



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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ERRE • NUMBER 022 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, August 31, 2016**



**Chair**

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia**



## Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Wednesday, August 31, 2016

• (1815)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)):**  
Welcome to our third set of hearings today at the special committee on electoral reform, the evening edition.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here on a Wednesday evening in August in Ottawa.

We have with us three witnesses. I will read short biographies of each before we get going.

We have Jane Hilderman, Dominic Vézina, and Taylor Gunn with us this evening.

Jane Hilderman is the executive director of Samara, an organization seeking to reconnect citizens and politics. Ms. Hilderman has worked on Parliament Hill for both government and opposition MPs, and currently focuses on researching Canadian participation in democracy, how members of Parliament do their jobs, and the citizen perceptions of politics.

In 2011, Ms. Hilderman contributed to a report released by Samara featuring the voices of Canadians who feel disempowered by politics.

[Translation]

Dominic Vézina is a strategic advisor at the Institut du Nouveau Monde, a non-partisan organization whose mission is to increase citizen participation in democratic life. Mr. Vézina has experience in the areas of psychology and communications. He was manager of the educational resources service of a school board in Montreal at a time when the board implemented educational pilot projects on governance and citizenship. In 2010, the National Assembly of Quebec awarded Mr. Vézina the Prix du mérite municipal, recognizing the commitment of those who establish programs in their communities.

[English]

Finally, we have Taylor Gunn, the president and co-founder of Civix, spelt with an x, a non-partisan charity seeking to build skills and habits of citizenship among Canadian youth. One of this organization's longest running and most successful programs is Student Vote, which is a parallel election for students under the legal voting age. In April, Mr. Gunn received the 2016 Greer Award for outstanding contributions to publicly funded education in Ontario.

We will follow the order in the notice of meeting, meaning that we will start with Ms. Hilderman for 10 minutes. Each witness will

speak for 10 minutes and then we'll have two rounds of questions in each round,

[Translation]

In each round of questions, each member will have the opportunity to talk to the witnesses of his or her choice for five minutes. It is very important to emphasize that the time includes the questions and the answers. If by chance witnesses have not had the time to answer a question because the five minutes are up, they should not worry. They will have the opportunity to answer the same question the next time they speak.

Without further delay, I would ask Ms. Hilderman to make her presentation on electoral reform.

Thank you.

[English]

**Ms. Jane Hilderman (Executive Director, Samara):** Thank you, Chair, for the invitation to appear this evening at this almost final committee before you embark on your cross-country tour.

As the chair mentioned, I'm appearing on behalf of Samara Canada. We are a non-partisan, independent charity committed to strengthening Canada's democracy and reconnecting citizens to politics. At Samara we employ rigorous, accessible, and innovative research to expose how Canada's democracy works for Canadians. Our work is regularly cited in national media coverage, post-secondary classrooms, parliamentary discussions, and even in places like the most recent Travers Debate where humourist Scott Feschuk referred to Samara as "Parliament's mom". We take that as a compliment. Our research works in tandem with Samara's engagement programming, as we aim to celebrate and encourage active citizenship.

I'd like to clarify for this committee that, unlike many of the academics and experts you've heard from throughout July and August, Samara Canada has not been immersed in the nuances of different electoral systems over many years. We have not been, and are not, an advocate for one particular electoral system over another.

Since our creation in 2009, most of our work has been focused on what I would call persistent or core challenges to a healthy and vibrant democracy. These challenges are typically found in most established democracies, irrespective of their electoral system. For example, in the eyes of many citizens, politics is often viewed as irrelevant or unimportant to their day-to-day lives, leading many to look to channels outside of politics to solve public problems. Elected officials often face a lack of respect and trust from the public, and many people will not consider running for elected office. Those that do often end up facing an extremely demanding job without many supports in place. Elections are typically not the places where these core challenges will be solved. Nevertheless, I recognize that elections remain key moments for our democracy that hold the attention of millions of Canadians, and voting still remains the primary avenue for citizens to express their political voice.

This committee has been tasked to explore alternatives to Canada's current electoral system and to do so in a way that includes a comprehensive and inclusive consultation with Canadians. I think a national conversation about how citizens choose our representatives and one that's driven by Parliament doesn't come around all that frequently. In our view, this should be a key opportunity for Canadians to get engaged in their democracy, to grow more familiar with the work of parliamentarians, and to feel that their opinions can be heard.

As the electoral discussion has unfolded this year, we have felt that most citizens face an uphill battle to understand what this debate is about, why it is important, and how they can get involved. Yes, there are some thorough Canadian reports and research studies already in existence, but many are long and use technical language. In response, Samara Canada decided to pull together the essential objective information on different electoral systems for Canadians getting up to speed on electoral reform. To ensure that this information was accurate and neutral, we worked with a political scientist, Stewart Prest, and five academic experts reviewed our report. Last week Samara released this report called "What We Talk About When We Talk About Electoral Reform" in both English and French.

I kindly asked the committee clerk to share the report with you last week. It is also available on Samara's website.

In short, it outlines how five possible electoral systems work in Canada. It includes first past the post, alternative vote, list proportional representation, mixed member proportional, and single transferable vote. The report also distills for Canadians the expert advice that this committee has heard. A selection includes advice that there is no best system and that each has its trade-offs, that partisan advantage is hard to predict in any change from an electoral system, that no system eliminates the need for Canadians to think strategically about their vote, and that we can learn from the experiences of other countries. We should not assume that an electoral system will work well for Canada just because it works well somewhere else.

While all members of this committee have essentially completed a crash course in electoral systems this summer—and I congratulate you—I want to remind the committee that most Canadians have not. I think most have yet to realize that electoral reform is an urgent

issue before this Parliament, let alone the fact that the window for this committee to hear from them is quickly closing.

To help this committee meet its mandate to a truly inclusive consultation process with Canadians, we recommend that more resources be dedicated to the creation and communication of non-partisan information about electoral reform and that more time be provided for Canadians to access this information, to talk about it with others, and to participate in the consultation.

● (1820)

Samara's experience with the creation of our own report found that electoral reform is a complex issue to explain in an accessible manner, particularly when many options remain on the table. At 20-odd pages in length, we are well aware that our report will not serve everyone's information needs. For example, educational resources should be designed and distributed for high school teachers and their students, for audiences with limited literacy, for different types of learning needs. Moreover, some of these resources should be available in different languages in addition to English and French.

Pursuing public engagement without considering the public's educational needs risks attracting, by and large, the voices of the most motivated in the discussion—experts, partisans, and passionate advocates for one option or another. These voices matter, but such engagement is not inclusive enough. Moreover, when a promised engagement falls short, I fear that Canadians may end up more frustrated and further alienated with politics and their democracy.

Time is also needed for an effective consultation process. Not only is electoral reform complex, but right now it's not particularly urgent and will take time to capture Canadians' attention. In the eyes of a vast majority of Canadians, the 2015 election did not generate a crisis for Canadian democracy. In fact, Canadians turned out in numbers the nation had not seen for many years. Youth turnout was a particularly impressive story, with a full 18 percentage point jump up from 2011. The electoral results were widely accepted by the public. The past government peacefully made way for a new government.

This is not to say that discussing electoral reform is pointless at this juncture. Quite the contrary, I think it is vitally important that opportunities exist for Canadians, their MPs, and civil society to step back and consider improvements to our democratic system.

But Canadians now have less than six weeks until October 7 to share their views with you. This current deadline has been imposed by many factors, including the Chief Electoral Officer requiring two years to implement a new system, the fact that it takes several months for a bill to move through both House and Senate, and that in turn this committee needs time to thoughtfully analyze what it has heard in submissions.

Given the lack of a democratic crisis that demands a quick course of action, this committee should have a process that is slow, thoughtful, and rigorous. With more time, the quantity and quality of Canadians' participation in the discussion on electoral reform can improve. As such, with more time, it will also enhance the public's perception that this committee's consultations are credible and should carry significant weight in the eyes of government and of Parliament.

In conclusion, Samara urges this committee to recognize that meaningful national engagement on a subject like electoral reform requires that many citizens have a real chance to be informed and a chance to be heard. If the committee requires more time to meet its mandate, to consult inclusively among Canadians, this is a request that should be made and supported by Parliament and government.

I'd like to leave you with some final ideas for your consideration as well. Whether Canada changes our electoral system or not, the issue of electoral reform and the work of this committee has highlighted two trends.

First, there needs to be strengthened public education about Canada's democratic system, often called civic education or civic literacy. I think this is especially important if the electoral system changes. At present, citizenship education largely remains the purview of provincial education curricula and is typically incorporated into high school education programs. This is very helpful, but it isn't sufficient. Efforts are needed to reinforce civic knowledge through adulthood as well as during the integration of newcomers into Canada's public life. However, there are very few resources for nationwide efforts in Canada in civic education, nor is it clear who among government departments or agencies should be responsible for delivering on this goal.

Second, parliamentary committees and MPs are likely to be called on more and more frequently to consult with Canadians. Given that this committee is using all the tools at your disposal—social media, e-consultation, a cross-country tour, and input from MPs through their town halls—it would be of great value to capture lessons from this committee for future committees and MPs. Great public engagement and consultation takes planning, skill, communications, and relationship building, experience that this committee should start a conversation about on the capacity of Parliament to undertake public engagement effectively.

Thank you.

•(1825)

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

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Vézina, for 10 minutes.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina (Strategic Advisor, Institut du Nouveau Monde, Institut du Nouveau Monde):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening, everyone.

Mr. Chair, distinguished members of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, ladies and gentlemen of Parliament, I would first like to thank the House of Commons and its members for creating and establishing the Special Committee on Electoral Reform and for the efforts you are making to consult the people and a variety of experts on this matter, which is so basic for the future of democracy.

The Institut du Nouveau Monde (INM) is pleased to present its vision to you. The vision comes from our expertise in citizen participation and from the range of consultations we have held with young people from 18 to 34 years of age who have taken part in our citizenship schools in recent years.

I will begin my presentation by providing you with some of the main observations on electoral participation by young people from 18 to 34 years of age. I will then present some bold reforms that seem to us to be essential in order to reverse the dramatic trend of declining electoral participation by Canadian youth.

First let me introduce myself and provide you with an overview of the Institut du Nouveau Monde. My name is Dominic Vézina. I am a strategic advisor for democratic institutions, citizen education and youth, a new position at the INM.

Founded in 2003, the INM is an independent, non-partisan organization, active mainly in Quebec, whose mission is essentially to increase citizen participation in democratic life. The INM operates from a perspective of social justice and inclusion, respecting democratic values and sustainable development principles, in a spirit of openness and innovation. The INM also publishes its annual *L'état du Québec*, a reference publication that analyzes the main social economic issues of the day in Quebec.

I now want to offer you some observations on electoral participation by young Canadians.

In recent decades, electoral participation by young Canadians has dropped sharply. An annual decline has now been confirmed for more than 40 years. Since the participation rate has gone from 70% in the 1960s to around 30% in 2004, it seems important to us to examine the matter and to take action in order to reverse this trend.

Even more concerning as a phenomenon is the constant, significant decline in the rate of initial participation in elections. By that we mean the decreasing participation of members of the new cohorts who are voting for the first time. This indicates a serious problem. It is the point at which we are breaking with our youth, a point that we have called generational suicide.

The literature we have consulted and summarized in our brief, in particular the studies by Elections Canada, provides information on the key determinants of youth voter turnout, or lack thereof. Whatever the case, all agree that it is imperative to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon by conducting national investigations and studies, both quantitative and qualitative, after each election.

That said, all available data point in the same direction: one of the most promising approaches to truly reversing the decline in young voter turnout is to increase initial voter turnout.

The INM supports the idea of reforming the current electoral system, but that change alone would not have the desired medium- and long-term impact. For the reform to be sustainable, it must, in our opinion, go hand in hand with an overall strategy aimed at improving young people's skills in civics, starting in their teenage years.

In our view, the main public target must be those aged from 16 to 21. They are the ones who are just about to acquire the right to vote, or who will be voting for the first time. That is why civics education courses in high school, college and university have a central place in the strategy we are proposing to you today. Before we present that strategy, let us first summarize the key findings from the literature we have consulted.

We observe that, while certain socio-demographic characteristics—such as age, education and birthplace—have some influence over the decision of 18- to 34-year-olds to vote, there are three particularly influential factors: perceiving voting as a duty, taking an interest in politics, and being informed.

The key factors cited by young people as keeping them from voting are not the direct opposites of those motivating them to go to the polls. The two main reasons for 18- to 34-year-olds not voting are a lack of interest in politics and being too busy. The third reason for not voting varies with a subdivision of the age range: 18- to 24-year-olds blame problems with registering to vote, while 25- to 34-year-olds blame cynicism, a factor that seems to emerge later than the other factors analyzed.

What are the five bold reforms we are proposing?

I repeat that the INM supports reforming the current electoral system in order to increase young voter turnout. We also propose, in conjunction with all those involved, the complementary development of a comprehensive strategy to develop civic literacy among young people.

● (1830)

The INM proposes a bold strategy beginning with instituting a “civic rite of passage” in late adolescence. This strategy, informed by INM-led consultations, calls for major reforms. It is based on a renewed vision of democracy in which electoral participation is not only desired but expected and encouraged, and in which voting is not just a right but also a duty and a responsibility.

The civic rite of passage is based on five substantial reforms.

The first reform is a compulsory civics course in high school. Civic education is the surest way to get young people interested in politics. One of the main reasons young people do not vote is that they do not understand how politics affect them personally. A compulsory civics course should be given in Grade 9, while school is still compulsory, so that it is taught to everyone. As well, mock voting should be available to all students for each election.

All the studies show that, the sense of duty notwithstanding, young people vote if they are interested by politics and are informed. Those are the second and third reasons that explain why they vote.

Comparative studies, especially those by Henry Milner, show that voter turnout is larger in countries with a high average degree of political literacy. They also show that a dedicated compulsory civics course can make a difference. Norway and Sweden are excellent examples of this. General voter turnout in both countries is 85%, with young voter turnout at over 75%.

The second reform involves voting at 16. Lowering the voting age to 16 is then warranted. Young people will have just received civics education, preparing them to vote in an informed way. They are motivated and helped along the way. This is the start of the civic rite of passage we are proposing. All 16-year-olds, still in their classrooms, would vote together for the first time in an institutional context that supports their commitment. There should be a ceremony to celebrate their eligibility to vote, similar to the citizenship ceremony for new Canadians.

The third reform is voluntary civic service for 16- to 24-year-olds. It has been shown that commitment and participation produce even more commitment and participation. One way of supporting the commitment and the participation of young people once they have left school is to offer them the possibility of serving their communities in voluntary civic service.

The fourth reform that we are proposing is to make voting compulsory, with the option of casting a blank ballot. To emphasize the fact that voting is not only a right but also a duty, we believe that consideration should be given to compulsory voting. Compulsory voting is the policy in about 30 countries, including countries similar to ours, such as Belgium and Australia. Compulsory voting should allow for voluntary abstentions through what is called casting a blank ballot, allowing a voter to register a rejection of all the parties if none of them is appealing. Compulsory voting would also force all the parties to appeal not only to their base but to all voters, including young people.

The fifth reform is to implement a semi-proportional voting system. Research shows that one reason young people do not vote is that they feel their vote does not matter. The composition of Parliament therefore does not reflect the actual diversity of the electorate. Introducing a new voting system that includes a proportional aspect would give voters the sense that their vote matters.

Our basic belief is that youth voting is critical for the future of our democracy. We therefore hope that the committee's recommendations will not only make our electoral system more representative, but will also provide us with a better capacity to educate and motivate our young people in the exercise of citizenship.

In the INM's view, restoring youth participation in democratic life should be a national priority.

● (1835)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vézina.

Mr. Gunn will be the last, but not the least, witness to speak.  
[English]

You have 10 minutes, please.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn (President, Civix):** What a privilege it is to be here in front of you. I'm a bit ashamed to admit that I've taken great joy in reading all the Hansard that's been released so far on your site, and then I spent the full day here just out of respect, because I know you had three sessions today and I just wanted to see what it would be like to show up at six to start work again.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** It seems as if everyone is in agreement that we're not experts on electoral reform, and I'm happy that we're honest, and that's the truth. So why would I be here? Fourteen years ago I'd heard that there were problems with voter turnout and there were hints that it was because of young people. I thought that maybe it wasn't the hardest thing to solve. It might have been because I was 24, and I thought that what we could do is simply to teach it in school like we teach everything else that no one wants to learn. We set out working on something that's now turned into 14 years. I was supposed to be a millionaire at this point, but we took the road less travelled. So I'll tell you a little about what we do.

We are a hundred times better at doing things than we are at talking about ourselves, so hopefully I can just tell you what we do and then we can trust that we might have a bit of expertise to offer you.

First, we thought that the most gripping teachable moment we could focus on was students under the voting age. Our main goal here is building the habits and skills of citizenship. We'd be using elections for that. Elections really are the biggest thing you can do out of politics. So we thought we could teach elections in school, and Student Vote is our flagship program. In a minute I'll go over some fun facts that I brought for you.

Basically, we empower teachers with educational resources. We've now expanded that to include online videos with the party leaders, who put democracy on the curriculum through the course of the campaign. This does not necessitate a curriculum fit. Instead, we try to find enthusiastic teachers who believe in the democratic process.

The key components of Student Vote include classroom learning, dialogue with parents, meeting the actual candidates through candidate forums—I know many of you were in them in your local schools, and I thank you for that—media consumption, and a vote on the actual candidates running in the schools' electoral district. The results of that are released through media and on television. We started in 800 schools in Ontario in 2003, and in last fall's federal election we surpassed half of all schools in the country, registering to participate 922,000 kids, who cast a Student Vote ballot.

I say that to you because throughout this, the underlying theme from Kingsley and Mayrand and Rose to the New Zealand CEOs and the two guys from Ireland is the necessity of civic education at all times, and especially in a process like this.

I worry that you're going to say that we need more civic education without knowing what progress has already been made. That's what we do around elections. We've got up to half of all the schools

participating. The point is to be in every school one day, reaching every student at every election. That's how we would truly build a habit just like how you teach kids math.

We know from independent evaluations that we're having positive impacts on teacher confidence and ability to deliver Student Vote. Students are having an impact on knowledge and interest. What is now being shown is that the more they do Student Vote, the better outcomes they have. It just makes sense, but that's the goal of doing this repetitively.

What we've got now is our second indication that kids may be supporting their parents' going to the polls. The recent feedback we got that hasn't been released yet is that close to 30% of parents attributed their decision to vote to their kids' participating in Student Vote. That matters when you talk about 922,000 families. What we do know when we did the math is that 2.5 million kids who went through Student Vote in the past were eligible to vote in this recent election. That does not show any link to increasing voter turnout, but that's where our base is now—above 18.

● (1840)

Just for fun, I wanted to say congratulations to Elizabeth. You were ranked fifth in the number of kids casting a Student Vote ballot in your riding, at more than 6,000 students. Blake, in Banff, at just under 6,000, was in the number 10 spot; and Matt was at 5,500, in Fredericton. That matters, because you want to see that grow over time. I also think it makes you care about young people in your electoral district, and I am trying to put pressure on you to care about them.

What else do we do? We run programs around budgets—very high level, much less mass reach, but we use political actors, like the Minister of Finance; lobby groups, like the Taxpayers Federation and the Canadian Labour Congress; and finally the party leaders. Their job is to weigh in, to pitch to kids what they want to see in the budget, and then kids give those opinions back to Finance and the public. You might be shocked to know that three years in a row they felt the best thing they could do with Canada's money was pay down the debt.

We run another program called Rep Day. Some of you, and then all of you by next week, will receive an invitation to participate in Rep Day. I know some of you already did. Last year, 45% of all MPs went into their local schools, with our administrative support, the purpose being for you to humanize our democratic process. It is really easy to dislike politicians, but maybe you ask, "What about Alain?" "Oh, I know Alain. He is a great guy." That is what we are trying to show to kids, that they can access our process through their elected representatives.

Finally, what we do is train teachers. The point of training teachers is to really seed the system with ambassadors of the democratic process who also have the capability to effectively deliver civic education programs. That comes maybe just to some summaries. When you think about civic education—and it may come up in questioning—don't depend on the curriculum. The curriculum can be poorly taught. It can be taught by teachers who aren't really meant to teach that subject, but they have been trained so they can do the things they like. Schools are political places.

It really matters who is teaching what, how they are teaching it—we would suggest that it is always experiential learning—and when they teach it. Maybe you don't want to teach an election when it isn't going on. I would also ask every educator, why aren't you doing an election simulation when there is one going on?

Then, of course, we have structural challenges. Some school boards now don't want politicians in for candidates' forums during elections. That is absolutely terrible. Do you know why? It is because—you might have seen it in the book—we can fill an auditorium in front of candidates with 400 or 500 people. I'll put some money down that you don't get that in your usual Chamber of Commerce debate.

Tips for the committee....

What is my time like?

**The Chair:** You have about two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Perfect. I'm so happy that everyone wasn't nice. I was worried, because we're all non-profits and we need funding, and sometimes you just have to be honest. I think it's time that you took the training wheels off. I think you've had a great go at learning how you might do this, but this is the type of thing that is just the coolest, biggest, greatest opportunity for our democracy. I'm starting to get a sense now of how special our democracy is, because we're starting to be pulled in our work to look at other places around the world.

The student vote programs don't actually go that well in other places, or they're non-existent. I see things happen in places like Mexico, where candidates who are open about the cartels are shot on their first day of being mayor. I think that when it comes to something like this, let's stop talking about New Zealand as the leader. We should be the leader in this.

I would suggest and point out to you that you've been disempowered by time, obviously. I had to plead with Mr. Reid and Mr. Cullen, and Mr. Holland who was here earlier, to change the submission date for the town halls...if you picked up on them from October 1 to after the Thanksgiving break week...because I thought you were purposely ignoring future voters in your consultations. It

might have been an accident, just as there was an accident in the Fair Elections Act that Elections Canada couldn't help facilitate our doing our work, so I get that, but I think you could engage so many more people with more time and more resources. I'm still wondering what's going on with that \$10 million. You don't have it, right? I think maybe you shouldn't have it. I don't know if I should trust that you'll spend it that well, but I don't know if the best place is in PCO or Democratic Institutions. I think you need to be more empowered.

I also think this is just a plain awesome thing that you could time around Canada150. It's not a playlist for exercises. I don't know what else is going on, but it's really one of the most important things we could do. It's about who we are. What a great opportunity to maybe extend and empower this dialogue. I think you'd at least have groups like us who have incredible access to the education system. Samara has an incredible volunteer network, and other actors across the country, and INM has a great hold in Quebec, who could support you and act as allies. I think you would get some incredibly passionate people putting in 16 hours a day on this to support your effort.

After reading all the testimony, sometimes I don't know who to believe. I'm sure you face the same thing. I just doubt you could come out with a really clear recommendation to take a particular system. I would just find that hard, after reading the testimony. I don't have a university degree, so you could write me off, but....

I'm interested to see what happens and then I will invite you or I'll let you know.... We couldn't do what we wanted to do, but we scraped together a few funds and we're working to put together a series of five videos: one, an introduction video just to introduce kids to why we're even talking about this; and then four others going into different systems. We hope to have them released by the third week of September, so that if you wanted to go into a high school in your community and have kids talk about this in a substantial way, we'll have something for you to do that. We've just sent out the invitations.

● (1845)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your passionate defence of electoral reform—

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** We're doing it right.

**The Chair:** —and youth engagement.



I should mention that I'm holding a town hall on September 15, and one thing I did—just for the benefit of others in case they're interested in doing the same—was to write to all the high schools in my riding, to the principals, telling them that some of their students might be interested in this. I hope that a lot of the educators will be there as well. Hopefully that will pay off in getting youth to participate.

We'll start our first round with Ms. Sahota.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** That's a great idea, Mr. Chair. I think that's fantastic.

Going along with that, I definitely take very seriously the advice that you have for all of us. I enjoyed your presentations, your enthusiasm to engage young people. I share in that enthusiasm. We definitely do not want to disenfranchise young people. It's quite the opposite; we want to engage them.

I think the Prime Minister's Youth Council is the most amazing thing ever. On my personal campaign, I engaged quite a lot with youth. I think the fact that volunteer hours are mandatory for high schools now helps drive a lot of youth to come out and find opportunities. That may happen accidentally at first, but once they join a campaign, whichever one it is—I'm sure everyone from all parties benefited from young people looking for volunteer opportunities—they become engaged and interested in the process and what's happening.

I have found, though, that a lot of schools are reluctant to let us in even after you become an elected official. There are teachers who go above and beyond; they really want you to come in, and they try to manoeuvre a way that we can come into the classroom. In the area I'm from, I've faced quite a lot of challenges—even writing to the schools—just to go in to talk to the classes.

I have read that if you catch them at a young age and you go in to speak... We don't have to be speaking about parties. Most of the questions that come from them are not about parties. They're usually about what you do, or what life in politics is like, what you have to do to get there, and a lot of other questions about voting. There are so many interesting questions that young people have. I think it can really turn around the engagement process for them and make it exciting.

There were mock elections in my area during this campaign, and that was really interesting. As I went door to door, I saw kids who would open the door and they thought you were like a rock star. They would be more excited than the parent. They would move the parent out of the way and say they were learning about me, this is what's happening, this is what this platform is about, and this is this party's platform. It was incredible to see. I congratulate all of you for the work you do in trying to promote this to young people.

Do you have any suggestions? I know some of you have talked about voter age and some have talked about compulsory voting. For this committee, do you think there's any one thing you would recommend we do above all to increase voter participation? As you know, reading from the blues, we've heard a lot of contradictory evidence from so many witnesses. It's hard for us to figure out at this point what it is we should be doing to increase voter participation.

● (1850)

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** It's wonderful to hear your own personal experience about engaging young people in your campaign and in your work as an MP.

If I only get one thing to do to engage young people, a very bold thing would be to lower the voting age to 16. We're starting to see examples of this happening around the world. Obviously, the Scottish referendum is an example, and the P.E.I. referendum coming up this fall on electoral reform in P.E.I. has lowered the voting age. Part of that, as my colleagues have mentioned, is that if you get the person voting in the supportive institutional environment of the school, a lot of evidence suggests it becomes habitual more quickly. If you vote the first and second time at the opportunities when you're first eligible, the odds that you're going to keep voting through the rest of your life are extremely high.

I think that would be really powerful. It would also send an incredible message to young people to say you have a voice in shaping the future of this country. Many young people might say they're not ready for that responsibility because I think they take it very seriously, as you encountered. But I think it would be a very bold way to do it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to add that I think it's really important to humanize the role of politicians.

Young people live in a completely media-dominated world. They hear all kinds of things, and then when they go home, they hear what their parents are saying. Cynicism is pervasive in discussions with students. We need to humanize the role of politicians.

I also want to emphasize the importance of schools and formal education. The Quebec curriculum includes classes that explain the democratic system in an oversimplified manner. It is important to explain how our democratic system works at the municipal provincial and federal levels and to engage young people through real-life experiences, as my colleague was saying.

As the chair mentioned, I used to work for a school board in Montreal that had introduced a process five years earlier to provide training to 150 students elected to our student councils. It was incredible to see the debating skills those students developed. Unfortunately, schools often didn't recognize it. It was a constant battle to be able to provide those kinds of activities, which were regarded as unrelated to formal education.

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

I'd now like to turn the floor over to Mr. Reid, for five minutes.

[*English*]

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** Thank you to our witnesses, who probably did not know they were going to be slotted into an evening slot when they agreed to come. That was probably a little bait and switch on the part of the clerk and committee.

I want to start by asking Taylor something.

You started in 2003, so I'm just trying to work out the age of your oldest former participant. What would have been the highest age at that time: 16, 17, 18?

• (1855)

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** It depends on the age. I think I can guess where you're going with this, but it depends on the age. We would have had some 10-year olds at that time and some 16-year olds.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** All right, I'll just take the 16-year old, because it makes the point the most dramatically. Someone who was 16 in 2003 is now almost 30 years old and has been an alumnus, as it were, of your program for 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2015, five elections. That would give you enough time to be able to gauge whether your program has had any influence on their long-term voting patterns. Have you had a chance to go back and examine whether they kept voting to a greater degree than other kids of the same age who are now about to turn 30?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** We'd like to, but we need funds to do it, and it shouldn't be us. We could support an independent body, like Elections Canada, which we've asked to do this longitudinal study. We're very open about the holes that we have, so for anyone who might have done this once, I don't know the quality of the instruction or the experience. I know for sure there are some schools where they may have just a ballot put in front of them on election day, and they ask their teacher what it is about. That's like a zero out of 10 experience. Then we have a 10 out of 10 experience, where kids are meeting the candidates and are encouraged to go home and speak to their parents.

What I think we would see if we had repetitive, great experiences is the long-term outcome, but I don't know that yet. If the committee would like to encourage Elections Canada to look into that, it would be terrific. I think that's a bit out of your mandate. The only thing we do know is that of those who we think are now over 18, there'd be about 2.5 million of them.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Okay.

If 10 is the youngest—and I realize that's probably an exceptional case, but it still works for someone who was, say, 11 years old in 2003, and they would have been 12 in 2004, in one election—

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Right.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** —and in 2006 they would have still been in high school, and also in 2008. Are there any students who have gone through multiple elections with your program?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I expect there are; we hear anecdotally from teachers that there are. We don't track students. It's a bit risky to take in that information and hold onto it and track it outside of an actual study. What we do know is the history of school participation.

The way the curricula are set up, for example, is that it's very likely that a B.C. socials 11 class, or its predecessor, would run this, but we don't know if those kids are then offered the next opportunity, or were offered it previously when they were in a different grade. That's the hole we face. However, we do know that in some place, like British Columbia, for example, in the last federal election, 39% of all kids in school between grades 4 to 12 were taking part in a student vote. But for some of them it may be the only time, and I can't guarantee the quality.

We're up for lots of more vigorous testing of whether we're being successful. I think the one success we can be very happy with is the depth in the education system that we've realized. I think the next comparison would be like the Terry Fox Foundation's access to schools across Canada, which is averaging around 77%. We're averaging 60% in English Canada.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds for a statement.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I won't make a statement but will wait until the next round.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

Monsieur Boulerice.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair,

Ms. Hilderman, Mr. Vézina, Mr. Gunn, thank you very much for being here today. I really appreciated your presentations, as well as your energy, your passion and your interest in young people and their civic and social engagement.

You are absolutely right; there are some deficiencies in Quebec and Canadian society regarding knowledge and understanding of our electoral system and our parliamentary system. Too many people we meet still think we have a presidential system. People think they're voting for Harper, Trudeau or Mulcair. We have to tell them that that's not the case, that they must vote for their local MP and the number of seats won by each party is calculated to determine which party will form the government and whether it has a majority in Parliament.

Mr. Vézina, I support most of the five points in your program aimed at improving youth voter turnout. One thing that I really want to emphasize, because I want it stated publicly, is that I strongly support the idea of offering an introductory course on citizenship and democracy in high school. That is probably the best path to take. However, before our Bloc Québécois friends overreact, I want to clarify that neither this committee nor any federal legislation will interfere in the prerogatives of the National Assembly regarding education. I can come out and say that what you're proposing is a good idea, but it will not be part of our recommendations, for reasons that you are familiar with and understand very well.

You said that young people feel as though their vote won't make a difference. Indeed, it is more than just an impression. All too often, that is the reality in our voting system. Many members are elected with 30% or 32% of the vote in their riding. This means that 70% of voters are seeing their votes tossed out.

Your fifth point is about introducing a semi-proportional voting system. How would that help solve the problem identified earlier?

• (1900)

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** That's a good question. I'm not an expert on electoral systems, but I can tell you that in all of our discussions with young people over the past five, seven or eight years in our citizenship schools, they all said the same thing. If we look at the last few elections, for example, majority governments have been formed with only 32% or 33% of the vote. As a result, young people no longer see the party in power as legitimate. A mixed member proportional system would automatically allow for more diverse perspectives.

Many young people have told me they think it's important that the parties work together to improve our existing system. People have to work together at school, at home and at work, so why not in our democratic system? That may be a simple example, but I think it's a good one.

I'll give you another example. Many of our schools have cooperation councils. If there is a problem, it is discussed on Fridays and they try to come up with solutions. When it comes time to vote, if only 32% approval is reached, there is no change.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you.

I should point out that NDP supporters in Edmonton officially supported a resolution on lowering the voting age to 16. Our colleague Don Davies also introduced a bill to that end. We are pushing for the same thing.

You had five proposals, but one thing that is missing is online voting. That surprised me a little, because we often hear that if online voting were available, young people would participate more. In fact, over the past few weeks of this committee's meetings, we keep hearing that interest in politics is the main factor. Anyone who is going to vote online is likely already interested in politics. As for those who aren't interested, even if we tell them it's going to be easier using their device, they are not more likely to become engaged.

Why didn't you include this aspect in your proposals?

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** A few years ago—in 2011, if I'm not mistaken—the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec asked INM to conduct a study among 16- to 34-year olds. If I remember correctly, 84% of young people indicated their interest in electronic voting. However, in all our discussions over the past few years, it's not something that keeps coming up.

I do think, however, that a better understanding of politics is key. We are talking about the fundamental issue of understanding the system in order to take more effective action in the future.

I want to emphasize another thing that could be important. Studies done in the past also show that young people who don't vote the first time they're eligible will not vote in the future. The numbers are very high, which is why it's so important to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 and introduce a civic rite of passage at school and in our institutions.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Thériault, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ):** Mr. Gunn, Mr. Vézina and Ms. Hilderman, I want to begin by saying how pleased I am to hear

your remarks. I believe your actions are going to progressively improve democracy and people's understanding of it. I want to talk about a few aspects that you didn't mention, Ms. Hilderman, but that I think need to be addressed.

According to the Supreme Court decision in the Figueroa case, electoral fairness requires fairness in the electoral financing regime. A strict taboo currently exists that might correspond to dissatisfaction with political institutions.

The Chief Electoral Officers of both Quebec and Canada do not promote the legislation every year when political parties are trying to raise funds. When the legislation isn't promoted, it's as though giving more and more money to one political party were illegal, or as if it could lead to recognizing that someone might be partisan. Some people don't want their name to appear on any lists, for example.

Given that laws on the funding of political parties are based on public donations, does it not make sense to educate the public about the importance of seeing this as a duty and civic action? If we want to reform democratic institutions in a way that allows for ideological pluralism, shouldn't every vote count once again based on the amount of money put in the box?

In other words, if someone votes for the Green Party, for example, their vote isn't totally wasted, because the party will have some resources during the election and for the next four years to express their ideas in the political debates of a so-called democratic society.

• (1905)

[English]

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** As I understand it, you are inquiring about the idea of the per vote subsidy, that every vote cast is worth something, as a donation to a political party that you're casting your vote for, in order to make your vote count. I understand that this has only recently been phased out.

I think your point is a good one: parties, in doing their job, have a unique place in our democracy. It's a very important job: to compete in elections, to be the vehicles for political participation, to sit in Parliament if they're elected, and then help make decisions. It does take resources to do that effectively. I don't think Canadians have a very good understanding right now of how party financing works in Canada. In fact, everyone who pays taxes subsidizes political parties today, because anyone who makes a donation can get a tax receipt, and that tax receipt how we Canadians are subsidizing political parties as entities.

The challenge then, of course, is if we subsidize the largest donations more than the smaller donations. We know that very few Canadians, relative to the whole population, make donations to political parties. I think that is the appeal behind the notion of a per vote subsidy, in that everyone at least gets to make some donation to a party. It's compelling as an incentive to think that your vote counts for something more. I also think it helps parties maybe think a little differently about their fundraising direction.

It might be interesting, then, how we might step back and consider the whole system of electoral and party finance. It's time we thought a bit more about what we want from parties in exchange for support from the public, which I think is necessary, as I said, for strong political parties to play their role in our democracy.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you have only 30 seconds left.

**Mr. Luc Thériault:** I would like to hear Mr. Vézina's thoughts on that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Vézina, I would ask you to give a brief response, please.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** Young people—I'm still talking about the audience I work with—express their views in different ways, so this should also include the financial aspect in order to encourage this collegiality and diversity of opinions. That goes without saying.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. May, go ahead.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here with us this evening. I also want to thank them for their hard work and for everything they do every day in relation to these issues.

• (1910)

[*English*]

I know all three of your groups, and I appreciate the work you do.

Taylor Gunn, I want to let you know that when Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand testified before us, even though you thought it might be a little out of our mandate, he didn't think it was. He made a point of saying that the changes made by the Fair Elections Act to Elections Canada's role in elections must be reversed and that there should be funding. Did you receive funding from Elections Canada to do the work in schools? How was that partnership with Elections Canada carried out?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** It's evolved over the years. In 2004 they gave us, from what I can remember correctly...the model was they didn't pay for our work. They covered some costs of printing, ballot boxes, voting screens, etc. If you go back to how our relationship started with Elections Canada, it was an all-party motion on, I think, February 10, 2004, 10 years to the day when Pierre Poilievre announced the Fair Elections Act's details, which is kind of funny. It's evolved now to where they'll cover the full cost of the program, but the cap at the last election was meant to be at a million dollars. We budgeted for about \$1.4 million or \$1.5 million. The entire project last year was about \$2 million, and I think we ended up with \$250,000 in-kind, a million dollars cash. It's not a wealthy type of project. Then we raised an additional \$750,000 to go out to community foundations and donors to go toward our teacher training.

They don't fund us. What they like to remind us, and maybe everyone else, is that they don't have what they call a “granting and contributions stream”. Should they have one? Should they not? I'm not sure. I will tell you that they put out an RFP last summer very shortly after the Fair Elections Act, and we told them that we

wouldn't be responding to it, so they then decided to sole-source with us. We thought that we didn't need to respond, because no one else does the work that we do—

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Right.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** —among other details.

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** I was just curious, but when you said I was number five, number five of what?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** It was in terms of the total number of ballots cast by kids under 18—

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** You mean across the country?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes.

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** That's nice. I was wondering, because I didn't think that had happened in my own riding.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but this is the first panel we've had in which all three of you support the idea of the voting age going to 16.

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** Yes.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Hold on. I didn't say yes. I would just say that I would support any type of experimentation in our democratic process that could improve engagement.

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** The sense I got from all three of you, and I would ask you to elaborate, is whether it is because young people at age 16 are in that structured environment where civic literacy can be inculcated? Programs can be mandatory in high school and the sense there—and I don't want to put words in your mouth—is that it's a good time to get people voting, because when you develop a habit of voting, you keep doing it. If you don't develop the habit of voting, you'll likely not be voting when you're 30 and 35, and so on. If any of you want to expand on that, don't take too long. I've only got five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** I actually don't know if I can provide any more details on this.

I worked on school boards for a long time, working with kids at both the primary and secondary level. At that age, they are searching for meaning and developing their identity. They are learning, and as I said earlier, they have access to all kinds of information. They are gradually influenced by their peers and try to find ways to become engaged. I think school can be a unique forum in that regard, while keeping in mind that experiences in extracurricular activities and activities outside school are also important. I mentioned this earlier when I talked about student councils and meetings with MPs. These experiences are important to them and I think we need to start there.

**The Chair:** We have 15 seconds left.

Ms. May, you can make a brief comment.

[English]

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Jane, you probably won't have time to answer this, but I've read a lot of Samara materials, which focuses a lot on the experience of members of Parliament within this parliamentary system. When we come back perhaps I can ask you, and you can reflect on it, how a fairer voting system that's more proportional might either reduce or clarify the relationship between MPs and Parliament versus their political party structure.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Mr. Aldag.

• (1915)

**Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.):** I'd like to thank all three of our witnesses this evening for coming. It's a refreshing approach to this topic and I really appreciate your landing at this time in the evening, at this point in the week, because it truly is refreshing.

I have a comment. I'll direct it, first of all, to Mr. Gunn, and it's a thank you for the Student Vote program. I too participated in it this year, including during the campaign. I'll tell you that when I would look at my calendar for what was coming up in a day, if I had a Student Vote day, a visit to the classrooms, it was a day that I would look forward to. The engagement from the classes was fantastic. The toughest questions came from the students, but it was amazing. I wish you every success in continuing the program moving forward, and continuing to grow because it truly was an amazing experience for me.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Great.

**Mr. John Aldag:** As Ruby said, going to the door, door knocking and running into students I had spoken with in classes, who always had more questions for me, was fascinating. It was a great experience.

Mr. Vézina, I appreciate the brief you provided. You've given some recommendations on compulsory voting with the option of casting a blank ballot. I like a lot of the really innovative, bold reforms that you put out there. I think some bold reforms are what we need.

The question I have is something that came up when I was door knocking. There are organizations, particularly some religious organizations, that object to voting. In the work that your group did, did you look at those kinds of conscientious objections? Was the idea of casting a blank ballot the only solution, or did you look at some of these other kinds of extremes? Do you have any comments on that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** It's important to remember that the right to cast blank ballots comes with the obligation to get out and vote. People must be able to express their dissatisfaction with the parties in place and so on.

The youth we work with often take part in citizenship schools during the summer or winter at various CEGEPs and universities in Quebec. Sometimes students attend these classes voluntarily and sometimes they have no choice. We always make sure their opinions are represented. Generally speaking, the students care about these

issues and know a little more about them than some of their peers. However, the essence of what young people have said about the five bold reforms we are proposing can be found in our brief.

[English]

**Mr. John Aldag:** I'll move to Ms. Hilderman. I really appreciated your comment—I think it was in your brief or maybe in your statement—that most Canadians have yet to recognize electoral reform as an urgent issue. This afternoon we had a comment about nobody being out there leading the torchlit parade, that people aren't protesting against it, so why are we doing it? The case I made is that I think it's the wrong time to do it when we're in crisis mode. This is the right time to rethink. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I'd like to get your further thoughts on why this is the right time. If you could just take us down that path with your organization, why do you feel this is the right time for this kind of discussion?

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** We prefer not to be in a state of crisis at all times, but I think it is a lesson for other jurisdictions. As you look, often what has prompted them to explore electoral reform were problems that emerged. New Zealand is often a great case in point, where they had some very abnormal election results that prompted them to take a closer look. That awareness among the general public, I think, made the job easier of having a national conversation about electoral reform that said, we don't have that urgency. But I think you're right, we have the luxury, then, of time to really do it well and do it right.

We haven't had, as I said, a real national conversation about what our vote should mean as Canadians, whether we are really happy with the nature of our representation in Ottawa. How would you feel about having more MPs and larger ridings? How would you feel about having a more proportional Parliament? How would you feel about having two votes on your ballot? These are all the sorts of questions that I think invite Canadians to think about representation. It's not necessarily the most exciting topic that brings people out in the streets, but it is something that's really important to a democracy. We know that it isn't self-maintaining; you have to nurture it. It's like a garden.

• (1920)

**The Chair:** I just thought of something, and you're the perfect witnesses to mention this to. We have an e-consultation questionnaire on the committee website. It would be great for students to do. You can direct the students that you have contact with to the website. It's a fabulous questionnaire that was developed by our analysts in concert with the committee.

We'll go to Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** Thank you for being here and for the part you play in encouraging greater participation, particularly in the case of young people. We appreciate the work you do in that regard.

Certainly, Mr. Gunn, I'm well familiar with your organization and have participated in your student days. It's something I always enjoy, going to the schools and seeing the students in my riding, whether it be part of your days or at other times during the year. It's something I do frequently and I always enjoy it.

I think it was Mr. Aldag who said that some of the best questions he gets are from students. That's so true. It's always refreshing when you hear that kind of active engagement from students. Thank you for the work that you're doing.

I'll start with a question for you as well. Obviously, you've conducted the mock elections. How many times have you actually done the mock elections now?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** In Alberta?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Well, in federal elections.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** We've done five federal elections. In Alberta, we've done three provincial elections, and we hope to do next year's municipal ones in Alberta.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Excellent.

It was pretty cool that I made the top 10 in the country for number of votes from students.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yup.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I would assume that should there be a referendum on electoral reform, you would probably be looking at potentially conducting a parallel—

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** A referendum?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** —referendum with the students.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes, we've done that before, actually. We've done that three times: in 2005 in B.C.; 2009 in B.C.; and 2007 in Ontario, or was it 2006?

Scott, you know. Was it the fall of 2007?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** It was 2007.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes, the fall of 2007 in Ontario. We also did a parallel students' assembly on electoral reform in 2007. We gathered 103 kids and put them through a five-day boot camp on electoral systems. I did feel bad for the kids, but they loved it. They went back to their schools. We did a tandem classroom consultation and had 5,000 Ontario kids participate. The kids come back and presented to the assembly what the students' opinions were: MMP. The assembly then recommended MMP to Ontario citizens.

So yes, if there's a referendum, among other things we'd be planning on doing a parallel one.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Excellent.

I'm curious. Did the results of those referendum much of the time—or maybe all of the time—mirror the election result amongst the actual voters?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Was that true in the case of the referendums as well? Was the result the same, or was it mirrored?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I think they might have voted yes for MMP in Ontario in 2007, and I would have to go back to 2009 and 2005.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay, I asked more out of curiosity than anything else.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** What's interesting is that, in Ontario at least, it did imitate the lower participation in casting a referendum ballot. We suffered the same thing in schools.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** In terms of timelines, in order to conduct a side-by-side referendum, what would your organization need to do that?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** It's additional work, but we could factor that in to whatever timeline we're used to having with the Student Vote program.

I could expand on comments around what you think I would suggest for adults, but we're used to doing a lot in little time, as I'm sure all three of us are.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Great. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Could you give me 10 seconds just to quickly say something?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Actually, John, there is a great urgency in this conversation. The Prime Minister said it's our last election under first past the post, so there's urgency.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. John Taylor:** I'll say something that's really important. This is different from any other conversation that took place in each of those three previous referendums. I don't know P.E.I. from a little while back, but at least in B.C. and Ontario, no politician, especially a premier, came out and said they wanted that system. That's why this is a much different system, and that's why I would suggest that anyone who is afraid of a referendum shouldn't be. The parties have way more at stake if they proceed with those same positions going into a referendum.

There's urgency. It could be the last way we vote, and we could change the system we've had for almost 150 years.

• (1925)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Are you indicating that you think it would be a good thing for the public to be engaged in a referendum on this topic?

**The Chair:** Answer very briefly, please.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I would love to get into that. I am sure we all would, but did I use up all of my time?

**The Chair:** Yes, you did. Take 15 seconds to answer that question.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I think, as it has been said by several of your witnesses, including today, if you don't do a really thorough, substantial, and what can be considered credible consultation process, I don't see how you can't go to a referendum, presuming that this would then cause the consultation you didn't.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sorry, I am a little unclear. What you are saying is that there needs to be a thorough consultation process, and then a referendum would be—

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** What I am saying is that right now I don't think this is thorough. I am suggesting that you make it thorough.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sorry, I just want to make sure that it is clear.

**The Chair:** Let's just clear this up, yes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I know we are overtime, but I am not sure I'm clear.

**The Chair:** Yes, let's clear it up.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** What you are suggesting is that we need a more thorough consultation process than we currently have—

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** —and then a referendum would be a good thing.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I am saying that if you don't have a more thorough consultation process, which really means you just need more time, which is one of my recommendations in my initial remarks—

**The Chair:** Okay, thanks.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** —then you should.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Romanado, go ahead.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoynes, Lib.):** I am like a kid in a candy store right now, having spent the last 15 years of my career in higher education. This is the panel I have been waiting for.

First, Ms. Hilderman, I highly recommend that anyone contemplating running for office read *Tragedy in the Commons* before they do. I did.

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** Oh, great, and you still did it. That is wonderful.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Yes.

In terms of civics, I did participate. I have to say that the five schools that participated in my riding were pretty much bang on, so good for them. In fact, as my colleague, John, mentioned, the best questions I got during the campaign were from the 16- to 18-year-olds. They probably are more aware. The great thing is that they have no filter, so they don't mind telling you exactly what they think, which is sometimes refreshing.

One thing you talked about was lowering the voting age to 16. My question is this. We all know that education is a provincial jurisdiction. I am from Quebec. I am very much aware of the fact that we are not going to be getting into the nitty-gritty of that. However, if we contemplate changing the voting age to 16, I don't think educating folks at the age of 14 will be soon enough. I would like to get your ideas on the corresponding change in education that

will be required, because you need to get them a little earlier, in my opinion. First of all, I would like to get your opinion on that, and then I have some follow-up questions.

[Translation]

My question is for all three witnesses.

[English]

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** I don't know specifically about each province, how they treat their civic education program. I think there is a lot of variability. I believe there is actually some work being done at Elections Canada to try to understand how each province approaches its work. You are probably right that if you are going to vote at 16, you should be learning earlier. I think some teachers do some education.

It is actually really interesting. The few studies that exist around young people and political beliefs suggest that political socialization happens very early. Kids are picking up on signals all the time: what is on the news, what their parents say about politics. Surprisingly, they can generally point out that politics isn't that popular of a thing at a very young age. They are seeing these signals, so I think you are right that there could be room for education earlier.

In Samara's work, I would say that we try to think about the non-traditional classroom, the classroom that often happens outside of school, whether in after-school programs, community groups, or other places where youth—or, as was said, other adults, newcomers—may congregate. We think this is an important space, too, that often gets left out of the conversation around civic education. Schools are powerful because they are institutional. It is easy to roll out something across them, but we have been very keen to try to develop tools for these more entrepreneurial community groups, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada and the Girl Guides of Canada, that are working with young people outside of school systems as well to be equipped to support civic education.

• (1930)

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Before we go on, I am just going to add to that, and then you can both answer.

What about leveraging technology? For instance, you hear about the two-year-old who can manoeuvre an iPad. Is there an app for that? Are there plans to create technology that will.... We hear about gaming. That generation loves gaming. Is there something in the cooker that we could be thinking about in terms of zeroing in on the fun aspect of elections?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** We use technology in different ways to supply content. I'm expecting Ruby at some point to ask a question about online voting because she did so in the first few meetings, pretty seriously.

To go back to what the real thing is, what's important—Marc Mayrand brought this up as well—is that there is a trend among election agencies across the country to gather information on students, usually from ministries of education, to put on the permanent electors list before they reach 18. That's great, but it's useless to a kid if they have no idea what that is and no idea what the permanent electors list is.

What we would suggest, and what we're investigating, is how do you create a teachable moment out of that? We're working on similar programs so that at the end of this school year we can trial citizenship ceremonies in schools and forecast where the kids do different things. Part of that would be then informing them and educating them that they're on the voters list.

I would go back to the point about who is in the classroom delivering that information in a way that makes it matter. We do monitor what education systems are doing across the country in their curriculum. What matters the most is whether you have a passionate, enthusiastic teacher.

I don't know if the following would be the case among this group, but we've asked people before why they got into politics. They would tell us, "I got into politics because I had this great history teacher in grade 11." It's this classic thing.

**The Chair:** We're going to have to go to Mr. Cullen, who's passionate and enthusiastic as well.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Yes, still passionate.

I have a question about Samara's report, *Tragedy in the Commons*, and some others. You paint a picture, or my colleagues who have since retired paint a picture, that the political culture stinks. It's aggressive. It's antagonistic. There seem to be a lot of incentives in our current system to yell at one another and make things personal. People, upon leaving politics, reflect on that.

Am I overstating the case from what you've found in your research?

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** No, I think you're right. With the 80 former members of Parliament we interviewed, they broadly felt that they got into it all for the right reasons, but they felt that the system chewed them up a bit and spit them out at the end.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** A system that incentivizes that bad behaviour is bad, and systems that incentivize other types of behaviour would be good, in terms of electoral systems. We've heard testimony that suggests that when you get into systems that are more proportional or that allow more co-operation or consultation between parties, the amount of vitriol goes down. Would less vitriol in our system be a good thing in attracting people to politics and keeping them engaged and interested?

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** On the question of whether less vitriol is a good thing, I say yes. On your point of proportional systems delivering that, I think they may nudge you toward it, but a big part of it also comes to the decisions that you as political leaders make about how you want to execute your office.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Those political leaders make self-serving decisions to advance their parties, or decisions for the country as well. If they are required to work with others in the system, then one

would imagine that the incentive to be mean and vicious and to tear each other down, would be less.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Can I just say something?

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Sure, Mr. Gunn.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** When I read the testimony of the two gentlemen from Dublin, third or fourth, I thought they said to not expect that. Am I...?

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** We've heard a bit of both.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I'd love it if that were the case.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Dublin wouldn't be the example that you would—

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** They're not the best example because they're not proportional?

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Right. They're STV. We talked to witnesses from Germany and Scotland this morning, anyway...

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes, I was here.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** The question I had about what you said around urgency is well taken. What would you do? If we want to have a comprehensive, quality process that engages Canadians, as everybody who comes to this table says we need to do, whether they're for a referendum or not, what would you do with the \$10 million if it were sitting right here, right now, or some portion of it, to make this process better and to better engage young people?

● (1935)

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Can I limit that to how we would do it in schools?

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Sure.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Usually that's preoccupying enough. I don't know how we'd spend \$10 million—well, actually, I would.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Let's just go with your expertise of schools.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I'd train teachers all over the country.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Train teachers.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** If I were going to do it really well, and the timelines were different, the first thing we'd do is to train our teacher network. I'd be cautious of... In my experience—and I can be totally wrong, and I might get some mean things—some people are really keen and eager about a certain type of electoral system, but don't have knowledge about the others.



**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** So train them on the systems?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Exactly.

And the money that you put in would guarantee you the number of educators that would then give you that guaranteed level of delivery. You could offer it to everyone and see what other delivery there is.

Then I would do two things, and this is what we proposed to the government.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Be really quick. I've got one more question for you.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Have citizens' student assemblies, the point being that they become experts on the system and are excited and go back into their communities and because they're kids, and you go to somewhere like Red Deer; Trail, B.C.; or anywhere like that, and they'll be on the front page of their papers. Then they'll go back into their schools and help facilitate conversations on electoral reform. Then you could run a classroom consultation that's available to everybody. In these days of modern day stuff, there are no videos put out by PCO/Democratic Institutions, or anyone.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** There's a 70-page handbook.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** A handbook is a.... Anyway, I'm not going to be mean, but I didn't see that as a resource for an educator. Just taking things from the Library of Parliament, and putting them in, doesn't help. What's the hook of the lesson? What's this?

You also need to know government 101 before you get into electoral reform. You need to know why elections even matter. So all these kinds of civics 101 things, I think, are part of the bigger conversation that you suggest, which is, let's crack open our democracy.

I'm non-partisan and do appreciate what you have said, but in the past politics you've also said that politics is what's wrong with our democracy.

I bet the first thing that people will complain about is what they've seen in politics that turns them off, and you could use that as a hook and then get them into questions of whether more females would be elected, or that parties would be less mean to each other. Those are all different ways you could hook people into this conversation. But I do think there's an impetus to get into this, because no other leader before has said—

**The Chair:** That's good.

Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I join with all my colleagues around the table in applauding the witnesses for their presentations, their commitment and the passion they show when they speak to this issue, and undoubtedly, as they do their work within their respective organizations.

Mr. Gunn, congratulations. Like many of my colleagues, I have also participated in meetings with students in schools. I want to congratulate you on all your hard work, on your analysis of the

situation and, much like the two other witnesses, on recognizing the importance of education. You've given us, and all politicians, a real lesson here today. I hope the committee will have the maturity to properly document all your comments in the drafting of its final report.

Ms. Hilderman, I have been a member of this committee for a week. I wasn't part of its past work, but I did have a chance to follow that work from a distance and read a lot of the literature. This is the first time I have seen a non-partisan citizen engagement organization refrain from taking a stance on this issue and remain completely neutral. You could have easily fallen into that trap when you answered the last question, but you didn't take the bait and still remained neutral. For that, I applaud you.

I find your document to be quite interesting. It explores all aspects and lets people objectively form their own opinion. As politicians, we are all biased, whatever our opinion may be of these issues. We all want to improve our democracy, but we all have our own interests in that regard.

I have a proposal to make. If, one day, we had someone else in the position of Minister for Democratic Reform and he or she needed someone to provide advice or host meetings, we would seek someone who is completely neutral, that is, someone like you. Your presentation was fantastic in that regard. I particularly liked the passage that reads, "Yet dissatisfaction with how democracy functions is not only a Canadian phenomenon".

It is often implied that Canada is the only place having problems in this area. However, if you look at global trends surrounding voter turnout, it's declining everywhere—and I want to stress this point—regardless of the voting method used. Indeed, this is not only a Canadian phenomenon. It's wrong to say that a mixed member proportional system will solve everything.

You emphasized this nicely in the passage that reads, "Indeed, countries who use other electoral systems continue to have citizens who express frustration with politics. In other words, changing the electoral system does not guarantee a significant boost in satisfaction with the way democracy works." This explains the importance of education that you have all mentioned.

Mr. Vézina, I want to make a small correction to something you said. A party does not win a majority government in Canada with just 32% or 33% of the vote, but rather 39% or 40% of the vote. In our case, we experienced this, since we won 32% or 33% of the vote, and we are in opposition.

You talked a lot about people who support a mixed member proportional system or any proportional system and people who say that their vote doesn't count under the current system. However, when we spoke to people who live in Scotland—as Mr. Gunn mentioned, and rightly so—they told us that despite declining voter turnout, the issues are what really had an impact on their interest.

You indicated this in your presentation, but you only added this aspect at the very end. Experts have expressed their views on the main reasons for the public's lack of interest in politics. Personally, I haven't heard many people saying they thought their vote didn't count. Rather, a small group of people really interested in politics are the ones saying that after elections. When they're happy with the results, of course there's no longer a problem.

I'm wondering if you could expand on the points mentioned on page 4 of your document, aspects that really have a direct impact on people's willingness to get out and vote, regardless of their age group. Could you clarify that for us?

• (1940)

**The Chair:** Mr. Vézina, you have 45 seconds to respond.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** Okay.

Mr. Rayes, you're looking at page 4 of our brief? Is that right?

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** I'll have another five-minute period later during which you can answer my question.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** You said page 4 of the brief, right?

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** Yes, in the middle of your brief.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** Are you referring to the factors influencing young voter turnout?

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** Yes, exactly. You did a good job highlighting those factors.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** It's important to remember that those three points emerged from a study. That isn't what came out of our consultations with young people. Those three factors are from the literature and are very important.

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** Is there any reason to believe that those points have no connection to our voting system?

If we were to increase education and awareness in that regard, would that automatically increase young people's interest, regardless of the method of voting? Can you confirm that?

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** Everything I've talked about, both in the brief and in my presentation, is based on comments from young people. The Institut du Nouveau Monde, the INM, is a non-partisan organization.

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** I'm very familiar with it.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** I talked about exactly what came out of our consultations with young people and the studies.

**Mr. Alain Rayes:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. DeCoursey, go ahead.

**Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I share my colleagues' sentiments regarding the work done by the witnesses and their organizations. These activities are crucial to getting not only young people, but all Canadians, engaged in the conversation.

[English]

Jane, if I could start with you, I share the view that the document that Samara has put together is an excellent one and a wonderful

workbook to help frame the conversation around electoral reform and the conversations that should be ongoing. The value propositions that underlie the different systems are in there; it's a good, digestible description of the different systems. There's also advice on the way questions should be asked to direct conversations around electoral reform. Can you talk a little more about the thought that went into putting that workbook together and how your organization envisioned using that document, and how Canadians can benefit from the document?

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** Thanks very much.

It was pretty well the most complex research piece to put together and consider, given how much has been spent on studying different electoral systems in different parts of the world, and also applied in Canada under different consultations, whether in B.C. or Ontario or New Brunswick.

That's why in part we wanted to work with Stewart Prest, a political scientist from UBC, to help us pull together what we thought were the most essential details. That's why we came up with what are the questions you should ask Canadians? How does this work? What does it mean for voters? What does it mean for parties in Parliament? What does it mean for governing? Frame it as a question and answer to help organize the information as succinctly as possible. Then we tried to carefully pick our language so it was as unbiased as it could be, as factually based as we felt we be about the system and how it would work in Canada, with as plain language as possible.

Even then, it's still a thick report. It's not something you can read in five minutes. You still have to dedicate some time to dig into it, but we tried to design it in a way that was inviting to bring Canadians into the report. Since we released it just last week, we've had well over 200 downloads from all corners of the country, from offices of members of Parliament, I'm very pleased to report—who I hope are using it at their town halls—but also libraries, community groups, and any Canadians who have found their way to this report.

What we are really trying to do now, through the next month, is to push it out through community networks to umbrella organizations that have members in different parts of the country. Essentially, the most important page in here I think is how to get involved in the conversation. We outline how to participate in this committee through social media, through your e-consultations. That information is really important to share right now, so we're relying on our networks and other networks to do that work for us.

If we had more time and resources, it would be great to think about translating it to the needs of other learners, making it shorter for ESL learners, making it more engaging with video and the like. There's a rich realm of possibilities, but we're not going to be able to do that in the time and with the resources we have on this one.

•(1945)

**Mr. Matt DeCoursey:** Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

**The Chair:** I'm just checking the clock. You have about 45 seconds.

**Mr. Matt DeCoursey:** Maybe I'll give you time to follow up in greater depth on this when we come back around, Taylor, but if the language is modified for school-age children, what utility do you see a resource like this as having in helping your organization or schools to facilitate this conversation with young people? Are there plans in place with Civix to do just that?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds, please.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** We're making five two-minute videos in partnership with the great east coast group called Springtide Collective. There isn't any money behind it; we're trying to make it happen. Then, of course, we would do some brief curriculum-style downloadable documents.

We've had some of the people who have been here in front of you as witnesses, who have been terrific. We were hoping to engage Jonathan Rose as someone to build that over the summer for another project. You've got all sorts of people who can make something amazing if you invest the resources in it.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

We'll go to Ms. Sahota to start the second round.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Okay. I feel like I have to ask a question about online voting because of your comment, Taylor.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Well, I guess I just will. I do have something else to ask as well, though.

I think we've been thrown off track because of all the witnesses we've had. The data just wasn't there to support going after that. I mean I still think it's a great idea and that we need to figure out how to do it, because I think that is the future.

Do you think now is the time to get into online voting?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I don't tweet very well, nor am I concerned about that, but I do take note every time I see credit card information or the Target data breach, all this sort of stuff, when thinking about comments that, "You know, we should online vote."

I think Mr. Kingsley called this a gizmo.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** He did.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** He thinks it's inevitable.

I don't know what you'd call me, other than an emerging old man, but there are still important things that you show up for. This is one of these things. I think those strange things that we still show up for emphasize their special type of importance.

I worry. I think the data they do have—and there's other people that have it—shows that it doesn't cause engagement. Making something easier doesn't necessarily make someone more interested. You discussed how you do things that cause interest and engagement. That's what's going to cause people to go out. Then you have problems with privacy, anonymity. We maybe think too

much of ourselves, but there might be someone out there who would like to pick who our government is.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Now I'd like to get back to the voting age, because I do find it very interesting.

I know most of you have suggested, maybe some more directly than others, that lowering the voting age would make a difference. Are there other countries that have 16 or 17 as the voting age, and has it made a difference in voter turnout amongst youth?

•(1950)

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** A political scientist probably studies this somewhere in Canada.

My experience, and what I can recall, is that there aren't that many national level governments around the world that do it, but there have been occasions where, as I said, they've lowered it. Most recently, I cited the example of the Scottish national referendum on Scottish independence, as well as what's happening in P.E.I., where there's an important kind of question that's going to shape the future of a country or jurisdiction and it's important to have young people engaged.

I think, though, as said, that the 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds have shown up and wanted to have their voice heard. I think it opens the door to conversation that maybe they should be given a full say in other realms as well at election time.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** To emphasize the P.E.I. model, it's very P.E.I., but what a great homegrown model of how you would encourage and engage people in electoral reform. Interestingly, the ballot of the plebiscite will be ranked.

They're at markets with their public information. The MPs are going into schools. They've dropped the voting age. It's a great model.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Do you know some of the factors that were involved in considering the drop of the voting age from 21 to 18 when we did it back in 1970?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** In 1970?

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** I think it was, yes.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I don't know about those, but I know that in P.E.I., politicians felt that if these kids were going to inherit the system, they should have a say in its choice.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** I'm probably out of time, right?

**The Chair:** You have 40 seconds.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Does anyone else want to comment?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** I often hear young people saying things like, “I can drive a car at 16, but I can't choose the person who will lead my country”.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, you have 30 seconds left.

[*English*]

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Good point.

**The Chair:** Okay, good.

Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Chair, my understanding is that the reason the voting age was dropped in the United States—I don't know if this is true here—was that people could be drafted and sent off to fight and die for their country. There was a belief that it wasn't reasonable to deny the franchise to somebody who could be expected to make the ultimate sacrifice. We were not involved in the Vietnam War, so it may have been that we were catching up with what was seen as being a reasonable adjustment for other reasons. That's my understanding of where that came from.

I want to ask about electronic voting. Do we have any evidence that this would have a differential effect in terms of boosting the number of young participants as compared to people in other age ranges? Does anybody know?

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** Sorry, could you repeat that?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I'm wondering whether having an electronic voting option available, so that you could vote electronically, would likely have a higher impact in attracting younger voters than other age groups.

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** I think Taylor summarized that what we know is that electronic voting makes it a lot easier for people who are already planning on voting to vote. Right now, if you are planning to vote, you have to think about where your polling station is, what the path is to get there, and whether you are going to vote before or after work, during your lunch hour, in-between classes, and all those sorts of things. It takes away some of those steps, and the point is that you've been motivated to vote.

How many people face those types of logistical barriers? Those barriers are there, and they are real. I think if you are a highly motivated person, then you overcome them. There are probably some young people who are not voting because it's too much of an effort to get to the polling station. I think creating the option to vote online would appeal to them, but those who are set on going to vote will find a way.

On the point about whether we can do it, I would say that as a world, it seems like we're on track to doing more and more things online. It makes sense to be at least undertaking pilots at this stage to figure out how to make it work—not large scale pilots, but a start at testing and figuring out exactly the answers to these questions with reliable data. Do young people seize this opportunity, or are they much happier to have a voting booth selfie?

• (1955)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Right.

This is more of a comment than a question. I think it makes sense to start with a by-election, rather than a general election, for reasons of scale and because the consequences of some kind of mess are reduced.

I think that electronic voting, like the postal ballot, has to be a supplement as opposed to a replacement for the other ways of voting. That's just an observation.

I have something else to mention. Young voters who have moved recently—and young people do move more frequently—are more likely not to know where their voting station is or not to have received a card from Elections Canada telling them where their voting station is.

I heard a story about trying to get greater student participation that makes this point in an experiment to find out whether people would be more motivated to go to get something good, such as a tetanus shot, by getting informational advertising or advertising that was fear-based, such as horrible photos of people with lockjaw and so on. This was back in the sixties. Professors then did what professors always do, and experimented with the student body. They sent out, to different parts of the campus, different ads about the free tetanus shots that students could get at the student centre. The results were so unimpressive for both groups that they had to drop it.

Then the idea was picked up again at another university, but this time they included a map of how to get to the student centre—and surprise, surprise, the number of participants went way up. Knowing either where you should go to vote or that you can vote from home makes.... I guess I'm pitching something as opposed to asking questions.

Maybe you could comment on that.

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** I think one of the reasons we had such great youth turnout in the last election was the fact that there were a lot of widespread pilots on university campuses to set up polling stations. It sounds obvious to put a polling station on campus where people go to school, but we hadn't done that, and it was well received.

The other thing Elections Canada did in the country was to open up special offices so people could vote in their home riding, because as a university student, you've moved and you don't know where you are. You maybe don't know the local politics, but you do know politics back home, and you still care about it. You could vote through a special ballot at any time up to several weeks in advance.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** You might still be legally a resident of your home riding.

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** Yes, that's it, so it's all of those things.

Interestingly, and I saw recently in the B.C. provincial election that you could show up at any polling station to cast your ballot on election day. I think that accessibility is fascinating.

**The Chair:** Yes.

We'll go to Mr. Boulerice now.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting to hear about the views of young people, their place in the political environment and their participation.

Ensuring that Parliament is a reflection of society is also a priority for us, as progressive people. Our goal is gender parity, as well as proper representation of first nations and cultural minorities. However, we rarely hear about how young people are being represented.

In 2011, at least six university students were elected in Quebec under the NDP banner, including the youngest person elected in the history of Canada, Pierre-Luc Dusseault, who was 19 at the time. He was even re-elected last year.

Mr. Vézina, I would like to hear your thoughts not only on youth voter turnout, but also on the importance that parties should be placing on having young candidates. I wonder if you could also expand on what you called “generational suicide”. That is a loaded expression.

What do you mean by that?

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** Thank you.

Those are good questions. I'm not sure I'm in the best position to answer them. I will give you my opinion, but it does not represent that of INM. What I really want to say is that it's a global process. The more young people understand the system in which they live, the more likely they are to gain real-life experience, either through student councils or student associations. Since they will be interested in politics, they will be more likely to get involved later on and even run as candidates. That goes without saying.

When I mentioned generational suicide, I was referring to the results. Over the past 40 years in Canada, youth voter turnout among 18- to 34-year-olds has dropped from 70% to 30%. Those figures are from 2004. That is a drastic drop. Young people no longer see themselves reflected in politics and often feel as though the issues don't concern them. The socio-demographic curve, in Quebec and Canada, is dropping for that specific age group. They no longer relate, and that is what is meant by generational suicide. No one is speaking on their behalf anymore, about issues that matter to them. Inevitably, since they no longer vote, everyone else stops worrying about them.

• (2000)

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Less and less.

Thank you.

Ms. Hilderman, in its report on the quality of Canadian democratic life, Samara Canada gives the Canadian federation a “C” grade. That's not terrible, but there's room for improvement. I remember coming home from school with a C on a test, and I wouldn't have a good evening.

Are there any international models we could emulate to improve our performance? How did you decide on the “C” grade?

[*English*]

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** The report you're mentioning is our democracy report card. We call it our “Democracy 360”, and we looked at three factors: communication, participation, and leadership.

One of the things that drove down the overall grade was that Canadians gave really tough marks to their members of Parliament and parties on their performance at their jobs, and I think this speaks to the breakdown of the relationship between citizens and representatives. Samara has also done a lot of work focusing on holding exit interviews with MPs who have served. As said, I think, they are in it for the right reasons but there seems to be a growing disconnect between what citizens feel they want to have happen and what they see executed. We think there needs to be a movement towards repairing that relationship and having better two-way communication between MPs and their citizens about their work, so that it's not just something that you're checking into on election day. I know you are all doing a lot of communications. It's making sure that it actually resonates and gets heard and that it's not just broadcasting, but that there's a conversation happening.

We also talk about really trying to celebrate everyday democracy, where citizenship is more than voting. Voting is very important, but there are ways you are involved between elections too, so that, again, there's just a great level of familiarity with how politics is working in our country. These aren't legal changes. These are more cultural changes, values changes that we were talking about in order to underpin our democracy.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Thériault.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Thériault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Vézina, I want to try to address a few things related to your expertise.

I have been teaching democracy for 30 years. Before I was an MP, I was a teacher. On a personal level, independent of my party, I wonder about this. I have often wondered about lowering the voting age to 16, and I still have mixed feelings about it.

First of all, how do we prevent a young 16-year-old from becoming an MP? Constitutionally, it's not possible. That could happen, that is, we wouldn't be able to prevent that from happening. The same is true of 18-year-olds.

People mature quite a bit between the ages of 16 and 18. I taught students early on in CEGEP, and in the same day, other students near the end of CEGEP, and a great deal of maturing happens during those years.

Figures on student voter turnout and that of their parents are fairly similar. Acquiring the right to vote is a solemn occasion. That's when individuals seal their social contract. I support training programs. I know it's very tempting to think that since they've been given all that and they've really acquired it, if we let them vote, they'll get a taste for it. Then their training would be complete. I understand that, but as a society, I tell myself something else. In any case, I want to hear your thoughts on that. How can you convince me?

• (2005)

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** Mr. Thériault, you heard me talk a little earlier about the rite of civic passage. We see that as a fundamental component. The course is interesting, but it's about putting young people through a real passage, a celebration of acquiring this fundamental right, the right to vote.

Your question is quite pertinent. As stakeholders who work with young people, we have wondered about this. However, we continue to believe that if all these components are put in place, we will increase youth voter turnout and they will have a greater interest in politics.

**Mr. Luc Thériault:** Thank you.

Mr. Gunn, would you like to add any comments? I saw you react to what he was saying.

[English]

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** You want me to convince you why it's important that we teach this in schools?

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Thériault:** No, I'm talking about lowering the voting age to 16.

First of all, we'd have to create those programs. That would already be a big step.

[English]

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I won't. I just think that it's worth experimenting with to see if it could cause more engagement and create a different culture in schools. If kids could vote, we'd better make sure we teach it really well. We don't have a position on lowering the voting age. We get criticized for that, but we think just like electoral reform, just like other things that we can do to our democracy, it's worth exploring.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Thériault:** Personally, I became an MP at 43. I had to work exceedingly hard to be able to do my job as an opposition MP correctly. There's a difference between what we want to do and what we can do.

Mr. Vézina, let's talk about the factors that explain the cynicism.

Do I still have time, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Mr. Luc Thériault:** Mr. Vézina, can you tell me how the cynicism and lack of interest is exhibited in young people?

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** As we describe in the brief, we noted that, as voters age, they become more cynical.

Young 18- to 34-year-olds feel as though their vote counts less, that their voice isn't being heard and that their concerns don't really matter. When you speak with young people, it doesn't take long to figure out that environmental issues and climate change are important to them. They continue to believe that those issues are crucial, because they will have to live with the consequences of the action or inaction of today's decision makers.

**Mr. Luc Thériault:** It's also because that is taught. In schools, however, talking about politics is taboo. We need to overcome this

resistance. What you're advocating here this evening will require a major cultural shift. I support your approach.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. May.

[English]

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** I'm going to pick up where I was with Ms. Hilderman in regard to Samara's work on the relationship between MPs and political parties. I just want to put out there that to me, the reason that we should be changing our voting system to a fair voting system is to privilege the interest of voters above the interest of political parties. When we sit around this table, I see 12 individual MPs who want to do the best for Canada, but a lot of the lens, particularly through the media, is that we're blocks of voters controlled by political parties.

So in pursuing that theme in Samara's work, this tension between the role of the member of Parliament showing up, who had run for office because they wanted to be part of a rewritten "Ms. Smith Goes to Washington", albeit not with a U.S. cast, but in that mode of being idealistic but then being, as you say, chewed up and spat out, do you have any thoughts on how changing our voting system would empower the individual MP through the fact that there would be greater fairness in the way Parliament is assembled?

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** It's a great point, and we were sensitive to trying to find more research that captured the perspective of elected officials as they transitioned electoral systems, and there's not a lot been done on that. So this is more speculative, I think.

You're hitting on a point around electoral reform that I think is so important: how parties are going to react and adapt things like their nomination processes, which our research shows most MPs find to be one of the trickier elements of the black box experience, not entirely understanding how it's supposed to happen, as the rules sometimes are bent and changed. We don't know how parties are going to adapt to that, no matter what system we put in place. That said, obviously MMP would have some different functionality because there would need to be two types of MPs, a local race and some other appointment process, whether it be voters get to cast a closed ballot or an open ballot.

I know that British Columbia citizens favoured STV it because they thought it was the system that in their view would create the greatest incentive for MPs to have bonds with their local constituency and would give voters the most choice, because you have candidates within the same party competing against each other on the same ballot.

These are some interesting design considerations. It's just hard to say for sure precisely how they're going to play out in Parliament in Canada.

● (2010)

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Given this conversation, I think there's a way to focus interest, particularly in the way this is covered by media, on what we do as individual members of Parliament. I mean, our Constitution doesn't mention political parties, and yet that was the theme that I think Taylor is remembering.

I did a tour across Canada during the second prorogation where the headline was "Rescuing Democracy from Politics". I love democracy and I love Parliament, but all of you around the table will not be surprised that I hate politics. I think it would be made much more civil by having an electoral advantage in co-operation, whereas now, because of first past the post, the electoral advantage is in making sure that your so-called voters don't bleed off to another party, through strategic voting and fear.

Does that give any of you any thoughts on how we shift this conversation from how a voting system advantages or disadvantages a political party to how a voting system makes the voting process, the quality of the experience, and the efficacy of the vote better for voters?

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** I think that's exactly the sort of basis.... If you are starting to explain what these options are to Canadians, you have to think about standing in the shoes of the voter. What do you want when you look at your ballot and when you look at who will represent you? With regard to your ridings, assuming we continue to keep those, how do you think those should look for you?

I think that's where you'd have more engagement on the question than you would have if you're saying it's about partisanship, and advantage, and strategic voting.

I think for most Canadians, that's not what lights them on fire.

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** I have a bit of time left if anyone wants to chip in on this answer, or I could shift gears.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Just quickly, I think there's evidence from the witnesses that would give some clues as to what they believe causes parties to be more endearing to all rather than a segment....

I think that what also came up is that parties can choose how they act toward each other and toward citizens, everything from who is successful in achieving nominations to use of advertisements. Maybe right now isn't the best example of a time.... We'll see what happens over the next couple of years to see if everyone behaves the way they're behaving right now, but I think parties can make those decisions themselves.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Mr. Aldag now, please.

**Mr. John Aldag:** Back home I've tried to take the discussion of where we've gone in some of our committee work. I'm trying to step back from solutions right now and to explore values.

I'd like to take the opportunity with the three of you and the groups you represent to try to take a step back from solutions, and, if you're able, to speak to values that you feel might resonate within the communities you represent, the younger Canadian population. If you could each take a minute or whatever time you need, if it's something you've given thought to or have comment on, I think it would be really helpful.

What kinds of values should we be looking at being held near and dear by...it could be the 14-year-old or the 16-year-old to 35-year-old population, so that as we move forward we're not losing sight of what might be important to the constituents you work with?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** If I could just jump in there quickly, I'm also not going to lose sight that I'm 38 now and I'm not a young person. We like to give young people the ability to speak for themselves.

I'd love to be in a position to go out and ask for those values from young people, in all of our constituencies. That would involve a more empowered consultation process.

**Mr. John Aldag:** On that, I would say that we do have the ability to receive briefs from you afterwards. Between now and the October deadline, if you have any of those conversations and have thoughts you'd like to put forward, I would greatly encourage you to send those through the committee. It's something that would help inform our discussions down the road.

Would the other two of you be able to provide comment on the issue of values?

● (2015)

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** It's an interesting point.

I think you're right. It's an entry point for people to avoid getting lost in the mechanics and details of different electoral systems, which can happen quickly. We do an exercise with groups called "Democracy Talks". Part of it is asking what sorts of values you prioritize in a democracy. Democracy has many values, as you probably have heard. There's no right shade of democracy, so there can be transparency, accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness. We have a list that we use. It is interesting because different conversations, different groups, bring out different emphases.

I think by and large, though, you're always going to have Canadians recognizing that a lot of these are all important, or some mix of them. That's where there's still going to be in this process of electoral reform some need to actually translate the values into system design choices. You can get a sense from Canadians of some of those values, such as whether they want more proportionality or less, or greater accountability lines. I still think it's not going to necessarily give you the perfect compass mark for what direction you need to go in terms of choice.

**Mr. John Aldag:** Yes, I absolutely agree with you that it is not going to point us in the only direction we could go, but I think it is important. I was looking at your report and hoping that maybe there would be a section on values. There wasn't.

I will go to Mr. Vézina. Do you have any comments on values?

[Translation]

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** It's hard to really take a stance on this.

Generally speaking, when you lead civic engagement activities for young people, certain key words come up over and over: transparency, dialogue, respect and listening. Those are the usual things.

The INM is currently developing a program with Quebec's Department of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion. It's a project on living together. The same values keep coming up. A parliament must embody the same values of inclusion, equality, dialogue and listening.

I'm being a bit of a devil's advocate here by simply telling you what often comes up in conversations with young people, but that's essentially it. It's interesting. We might need to consult them further on this and get back to you.

[English]

**Mr. John Aldag:** I was going to say that in our motion that created this committee, we have five principles that I think reflect values. What I have been struggling with is whether this is a comprehensive list, or whether there are other things.

Anyway, I appreciate all of your comments on that. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, go ahead.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Seeing that we have about 12 minutes left, and I know you have numerous speakers, I am hoping I'll bank some goodwill for the future by keeping myself brief here.

I just have one two-part question, which you should be able to respond fairly briefly.

Mr. Vézina, I don't think I have heard you discuss this today, whether in your opening or in response to any other questions—unless I missed something—but I believe your organization is supportive of the idea of mandatory voting as part of the reform. Because I haven't heard you discuss it, I just want to hear your reasons for supporting mandatory voting and how you would see it being applied. Obviously, there are different ways. There could be the carrot or the stick approach to encourage the vote. What would you see as being the correct way to apply it?

[Translation]

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** I have to humbly say that I have only been with INM for three and a half months. Thus, I have not participated in all the exchanges we have had with youth over the past seven or eight years. I would like to emphasize that, with respect to mandatory voting, young people are telling us that what is important is to get out the vote. Although we do not want to repeat the same thing over and over, mandatory voting is always associated with blank ballots. It is important for young people to be able to choose whether or not to support all the options provided.

[English]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay, thank you.

I will close with that, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Well, that was very brief. You have many goodwill points there.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** As I said, I hope I've banked some goodwill for a future opportunity.

● (2020)

**The Chair:** You have indeed, yes.

Mrs. Romanado, please go ahead.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** My colleague brought up youth who are interested in presenting themselves as candidates. I know that in the last federal election, in the riding next to mine, there was a Green Party candidate who was turning 18 on October 19. I have to say kudos to her for having the bravery to do that. Not every woman of the young age of 18 would put herself out there. Most 30-year-olds wouldn't. I just wanted to throw that out there.

[Translation]

Mr. Vézina you mentioned that young voter turnout has been declining for years, but that it increased in the last election.

In your view, what concrete action can we take to maintain this momentum and even increase voter turnout in three years? Are there things we can do in that regard? As was mentioned, it is unfortunate that we talk about democracy only every four years when there is an election.

What can we do in the next three years to continue engaging youth on these issues?

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** I would like to tell you about an initiative that we are developing.

A few years ago, there was a program in Quebec called *Électeurs en herbe*, which was modelled after the game show *Génies en herbe*. Together with the youth forums, Quebec's Chief Electoral Officer travelled around Quebec. In 2014 or 2015—I don't remember the exact year—more than 70,000 youth from 265 secondary schools participated in the program.

This type of measure, which is becoming popular again in Quebec with the new youth policy, will lead to these types of exchanges throughout the year. When there is a municipal, provincial or federal election, young people will be able to experience a voting simulation. That is one of the practices that will bear fruit in the next election and those that follow.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** There is an organization that has a program called “Bring your MP to school”.

Are you familiar with anything similar to that? We have often been invited to schools, but is there an opportunity for a student to shadow us for a day and for us to do the same thing for that student? That would show that we are willing to spend the day with the student at school.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** If I have understood correctly, you are referring to a buddy system.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Yes, exactly.

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** That doesn't exist, but it is a very good idea. We could pair up people.

[English]

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Mr. Gunn.



**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes, there are several programs like that across the country. Some of them are based provincially and are meant to bring in MLAs or MHAs. Usually those are run by the teachers' unions, from what we've seen in Alberta and Nova Scotia, and I think Newfoundland and Labrador. They're meant to teach their provincial politicians about the state of schools.

UNICEF does something in the week of November about child rights day, and then we run our rep day where we try to help facilitate that.

One thing that's interesting is that when we surveyed MPs and schools that participated in a rep day, there's this really funny disconnect. MPs said they wished they could get more invites to schools, and teachers said they wished that MPs would want to come to schools. They just didn't know that they actually both wanted each other, but there's a layer of what can be fear in the system.

I think it's healthy to talk about politics in a classroom. I think it's a great thing. I actually think that's the way you engage kids the quickest, to go in, be yourself, be your partisan self. That's fine. If you as an MP mess up in a classroom, parents will hear. There are teachers who are there to help the kids interpret: what is partisanship, why is she giving out pins, why is she saying she doesn't like Stephen Harper, all this sort of stuff? But there is some fear in the system that you could abuse your privilege as an MP, and part of what we need to do and what you need to do is to change that because where else...? Do you think you're going to put up a website and all the kids will go to it? Right. Let's use things like these instruments, like schools and the education system, to try to inculcate them into our democracy.

**Mrs. Sherry Romano:** I just want to mention that I have reached out to all my schools. I am visiting them, so I'm out there. I wish my schedule would allow me to spend more time there, but we're here.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Mr. Cullen.

• (2025)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** On Mr. Gunn's last point, that politicians are wanting to get in but are saying they can't get in, and schools are saying they want politicians to visit, you're like a political matchmaker. You're out there helping people get together to find each other in this mad, crazy world of ours.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** I've tried to grab a couple of questions from Twitter, which I posed earlier today, about the voting age being lowered, for which we had cross-partisan support to do in my first year in Parliament.

One fellow writes, "You can easily influence more 16-year-olds with lies than truth. Lies are easy." I'm taking a quote from Twitter that's not particularly supportive of my own position, a quote implying that we cannot trust young people. Yet, I think that in this country, with a letter, you can be brought into the army at the age 17—which goes to Mr. Reid's point about the history of the United States—yet we don't allow them to vote until they're 18. So young

people in Canada could actually be in a war that they had no say in whatsoever, never mind the sacrifice they may have to pay.

This tweet says that young people are easily influenced at 16, that we shouldn't do it and shouldn't ask them.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** In our experience, this is probably the data I can actually speak about. It's right here; I could pass it around. It's just not translated, so I think I should translate it before I submit it. You can see the chart. If young people are so easily soaking up these lies, then they're doing so just like the adults are.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** In our federal elections, kids cast more ballots from 2004 to 2011—

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** This is an interesting experience. I want your reflection on this because we're talking about modifications and some of these things can be small. You have your youth vote program, which I love and thank you for, the Student Vote .

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** We did 15 high school debates during our federal election in Skeena, and the questions were killer and the students were prepped, and they were not coming in with partisan predispositions, unlike most. If you've been to town halls or debates, 50% to 80% of the crowd has made their mind up. These kids were in there looking at us with hard questions.

In the previous election, one of the local high schools tried to release the results a day or two early and were threatened with a lawsuit by one of my opponents. They actually engaged a lawyer and went into the school and threatened the principal with civil action, legal action. I thought that was rather instructive, not only the fear but also their saying publicly, I don't want young people influencing us. That triggered my view that maybe we do. We have polls coming out of everywhere in the last 48 or 72 hours of a federal election. We have no restrictions on people being inundated, sometimes with truthful polls, whatever that is, or sometimes with outright push polls that are lies.

Why not release student results earlier? Why not release that student vote earlier?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** It's for the same reason we don't make the kids vote online. It's because everyone thinks it would be easier, but it's not our process. We're trying to teach kids the current process. If you vote at an advance poll, which usually is what our Student Vote schools do—

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Yes, they all vote before the election date typically?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes, and we emphasize as firmly as we can not to release the results, or we'll never get support from Elections Canada again. There are still a few schools that do, but it's not what happens in advance polls if you go to vote. We're trying to mimic the identical process, and I don't know if we'd be successful in engaging non-partisan election agency support if we did release those results in advance, because that would typically predict the winner.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** I have a broader question, and it's perhaps for the three of you. We're about to go out to consult with the public, and there's some debate as to whether we should ask about values only, or if we could eventually get to the point of asking about choices, which is what this committee eventually will face as we report to government. Pick a model and place some things as more important than others: proportionality, direct representation, all these things are waiting.

How important do you think it is for this committee, as we engage with the public, to put the options that we will face as committee members, and hearing all this testimony, in front of the public with young people or older people, regardless?

I don't know if, Jane, you want to start and we'll go across the table?

**The Chair:** We only have 30 seconds, so be quick.

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** As an organization interested in helping inform the public about how they can participate, it's helpful to have a more narrow set of menu options to explain than it is to have a broad, full system.

[Translation]

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** As we mentioned a little earlier, INM's mission really is to encourage citizens to participate in the conversation and in societal issues. I believe that this must be done. Consultations will be held in the near future in the ridings. That also provides good leverage. In my opinion, you should consider as many opinions as possible on this matter.

However, I still want to tell you that the secret to all of this is education. People have to be informed so that they have the relevant information, which lets them make the best possible suggestions.

• (2030)

[English]

**The Chair:** Be brief, please.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes. Values are great. That will make the conversation simpler. Where it will become complicated and probably more substantial is when you start to attach those values to specific examples of electoral systems.

**The Chair:** Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I'm also trying to curry favour by asking a limited suite of questions.

Taylor, you started in Ontario, but now your greatest penetration is in British Columbia and Prince Edward Island. This got me thinking that there'd be different layers of ability to get into. I wanted to ask about your ability to get into schools in aboriginal communities and whether you've had good success there or not?

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** We developed a program that targets communities like reserves specifically, and it's partly because we continue to go after all schools. We also know that many urban schools—and I'll try to keep this short—such as in Winnipeg or Calgary may not be like an on-reserve school, but they have as big an indigenous population. We continue to think it's most efficient to go after all schools. We may change that in the future, but for now we haven't targeted them specifically, nor have we targeted any type of school.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** The reason I ask that question is that it seems to me that where your program is most likely to be effective is with individual families, for example, or sectors, that have not had a history of participating in voting. If parents are already doing it, then I think there is a lesser need for the program among their kids as a way of jump-starting them. We know there's a lower rate of participation among aboriginal people than among the population as a whole. That's the reason for the question.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** One of the best stories that, and it was near you.... You don't have Smith Falls in your district, do you?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** That is my riding, yes.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** I think there's an ESL school, or it's a school for those who are older and out of school and didn't go to high school, but can come back.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** TR Leger school.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Yes, I think that's it. There was a pair of young indigenous women who went back to school. They practised Student Vote at that school, and then they voted for the first time in the real election—and maybe the first time in their family, albeit I shouldn't say that, because I don't know—because they were confident enough through practising in Student Vote.

Then another thing we hear from teachers, and from parents via the parent-teacher interviews, is that any parents will admit that they didn't vote, but their child's either inspiration or shame forced them to participate in that election. Many parents even admitted that they felt they'd learned more about the election from their kids than from any other source.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** We'll close with Mr. DeCoursey.

**Mr. Matt DeCoursey:** Coming back to the challenge of consulting people properly, I do believe we have question about values to ask Canadians, but I think it's fair to assume that we'll have to ask them about the choices and the trade-offs they'll make. One thing I worry about is some people who will come with testimony that argues in absolutes.

Given your varied experiences consulting with people and challenging assumptions, what should we be cognizant of in the way we receive testimony, in the way we challenge witnesses in response, and the way we ask questions that consider potentials and maybes and ifs and unknowns in this process, particularly as it relates to young people? I'll qualify that by saying that I think good youth engagement requires good adult allies who give young people the respect of receiving blunt questioning and blunt opinion, but also challenging that.

**Ms. Jane Hilderman:** That's a great question.

You're right, respect is very important. Being in front of a committee can be intimidating, so I think that making people feel as comfortable as possible is really key, and I hope maybe as you travel across the country you'll be meeting in some places in rooms that aren't as grand as this, but places where youth are found.

We've asked youth for advice on how politicians should engage them and they say come to where we are; don't make us come to you all the time. That's just one piece of advice.

In the actual conversation, I think giving them the respect of asking them why they think something. Taking the time to get to know where they're coming from is really important. I think that's where you're in conversation, not challenging them. It's important to keep in mind you're in conversation

• (2035)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Matt DeCoursey:** Is that your view on this?

**Mr. Dominic Vézina:** It is a very pertinent question and one that is difficult to answer.

Sitting down with people, talking to them, no matter their age, listening to them and doing a little teaching helps inform people about these issues. Parliament has prepared quality documents that explain the different systems tried around the world.

I believe that these meetings must be as sincere and honest as possible. We talked about this before. It's about humanizing the role of the politician, establishing a pleasant atmosphere, one without partisanship, even though it may not always seem that way. That is what is important in our work.

[*English*]

**Mr. Matt DeCoursey:** Taylor, you get to finish this off for the long day you spent with us here.

**Mr. Taylor Gunn:** Thank you. It was a treat, it was really fun, seriously, and maybe that'll apply to how I answer this.

When I was a youth, I didn't feel special. I always caution about thinking that, "Oh, that's a young person. We need to wear a funky T-shirt", or this sort of stuff. What could be more interesting for them to say than, "Oh, my gosh, mum and dad", or "Hey, boyfriend, I was in front of these old stiff in suits today talking about electoral reform and they're on this special committee and some of them are going to go back to the Prime Minister and some of them.... That's really cool."

What you have is the fact that you will go as a body to places. I don't know if you have a calendar set up. I don't know what instructional material you'll be using, so it's not just top of mind.

Would you like help getting into schools? I know you've got a couple, and I know there are several terrific teachers in Fredericton, for example. I don't know if you'd do a whole assembly, but you could do a classroom. You might be too many—but who cares, just approach it honestly. I don't know if you have a schedule that you could share or if you might want connections to schools. That's what the longer process would give you.

You could make sure that you're going in with materials and that the class has been primed by maybe three to four classes, so that when when they come in, they won't just be saying, of course there should be PR because percentage seems fairer. Let's get into the complexities of that. It's like multi-member districts, all this neat stuff. I would suggest that you need a bit more than just half an afternoon with free sandwiches and a Coke. Great. I missed class today.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** That is actually a good idea.

This has been a long day, but this last panel was very energizing and enriching. I don't remember who said it earlier, but this has been an excellent meeting.

We would like to thank the witnesses for meeting with us even though it is August. Your comments have been very informative and have provided much food for thought. We look forward to seeing you again.

The meeting is adjourned.





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