It seems to me that it has played out much as many of the critics anticipated.

In some ways, it's a good illustration of why good-faith criticism of the legislation ought to be viewed in a constructive format as opposed to wholly dismissed, as I felt was often the case with those two bills.

Blaine Calkins: I don't think you're going to get any disagreement from this side of the table on that particular issue.

You said that because of Bill C-18, many platforms are no longer participating in the sharing of what Mr. Marcoux would argue would be actual bona fide journalistic information and mainstream media information.

I'm just curious. Mr. Geist, do you think this has had an effect on civic resilience?

Mr. Marcoux, do you think this kind of legislation has had an effect on civic resilience?

I'll ask the same question of you, Ms. Reusch.

If we can't share what we consider to be bona fide information from legitimate journalistic sources, then we're going to create a vacuum. That vacuum has been filled by online information. Every one of you has basically said that this is a problem. What you're telling me, then, is that Bill C-18 is a problem. Can you elaborate? Do you agree with these sentiments?

Michael Geist: I do, on two levels. I'll make sure that there's time for my fellow panellists.

I'd say first it is a problem for the very reasons you just articulated. It means that the void gets filled. It isn't that people don't share information about current events and activities. It may well be that it's more opinionated and it may be less fact-based, or at least it comes out of fewer organizations that many would view as more reliable simply because they're not on those platforms. Let's face it. Those platforms, Instagram and Facebook, remain popular for many people.

I think it has also harmed many of the media outlets, at the end of the day. They were able to get some money from Google as part of the deal that was struck with Google, but in the grand scheme of things, they lost licensing agreements they had with Google in return for that money, as well as licensing agreements many had with the Meta properties, and they lost the ability to disseminate their works.

We see this ongoing value. I was struck—fairly recently, actually—that there was some promotion from CTV that said you can now customize your Google News feed to choose the sources you get, including CTV. This is the very platform of which, throughout Bill C-18, we were being told, “It's a problem, because it's not paying us.” At the same time, we have those media outlets still today looking to those platforms as a source of dissemination.

I thought it was wrong-headed legislation and there ought to have been better ways to deal with it. We continue to pay the price.

Blaine Calkins: Monsieur Marcoux.

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

Philippe Marcoux: I don't want to comment on the value of that legislation or the problems associated with it, except that it's impossible to conclude that not being able to see their products on the social media in question has been a good thing for quality news media. Of course it hurt them. They needed that visibility. At the same time, the amounts paid by Google help a lot of media outlets. There have been some positive aspects to the legislation. It wasn't just to prevent the flow of information.

That said, as Mr. Geist mentioned, was it worth it? I'm not in a position to answer that. However, part of the work to combat disinformation will be to put some controls on the web giants. We can't just leave the door wide open for these private companies to become the only sources of news while not providing resources to the media that produce quality information.

Was that legislation the solution? I don't know. I can't answer that. However, we also can't ignore the important role of the web giants in distributing this quality information.

[*English*]

Samantha Reusch: I'll add that I'm also—

The Chair: I'm sorry. As the keeper of the time, we are well over six minutes, so I have to apologize. There will be plenty of opportunities to add your answer.

We'll turn to Mr. Al Soud for six minutes, please.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, all, for having me. I am not a usual member of this committee, but I'm here so often I'd like to think it's honorary at this point.

To our witnesses, thank you for being with us today.

Ms. Reusch, it's a pleasure to see you again. Of course, we panelled together not long ago on a topic that I find feeds perfectly into what we're discussing today.

I am one of the younger ones in the House. I know the chair is giving me the side-eye as I say it. This means that I approach many of these conversations with a slightly different lens and a different perspective.

One of the things I hear recurrently is this idea that young people aren't interested in the world of politics, and that is unequivocally untrue. I find, as you said in your opening remarks, that young people are some of the most politically interested people. They have some of the strongest opinions that one could ever find, yet there are still challenges in terms of their engagement, and you highlighted those. I'm wondering what you find are the primary barriers to their engagement.

Samantha Reusch: I agree with everything you've shared. I often say I've never met a young person—I've been doing this for 10 years—who doesn't care about something. I think the idea that young people are disinterested in the issues is false. I think the gap that exists between the things they care about and the way the government discusses...the processes or their sense of their access to those processes to create change within institutions is where the gap tends to lie.

Our canvassers were going out to canvass to try to design interventions to address the barriers their peers were feeling in their community. It was a really interesting introduction to the type of work we do for them. These are the types of things they were hearing: “I care about this thing, but I don't really know how to change it.”

You end up in a place with analysis paralysis, or completely disengaging. The tenor and tone of politics are something a lot of young people don't find very appealing.

I liken it to being a sports fan. If you're really into the Habs versus the Bruins, you can get really into that rivalry and the dynamic between the two, but if you're a casual watcher, sometimes you don't really know what's going on. You don't know why there's the back-and-forth, and it's easier to just sit back.

Fares Al Soud: That's fantastic. Thank you.

I'm quite keen on something you said in your opening remarks about this idea of meeting Canadians where they are. I constantly say this, and I know that many in the House do: It's finding people where they are. That is the priority. It's a two-way street. We engage with them, and they engage back, and that is how it's supposed to be, but if we're not finding them in the places they navigate, then we're not going to have those conversations.

I suppose my question here is, where do you find young people are least engaged currently? How do we meaningfully engage them so that they don't feel like, well, the world of politics or the world of government is just not for them and there's no way they can influence change?

Samantha Reusch: The tricky thing, given the room I'm sitting in right now, is to say that I actually don't think politicians are the best people to be bringing young people into politics. I say that with a tremendous amount of respect.

For a lot of young people, I think we've seen this sort of decline. The level of trust young people have in elected officials has declined. Very few are members of political parties, though I think political parties have a role to play in engaging potential supporters and that kind of thing.

Often, though, the people whom young people trust the most are their friends and family. We often see that young people who are really engaged, like you, have come from families that instill this in them young. Not everyone has that, and we believe that shouldn't be a barrier. Our education system doesn't do a great job of onboarding people into our democracy. It often focuses on really technical elements, as opposed to the softer ones. A lot of young people don't know that you can come to testify in front of a committee and share your point of view on things or send a letter and someone has to read it.

Once they do these things, they realize that it's super easy, and they get a bit of a buzz from the fact that they get that response, but often, it's getting them to take that first step or making them aware of the ways in which they can get involved that is one of the biggest hurdles.

The most obvious place for people to engage, I think, the most in your face, is obviously during an election, but a lot of young people, for lots of different reasons, don't feel that their vote will translate into meaningful change.

That's a lot of the work we do during elections. I hope that answers your question.

● (1230)

Fares Al Soud: Absolutely, and I also want to latch on to something you said there. We had a 14-year-old and a 16-year-old testify in one of my sessions at the heritage committee. I can honestly say—and I think there was consensus among us as members—that it was some of the most moving testimony we'd heard on the topic at hand.

I wholeheartedly agree. If young people knew that those spaces existed, that they could be involved in those kinds of environments, I think it would be one way of bringing them in.

I also hear you on the idea that politicians perhaps are not best suited to bringing them into these spaces, and I imagine that media literacy plays into that aspect. What kinds of media literacy do you find would most effectively draw them in? You highlighted shortcomings, perhaps, in terms of the education being a little too material-focused, rather than what it ultimately could mean for them. How do we effectively convey that there's potential in the world of government?

Samantha Reusch: If I may, this speaks to the question from the other member as well. I was going to share that there's information going around currently that young people spend an average of five hours a day on social media. Despite that, I actually don't think that social media is a great...we do it, everyone does it and you have to do it, but it's a really challenging environment to break through in. There's a lot of noise. We've met young people in organizations that do work similar to ours during elections who don't even know an election is happening, because their algorithm is very specifically giving them a different type of content.

Our information ecosystem is so fractured that one of the things I think we have to do is acknowledge that we're operating in an environment where everyone is experiencing the world a bit differently. What might work for one person.... You might be able to reach someone online because their algorithm will share it with them, but then others will never see that outreach. I think there has to be a varied strategy.

Social media can be one way, but at the end of the day, the platforms are designed to be addictive. One of the biggest difficulties we face is that there's an opportunity cost to the amount of time young people spend online, and to get them out in communities door-knocking in your cases, or participating in programs.... Once they're there, we hear so many young people talking about how lonely their peers are and how much they're looking for meaningful connection, but I think that in this new generation, it has become increasingly a challenge even to get them in a physical space and connecting with one another, never mind with politics.

The Chair: Thank you so much. It was, though, I have to say, a bit hurtful, even though I know we're not cool—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: To hear it in testimony is a little too hurtful, but I do respect the analysis.

I will turn to Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

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

Christine Normandin: I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us.

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Marcoux. I imagine that Colonie 404 was created based on findings that were made or that it was designed to meet particular needs.

Basically, would you say that your first finding about disinformation is that people aren't even aware that they are potential vectors of disinformation?

If not, would you say instead that they are aware of it, but that they don't necessarily have the tools required to distinguish between good and bad information?

Philippe Marcoux: You've hit the nail on the head. Of course, I wouldn't say that people are not at all aware, but I think they're clearly not aware enough of the role they play in spreading disinformation.

I'm not here to blame the public for not doing their job. It's all moving very quickly and we don't think it matters much. You read a news story, you find it funny or interesting, it confirms something you think and you share it with your friends. Things are moving very quickly. However, we're going to have to be aware of the fact that, if we don't do the necessary checks, we're part of the problem.

Second, when it comes to tools, this is true for the majority of people. In my world, obviously, we are awash in information and we know all these ideas, but there are ways to verify information. That's the story we're trying to tell with Colonie 404. It can be done, and it can be done quickly. Yes, we are trying to give them tools that they will always have.

The problem with artificial intelligence, among other things, is that at one point people were told that if they saw a photo showing a character with six fingers, they could conclude that it was disinformation. However, artificial intelligence is constantly improving, and eventually it will be no longer possible to verify it. The tools we are offering with Colonie 404 help people verify information in an ongoing way. We hope that people will learn something from our small effort. However, once again, it's going to take a lot more effort and initiatives for them to understand that they shouldn't be part of the problem.

● (1235)

Christine Normandin: Speaking of which, I'd like your opinion on a couple of aspects.

You mentioned the fact that a lot of wrong information easily went viral, but that there were relatively few sources of disinformation and actors spreading it.

Without necessarily legislating to abolish these sources, for example, could a first step be naming them and raising red flags?

For example, when content becomes extremely viral on social media, could there be an indication that it is viral content or that it comes from a less than credible source before someone shares it? It wouldn't be a matter of telling them not to share the content, but simply drawing their attention to it.

Would that already be a potential solution?

Philippe Marcoux: If it were possible, it might begin to address the problem. I'm not sure. Honestly, I would have liked to have invested the small resources we had for Colonie 404 in the development of a tool like the one you describe. I'm not sure it's technologically possible. We can make an effort and perhaps work on the fringes to name sources, but things are moving so quickly. These people are so well organized that, if you cut off one channel, they'll find another. They will change their name. These people are not necessarily in Canada either. Therefore, what control can be exercised over these channels?

Furthermore, we're getting into grey areas. When there is no doubt that it is a source of disinformation, it's easy, but there are news sources that are not great and others that may be acceptable. How will you find the dividing line in your efforts to block or name them?

Technologically, it's extremely complicated. It's like the race to detect fake news and fact-check. A lie goes around the world twice before the truth has time to put its shoes on. This is a real problem. I would like us to work on it, but I have doubts about the possibility of finding a satisfactory result.

Christine Normandin: I'm going to ask you a question along the same lines.

Artificial intelligence is a source of problems, but do you think it will eventually be possible to use it more to neutralize the sources of problems and inform people better? For example, it might be possible to use artificial intelligence to cross-check information.

Should we give people more tools to fight fire with fire?

Philippe Marcoux: Yes, that's definitely part of the solution. However, we are in an arms race between the good guys and the bad guys, and they have no principles, unfortunately, so they are moving faster. They will use new technologies to produce their disinformation faster than we can develop tools to identify that disinformation.

However, it's a race we have to engage in, even though, without saying it's a losing battle, we're always going to be a little behind. Yes, we have to use technological tools to fight pretty much the same technological tools.

● (1240)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Thank you so much.

We will now turn to Mr. Van Popta for five minutes, please.

Tako Van Popta: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

Mr. Marcoux, I'll begin with you.

You talked about the need for critical thinking. I would agree with that. I think that should be a mandatory course in high school.

I was in high school many decades ago, unlike Mr. Al Soud. It was very recent for him. This is many decades ago, long before the Internet was a thing.

I had to take a course on critical thinking, because there was misinformation and disinformation way back in those days. We called it bias. Our teacher taught us how to read something critically and understand the bias and where the writer was coming from. It was taught then. It's a skill I've taken with me my whole life.

It would seem to me that it's very important today, particularly, to teach people how to think and read critically.

There's only so much the government can do. We struggle. On the one hand, we want freedom of expression and freedom of the press. On the other hand, we want to protect people from misinformation. We, as a government, have not found that balance.

It's over to you. What do you think about individuals just taking responsibility for themselves to learn how to think critically?

Philippe Marcoux: Obviously....

[*Translation*]

I'm sorry. I was going to answer you in English, but I will continue in French, on principle.

Of course, people have a responsibility, and they must be aware of it. That's what we're doing with our game. It aims to make them aware of the problem. However, you started by talking about education. I know it's not the federal government's responsibility, but education in high schools is important. In fact, I'm going to meet with teachers who teach what we in Quebec call the CCQ, which is Quebec culture and citizenship. They have a responsibility to talk to young people about critical thinking. I'm going to give them my game as a teaching tool.

More than that, we also have a responsibility to raise public awareness. I'll let you determine whether it's your responsibility, as the federal government or another level of government, but we can't simply tell people that they have to be aware of the problem and work on their critical thinking skills. That's a short-sighted approach. We have a societal problem, and we all need to work on it.

[*English*]

Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

I want to talk about bias in the media.

I'm reading from your website. It's an excerpt from the “Quebec Press Council Guide of Journalism Ethics”. Point number 6.2 states, “The news media must under no circumstances let their commercial, political, ideological or other interests take precedence over the legitimate interest of the public in quality information, nor restrict the professional independence of journalists.”

I see you nodding your head in full agreement with that. I agree with that as well.

I read a very recent article in The Canadian Press by Catherine Morrison around former CBC anchor Travis Dhanraj. I don't know if he was fired or if he quit, but anyway, they had a falling out. He said that he was being told what to say or not to say and who to interview or not to interview. He was saying that this went against his professional journalistic ethics.

I wonder if you have a comment on that, not necessarily on this case in particular but the importance of the media being professional and bias-free. Everybody has a bias, of course.

[*Translation*]

Philippe Marcoux: I'm obviously not going to comment on the specific case of my former colleague at the CBC. I spent 28 years at Radio-Canada, but I don't know this person, let alone the details of the case.

What I would like to tell you is that there is an important nuance between disinformation and what you call bias and what I would call the viewpoint of a media outlet. The news media outlets that work for the public good in Canada and Quebec are not the problem. They're not the ones spreading disinformation. You may disagree with some of their articles or columns. You can criticize them. In fact, the organization I represent does exactly that, criticize the media. People send complaints about journalism to our organization. The media is not perfect, but it does not spread misinformation to do harm or sell a particular point of view. That's not what it's doing.

It's important to make that distinction and stop confusing the issue. Saying that the traditional media is the enemy of the people is not attacking one aspect of its work, it's attacking its credibility. Doing so means leaving the door wide open to those who publish nonsense and sidelining credible media. When you don't agree with an article published by a media outlet, it's very dangerous to decide that you should no longer believe anything it says and that it's a spreader of disinformation, when that's not what's happening. This has a significant impact on the public and on the fight against disinformation.

● (1245)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll have to intervene there. I apologize.

We'll turn to Madame Brière for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the three witnesses for being with us today. Frankly, this is a very interesting conversation.

Ms. Reusch, in your opening remarks, you said that you asked young people what they thought about democracy in Canada and that you understood from their answers that being heard was important to them.

I was told that on Sparks Street, until very recently, there was a speaker's corner where people could stop by and address the crowd. People used to talk to each other and ask questions. It was an actual public debate.

I don't think that's what the young people were referring to in terms of what kind of system would speak to them.

However, what do you think the government can do to help organizations like yours promote civic participation and get young people engaged?

Samantha Reusch: Thank you for the question. I will answer in English.

[*English*]

I love that idea of having people out on the street talking to one another. I think that when you give people the resources and the space to do innovative things, they'll often come up with things that feel local and relevant and that speak to the people who live in the space where they are.

Part of my recommendation today around increasing funding for this type of work is purely from some napkin math. I estimate that right now, those of us who work in this sort of non-partisan civil-society democracy space are probably a total of 20 million per year in terms of our general market share, if you will. Therefore, I think that increasing funding is paramount.

Going around and reaching individuals is resource-intensive. Again, there aren't really any shortcuts to this work. We need to be on the ground in spaces, and that doesn't mean we need to have the resources to reach every Canadian individually. However, one of the things we've seen over the last 20 years through our work is that activating young people in local communities who can go and do that work is paramount. The more young people you're able to engage and bring on board as local democracy advocates, let's say, and the more people you involve in that conversation, the more that culture will grow.

I will also say that these things sound sort of quaint. In terms of canvassing, I think all of you are familiar with door-knocking and the impacts of that. I think it can sound sort of fluffy, in a way, or maybe you could.... I don't know.

I know that this government is investing heavily in our security and our defence, and there's a lot of money going into protecting our institutions. I think this is actually a critical gap. I think the extent to which the public understands the gravity of the situation we're in here in Canada is far removed from what the government understands. That comes in terms of protecting our elections and our institutions, but it's also the attitudes Canadians have towards those institutions and our shared sovereignty. I think these things can sound really simple, but they're really profound and meaningful. The more we're able to do them, the more we'll be able to collectively defend our democracy.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Thank you.

Earlier, you also talked about a recommendation you made regarding a Canadian democracy fund. Could you tell us a bit more about that recommendation?

For example, who would manage the fund, and what kind of organizations could it help?

[*English*]

Samantha Reusch: Absolutely. As I mentioned before, the funding is very limited at the moment for this type of work, and that's both on the government side and on the philanthropic side. There have been funds in the past, led or invested in by the federal government, like the Equality Fund, which distributed the funds in an arm's-length capacity. The goal isn't to create a government-led strategy towards revitalizing civic space and engaging the public in democracy. This shouldn't be a partisan issue, so I think the more arm's-length it is from government, the more credible it will be with the public.

I think some model that distributes the fund to a third party to grant out is paramount, and I think that the organizations and the recipients of those funds should be civil society organizations—non-academic and really focused on engaging the public. It's not that research is not important, but we do fund a lot of research. I think this is quite specific in the objectives it should have and that the work is very importantly non-partisan.

As I mentioned before, I think political parties have a role to play. However, in this case—as I delicately or maybe indelicately mentioned before—a lot of Canadians don't necessarily trust the agendas or the approach of partisan actors. Therefore, having trusted intermediaries to help bridge that divide, I think, is really critical. Those things can importantly address things like misinformation and disinformation and the skills people need in order to engage in that critical thinking that we were discussing before. I also think it can foster innovation in democratic participation and do a lot of other things.

I think my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Because I've inadvertently—well, it's my usual practice—given Mr. Van Popta and Madame Brière extra time, you have three and a half minutes, Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Marcoux, I'd like to talk to you about something that may be less under federal jurisdiction. I would like your general comments about it.

You mentioned that one of the first solutions to counter disinformation or misinformation was having quality news.

Since you have many years of experience in journalism, including 28 years at Radio-Canada, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the change in the public's understanding of journalism over the years and how it came to be. I'm thinking in particular of the grey areas that may exist in some cases, for example between journalists and influencers, which is a relatively new phenomenon. There's also the fact that "journalist" is not a protected term.

In short, I'd like to hear your comments on the environment in which we find ourselves in terms of quality or recognized news, which in itself is a tool to counter disinformation.

Philippe Marcoux: As you know, that's a very big question that we grapple with every day at the Press Council, for obvious reasons. Our organization does receive complaints about journalism.

We still have to define what journalism is. We have our definition, and the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec, or FPJQ, has its own. It makes sense for us not to have the same definition, because we're not addressing the same issue.

To answer your question in a likely unsatisfying way, we are constantly wading through grey areas. That's the case because now there are new information providers, so to speak, that don't fit the so-called original definition of journalism.

Naturally, back when journalists could only work at a newspaper, on the radio or on television, it was easier. We knew who these people were. Now, there are many, many platforms and communication channels that feature journalism. People can do excellent journalism work there, even if they don't work for a radio station, a television station or a newspaper. Therefore, it becomes very difficult, especially for the public, to sort things out. We have our definitions, our criteria and all that, but the general public has trouble determining which sources are credible.

I would like to say that if someone, at the outset, commits to following basic ethical principles at the very least, we know that that person is acting in good faith and working for the public interest. These principles are set out in the Press Council's ethics guide. I think that's the first criterion. If you can tell that someone is not an activist and is working for the public interest, that's a good way to establish that you can trust them.

That said, it is actually a problem. Once again, I would like to have an ultimate solution, such as a quality seal. It is now possible to become an associate member of the Quebec Press Council at very little cost, and then to use our logo, which simply states that you are committed to following the journalistic ethics guide. It's certainly not the ultimate solution, but if you see the logo, at least you know that the information is produced in good faith. There should be more of these initiatives.

● (1255)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now turn to Mr. Cooper for five minutes.

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

I'm going to direct my questions to Professor Geist.

Since October 7, there has been a massive increase in anti-Semitic hate and violence in Canada. Just yesterday, you wrote a column on this topic, entitled “Words Are Not Enough”.

You note:

> [Since October 7], Canadian Jewish communities...have faced relentless anti-semitic incidents: schools hit with gunfire, synagogues firebombed, community centres and old-age homes vandalized, hospitals protested, summer camps threatened, Jewish students and campus groups vilified, and Jewish-owned businesses boycotted.

You go on to say:

> These repeated incidents have become as much a part...of being Jewish in Canada in 2026 as the police presence outside synagogues and the enhanced security for community events. The unmistakable message, echoing that dark era in Europe in the 1930s, is that Jews are not welcome here.

That's a pretty chilling indictment of the climate Canadian Jews face today, is it not?

Michael Geist: It is, but I must admit—with enormous regret—that I think it's accurate and reflects how many in the community feel. I was speaking just yesterday with someone who was talking about attending synagogue services wearing a flak jacket. When you take your kids to school, there are multiple security measures that exist. It's akin to going to an embassy or trying to get through an airport, at times. This is Canada in 2026.

Listen, I think these issues stem from a number of factors. My view—and it's expressed in the piece—is that we desperately need leadership to stand up and make clear that this is wrong and won't be tolerated, and that action is going to accompany it. I certainly welcome what we saw yesterday, but it needs to be seen as a start, not as a wholesome solution.

Michael Cooper: In another piece that you wrote, right after the Bondi Beach massacre, you stated that “too often leaders avoid references to antisemitism or couch it with an 'all hate matters' message”.

Can you elaborate on why it is so important for leaders to call out anti-Semitism, full stop, without conflating anti-Semitism with other forms of hate, as condemnable as those other forms of hate may be?

● (1300)

Michael Geist: To be clear, of course all hate does matter, but in this instance, when you look at the data, the amount of anti-Semitism and the violence that's accompanied it far outstrips the targeting of any other groups. It is a very small group in Canada.

Too often, we see people who are not willing to call it out or, frankly, are not stepping up at all.

I give enormous respect to the ministers and MPs who appeared yesterday in terms of trying to provide additional funding, but candidly, it's the same faces. It's largely MPs of Jewish background or those who come from constituencies where there is a larger Jewish presence.

This is a Canadian issue. This is an issue where we have a group in Canada that has trouble sending their kids to school or going to their place of worship or to a community centre without all sorts of security. We'll know that we're dealing with this more effectively when the MPs who don't have large Jewish constituencies are standing up and speaking out on these issues, and when it's the various other business leaders, community leaders and religious leaders, who may not for the moment be directly affected by this but should recognize that this affects us all. We really need all the various communities speaking out.

Michael Cooper: Canadian taxpayers spend $1.4 billion annually to fund the state broadcaster, the CBC. Earlier this year, B'nai Brith released a report in which it did an analysis on CBC coverage. What B'nai Brith found was a vast gap in terms of bias targeted toward Israel. References to things such as Israeli civilians were being virtually airbrushed from CBC's coverage since October 7. The conclusion of the report is that, in fact, CBC has contributed to fuelling anti-Semitic hate in Canada.

Do you share B'nai Brith's conclusion and the concerns it has raised?

Michael Geist: I think the Jewish community has a lot of concerns with the kind of coverage that's out there, whether it's the CBC or otherwise. I think that the effect is a combination of all sorts of things. It's not just on the leadership side. I think media unquestionably has a difference. It has the lack of accountability. The issues that arise on campus have an impact. We are seeing all of this come together.

What we are also seeing is this escalation of violence, which has risen to the level of literally shooting at synagogues this past weekend. My enormous fear, and what prompted me to write the piece you mentioned, is that it doesn't end there. With Bondi Beach and the murders we saw in the United States in Colorado and Washington, it feels like that is the next step here if we don't step up and say that this simply can't continue in Canada.

The Chair: We're well over time.

We'll turn to Mr. Louis for five minutes, please.

Tim Louis: Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I'll start with Ms. Reusch.

You mentioned at the top that youth have strong ideas. They're not apathetic, but they do feel distanced from the system. That's what the study is trying to do. It's to see how we can reach them, and I appreciate all the work you're doing.

You said that people who are more disconnected from civil institutions end up being more vulnerable to being manipulated. I appreciate it when you say they're not disengaged, but that they're looking for an on-ramp. I think that was very telling.

I also appreciate the work you're doing with the longer conversations in the canvassing that you're doing. You referred to them as longer, local and relevant conversations. Do you have success stories about someone who might have been approached and now is doing the work?

Maybe in that vein, can you tell us how you got involved?

Samantha Reusch: That's a good question. I can definitely speak to that.

Our Rise program, which has been part of the Canada Service Corps since 2018, has worked with youth with little to no experience. We've had over 700 youth come through the program.

As I mentioned, when it comes to taking that first step, we've had lots of youth join the program for really interesting reasons. For some, it's because a loved one in their life has said, “You need to make friends,” while others are a bit more engaged and care a lot about policy but don't know how to get things moving on the ground. There are lots of different stories.

One of the big wins in that program and across the work we do is that usually they come back for more. I think once people take that first step, they create a ripple effect. They're willing to go and engage their friends.

We've been running another initiative called Table Topics since about the 2019 election. That focuses on giving people a little bit of money for some food and giving them a bit of training on how to start a conversation with their own friends and their own network so they can sit down together and break the taboo of no politics at the dinner table. We've had thousands of young people host these dinners. The cool thing is that often we get people who come and want to host their own dinner after they've attended one, so I think that's successful.

On an anecdotal and individual level, the stories that I hear of people who go down those pathways from not knowing how to get involved to showing up at a city council meeting and talking about local policy are numerous and diverse. The idea is giving people the confidence, the skills, the knowledge and the tools to take the issues they care about, create their own theory of change, and move forward and feel like they're having an impact.

The work can be quite specific, and there's no silver bullet, but once you get people started, they'll go from there on their own.

● (1305)

Tim Louis: Fantastic. I can certainly sense the passion that you have.

Given this opportunity to appear before us, what is your direct message to someone who might see this appearance and be on the fence about considering getting involved and engaging? What would your message be?

Samantha Reusch: The world has changed a lot since I started doing this work. I think we all bear some personal responsibility, as was discussed before, to participate and uphold our democratic institutions. I don't think they're a given, and I don't think we should take them for granted.

More and more, I'm seeing people want to show up and have conversations with people who might see things differently from how they do. I think young people especially are more aware that the things they're seeing online are not the full picture. I see this interest in reaching out, particularly to people with different perspectives and points of view. I want to encourage that. The more rigid and the more siloed we become, the more difficult it is to bridge across differences.

Often, taking that first step, for the most part, is a positive experience. Even just volunteering can be a great first step.

Getting off-line is the main goal. I mentioned before we do a lot of social media content and we reach out to young people where they are online, but our goal is almost always to get them off-line and doing things together.

Tim Louis: How can we quantify and measure success? Would it be youth voter turnout? Would it be youth feeling like they're voting with confidence? What would be a good metric?

The Chair: This is going to be harsh, but give a very brief answer.

Samantha Reusch: That's one way, but I think there are lots of ways. Trust is one that I would emphasize as being particularly important.

The Chair: It didn't have to be that brief, but that was excellent. The last time I said that, the witness went on for another minute, so I thank you for staying within the five-minute mark.

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

This committee is adjourned.